

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Hagel, Kerry, and Brennan Senate Confirmation Hearings: U.S. Policy on Europe

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In the coming weeks, the United States Senate will begin the confirmation process for three key Administration positions: Senator John Kerry (D-MA) for Secretary of State, former Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) for Secretary of Defense, and White House Chief Counterterrorism Advisor John Brennan for Director of the CIA. All three have been prominent backers of President Obama's foreign and defense policy.

The Senate confirmation process allows the American public an opportunity to learn more about these candidates, what they believe, and how they see America's role in a dangerous world. The American people deserve clear answers from President Obama's nominees and a clear-cut commitment from them that they will advance U.S. interests

on the world stage and defend America's national security needs.

**Europe Matters.** U.S. leadership in Europe should be an important issue in the confirmation hearings. Many of America's closest and oldest allies are in Europe. The transatlantic relationship has vitally important defense, intelligence, and economic dimensions. For more than 63 years, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been the bedrock of transatlantic security. The economies of Europe, along with the U.S., account for approximately half of the global economy.

Regrettably, the Obama Administration has attached little importance to the transatlantic alliance, and Europe has barely figured in the Administration's foreign policy. The Administration has weakened the U.S. alliance with Great Britain while undercutting allies in eastern and central Europe in an attempt to appease Russia.

A strong transatlantic alliance should be at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. Washington must reinvigorate partnerships with America's key friends and allies in Europe. It should adopt policies that advance national sovereignty and economic freedom across the Atlantic rather than subvert them.

There are four main issues that underpin U.S.-European relations on foreign affairs and defense.

**1. The U.S.-U.K. Special Relationship.** The U.S. has no closer friend than Great Britain. Both nations are liberal democracies that have been willing to use force to defend the free world. Today, the U.S. and Britain continue to cooperate closely in the realms of defense and intelligence, and they continue to share a fundamental interest in economic freedom and a belief in personal liberty.

Instead of building on this relationship, the Obama Administration has indulged in a series of petty insults against Britain while taking the side of Argentina in its provocative campaign against British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands.

A strong Anglo-American alliance is no obstacle to good U.S. relations with its many other allies around the world, but a weak relationship is the betrayal of a friend as well as a stark reminder of America's tendency to forget that it cannot expect to keep its allies if it refuses to take their concerns seriously.

**2. The Future of the European Project.** The financial and economic crisis enveloping the euro zone has exposed the fundamental flaws of

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the European Project. For several decades, the European Union has pursued an “ever closer union”—a growing centralization of economic and political power with little or no concern for enhancing economic freedom, national sovereignty, and democratic accountability.

A politically unified Europe is not in the interest of the U.S., and the executive branch should not back an “ever closer union” within the EU, including in the critical areas of foreign policy and defense integration. A Europe of independent nation-states would best advance U.S. interests in Europe, a robust and enduring transatlantic alliance, and democracy inside Europe.

Washington should actively promote strong bilateral relationships with individual European capitals. This must include strengthening the vital U.S.–U.K. partnership, supporting the development of a comprehensive missile defense program in Europe, and backing the expansion of the Visa Waiver Program to include major U.S. partners such as Poland.

**3. The Future of NATO.** The future of NATO is troubled. This is the result of reduced defense investments by NATO members since the end of the Cold War and the lack of political will to use military capability when and where it is needed.

Yet even with these shortcomings, NATO remains the world’s premier security alliance. NATO has done more to promote democracy, peace, and security in Europe than any other multilateral organization, including the EU. Continued active U.S. participation is essential to the alliance’s prosperity. The U.S. must lead NATO, help the alliance prepare for its future after Afghanistan, and not turn its back on the alliance.

**4. U.S. Military Force Posture in Europe.** The U.S. has approximately 80,000 service personnel based in Europe, spread across 28 bases. Stationing American troops in Europe directly serves U.S. national security interests. The U.S. presence demonstrates the American commitment to the security of Europe, helps to build European capacity by conducting training exercises, and allows the U.S. to respond rapidly to crises in the broader Eurasian and Middle East regions.

The Administration’s damaging defense cuts in the U.S. military footprint in Europe include the removal of two U.S. Army Brigade Combat Teams from Germany and a U.S. Air Force A-10 Squadron from Italy. Continued reductions in the size of the U.S. military presence in Europe are dangerously shortsighted: They reduce the flexibility of American military responses, result in no real savings, and send a message of U.S. indifference toward Europe and NATO.

**Clarity and Guarantees on the Important Issues.** The Senate should use the confirmation process as an opportunity to question each nominee on the important issues facing transatlantic relations.

The Senate should seek to get clear guarantees from Senator Kerry that he will:

■ **Advance and strengthen the Special Relationship with Great Britain.** This must include enhanced defense, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic cooperation. In addition, Washington must stand with London on the Falklands issue and support the right of self-determination for the Falkland Islanders in the face of Argentine threats and intimidation.

■ **Back national sovereignty and economic freedom in Europe.** The U.S. must end its support for political and economic integration in the EU, which has only encouraged the drive toward the creation of a fundamentally undemocratic federal Europe that is frequently anti-American in outlook. Europe needs greater economic liberty and self-determination rather than more supranationalism and big government.

The Senate should seek to get clear guarantees from Senator Hagel that he will:

■ **Ensure that NATO, and not the EU, remains the cornerstone of transatlantic security.** Washington must warn against the dangers posed to U.S. interests by the development of an EU defense identity and EU military command structures.

■ **Freeze current plans to remove U.S. troops from Europe.** A strategic review of U.S. interests in Europe, not a desire to slash the defense budget, should guide the important decisions on the number of bases and the distribution of troops in Europe.

**The Obama Legacy.** The forthcoming confirmation hearings are an important opportunity for the Senate to pose key questions about the direction of American foreign policy under President Obama in his second term. After the first four years of the Obama presidency, the U.S. has grown weaker while the world has become even more dangerous.

The transatlantic alliance needs stronger leadership from

Washington and a firm commitment from the Administration that it will advance ties with America's key allies in Europe while supporting economic freedom and national sovereignty across the Atlantic.

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