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John Kerry's Grand Tour: Priorities for Europe

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From February 24 to March 6, John Kerry will make his first trip overseas since being appointed U.S. Secretary of State. During this period, he will be visiting the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar.

The Obama Administration has too often taken America's relations with Europe for granted. Secretary Kerry's trip to Europe will offer him an opportunity to improve relations with America's European partners, especially the United Kingdom, while at the same time ending blind U.S. support for deeper European integration.

Obama's Failed European Policy. Alliances take hard work and require attention from all parties involved. Regrettably, the Obama Administration attaches little importance to the transatlantic alliance,

and Europe has barely figured in the Administration's foreign policy. This was recently demonstrated during President Obama's hour-long State of the Union address, in which the word *Europe* was mentioned once and the word *NATO* not at all.

Europe should still matter to the U.S. Many of America's closest 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.

Blind Support for the European Project. The financial and economic crisis enveloping the euro zone has exposed the fundamental flaws of the European Project. For several decades, the European Union (EU) has pursued an "ever closer union"—a growing centralization of economic and political power with little concern for economic freedom, national sovereignty, and democratic accountability.

A politically unified Europe is not in the interest of the U.S., and the U.S. should not back an "ever closer union" within the EU, including the

critical areas of foreign policy and defense integration. U.S. policymakers need to start seeing Europe for what it really is: a collection of sovereign nation-states. A Europe of cooperating, friendly, and independent nation-states would advance both democracy inside Europe and the U.S. interest in a robust and enduring transatlantic alliance.

Washington should build strong bilateral relationships with individual European countries and be wary of initiatives in all realms that promote the EU or extend the EU's failed economic model to the U.S.

Special Relationship in Doubt. 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.

The U.S. is never more influential in European affairs than when its relationship with the U.K. is strong. A good measure of the effectiveness of U.S. engagement in Europe can be made by assessing the strength of the U.S.–U.K. Special Relationship. Here also, the Obama Administration has

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been disappointing. It has indulged in a series of petty insults against Britain while echoing Argentina's provocative call for negotiations over the Falkland Islands. It is time for the U.S. to recognize that it has nothing to gain—and much to lose—by refusing to support British sovereignty in Europe and the South Atlantic.

Transatlantic Security. NATO has been the premier security alliance since the beginning of the Cold War. It 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 future health. The U.S. should lead NATO, help it prepare for its future after Afghanistan, and not neglect the alliance.

The Administration has removed two U.S. Army Brigade Combat Teams from Germany and a U.S. Air Force A-10 squadron from Italy. These cuts will only weaken NATO and America's leadership in Europe. Furthermore, continued reductions in the size of the U.S. military presence in Europe would reduce the flexibility of American military responses in the region, result in no financial savings, and send a message of U.S. indifference toward Europe and NATO.¹

Eastern Europe Notably Absent. Absent from Kerry's itinerary is any visit to Eastern Europe, where many of America's closest allies are. Many Eastern Europeans are confounded by the White House's lack of interest in the region. This was especially the case after many in Eastern Europe offered unwavering support for missile defense in spite of Russian opposition and strongly supported the NATO operation in Afghanistan, only to be slighted by the White House.

Underpinning the concerns that Eastern European allies have regarding the reduction of U.S. troop numbers in Europe, the abandonment of the missile defense third site, and the lack of U.S. support for NATO enlargement is the Administration's so-called reset policy with Russia. Eastern Europe feels constant pressure from its former Soviet masters, and many in the region are worried by U.S. overtures toward Moscow. Kerry is one of the greatest supporters of the failed "reset" policy, which makes it all the more imperative for him to make it clear that the U.S. recognizes and values the friendship of the democracies of Eastern Europe.

Demonstrate That Europe Still Matters. The transatlantic alliance needs stronger leadership from Washington. Kerry needs to make a firm commitment to advancing ties with America's key allies in Europe while supporting economic freedom and national sovereignty in Europe.

While visiting Europe, Kerry should therefore:

- **Advance and strengthen the Special Relationship with Great Britain.** This should include enhanced defense, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic cooperation. In addition, Washington should 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. should end its support for political and economic integration in the EU, which has only

encouraged the drive toward creation of a fundamentally undemocratic federal Europe that is frequently anti-American in outlook. Europe needs greater economic liberty and self-determination, not more supranationalism and bigger government.

- **Demonstrate U.S. commitment to Eastern Europe.** Secretary Kerry's omission of Eastern Europe from his itinerary will be noticed not only in Eastern European capitals but also in Moscow. He should add a visit to Eastern Europe to his scheduled trip.

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

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

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1. See Luke Coffey, "Keeping America Safe: Why U.S. Bases in Europe Remain Vital," Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 111, July 11, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/07/keeping-america-safe-why-us-bases-in-europe-remain-vital>.