

ISSUE BRIEF

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Brussels Mini-Summit: Understanding Key Issues Facing the NATO Alliance

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On May 25, the North Atlantic Council at the heads-of-state level will meet in Brussels in what is commonly referred to as a NATO mini-summit. The mini-summit will be President Trump's first opportunity to attend a NATO meeting with fellow heads of state. In addition to formally inaugurating NATO's new headquarters, the mini-summit will allow the alliance to assess decisions made at the Warsaw Summit last summer, both in terms of implementation and initial effectiveness. The meeting is also an important opportunity for the Trump Administration to reaffirm U.S. commitment to collective defense, reassert America's leadership role in the alliance, and help chart a path back towards NATO's core mission of territorial defense.

NATO's Importance Should Not Be Understated

Since its creation in 1949, NATO has done more to promote democracy, peace, and security in Europe than any other multilateral organization, including the European Union. The alliance remains in a critical phase as it transitions from a focus on out-of-area operations back towards collective defense.

Russian aggression only increases the need for NATO to be fully funded and properly functioning. Russia continues to act out against neighboring states and has threatened NATO members. In September, Russia will launch exercises on the border of the Baltic States with 100,000 troops taking part.¹ Russia continuously tests the cohesion of the alliance, whether through propaganda, use of cyber attacks, or provocative flights near NATO airspace and, recently, U.S. and allied naval vessels.

The U.S. must renew its leadership role in NATO, including reinforcing and strengthening measures decided upon at the Warsaw Summit to bolster collective defense. The U.S. should press allies to commit to robust defense spending and proper investment in equipment. Alliance members should not become distracted by the threat posed by terrorism but rather must remain focused on the core mission of territorial defense. President Trump should also reaffirm American commitment to NATO's open-door policy in Brussels. Finally, in light of the Taliban's resurgence and the emergence of ISIS as a force in Afghanistan, the U.S. should lead the way in renewing NATO's commitment to support the ongoing Resolute Support mission.

In Brussels next week, President Trump has an opportunity to lead on important issues facing the NATO. To better illuminate the steps that should be taken to make the most of the mini-summit, The Heritage Foundation has published a series of four *Issue Briefs* that address the most vital issues that heads of state will encounter.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at
<http://report.heritage.org/ib4707>

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1. Brussels Mini-Summit: Getting NATO Members to Spend More on Defense

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Issue Brief No. 4691

April 26, 2017

<http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/brussels-mini-summit-getting-nato-members-spend-more-defense>.

Weak defense spending by European NATO members threatens to undermine the collective security guarantee and play into Vladimir Putin's hands. The Brussels mini-summit is an opportunity for NATO members to recommit themselves to their treaty obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty. While progress has been made with European defense spending, much more has to be done. The U.S. needs to use the Brussels gathering to press allies on responsible and realistic defense spending.

2. Brussels Mini-Summit: Territorial Defense, Not Counterterrorism, Must Be NATO's Focus

Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis

Issue Brief No. 4698

May 3, 2017

<http://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/brussels-mini-summit-territorial-defense-not-counterterrorism-must-be-natos>.

At the May mini-summit, President Donald Trump should reassure European allies that America remains committed to NATO. President Trump should also recognize that Vladimir Putin is not a partner to the U.S. in the transatlantic region. Most important, President Trump should focus NATO on the core mission of territorial defense and not be tempted to realign the Alliance to focus primarily on counterterrorism—a mission it is neither equipped nor designed to do. NATO's focus on territorial defense instead of counterterrorism does not mean that the members inside NATO should not be working together on counterterrorism operations; rather, NATO as an institution should not be the leader or main actor in these operations.

3. Brussels Mini-Summit: Keeping NATO Enlargement on the Table

Daniel Kochis and Luke Coffey

Issue Brief No. 4701

May 5, 2017

<http://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/brussels-mini-summit-keeping-nato-enlargement-the-table>.

NATO has done more than any other organization, including the European Union, to promote democracy, stability, and security in the Euro-Atlantic region. This was accomplished by enticing countries to become a part of the club. NATO's open-door policy has been a crucial driver of modernization and reform in candidate countries, has promoted stability and peace in Europe, and has made it easier for the Alliance to coalesce around collective defense. Viewing Montenegro's accession to NATO as a closing ceremony for enlargement would be a substantial mistake. It is in America's interest that NATO's door remains open to deserving European countries.

4. Brussels Mini-Summit: The U.S. and NATO Must Remain Committed to Afghanistan

Luke Coffey

Issue Brief No. 4703

May 10, 2017

<http://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/brussels-mini-summit-the-us-and-nato-must-remain-committed-afghanistan>.

The end-of-2014 deadline for Western-led combat operations marked, not the end of the war in Afghanistan, but simply a continuation of the campaign led by the Afghans and supported by the international community. President Trump should announce—before the Brussels mini-summit—his plans for U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan. This will show NATO partners that the U.S. remains committed to leading the international effort in Afghanistan. Reinforcing U.S. commitment to Afghanistan will encourage other NATO countries to redouble their own efforts to help to secure the country.

1. Julian Barnes, "Planned Russian Exercises in September Sow NATO Worries," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 28, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/planned-russian-exercises-in-september-sow-nato-worries-1490715830> (accessed May 17, 2017).

That burden must be shared equitably within the Alliance and the international community should remain committed to funding, equipping, and training the Afghan security forces for the foreseeable future. The leaders of NATO should also use the mini-summit as an opportunity to pressure Pakistan to accept a long-term solution, and stop providing relief to the Taliban.

Taking Full Advantage of the Opportunity

Thursday's meeting of the North Atlantic Council should be more than an introduction between President Trump and fellow NATO heads of state with a group photograph in the new headquarters. NATO faces real threats, and the U.S. and its allies should not miss an opportunity to make important progress in addressing the complex challenges facing the alliance at a critical juncture.

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