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Steadfast Jazz 2013 and America's Commitment to NATO

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In November 2013, NATO will conduct a military training exercise called Steadfast Jazz 2013. The exercise will be held in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. According to NATO, the primary purpose of the exercise is to certify command and control elements of its NATO Response Force. However, considering the size, timing, and location of the exercise, it will also help to reassure Poland and the Baltic states of NATO's commitment to their territorial defense.

In light of President Obama's troop reductions in Europe, the U.S. should send significant numbers of troops to the exercise in order to demonstrate America's commitment to trans-Atlantic security at a time when America's commitment is being questioned.

The Importance of Steadfast Jazz 2013. A capable and militarily strong NATO is in America's interest. NATO is only as strong as its member states, which is why joint training between U.S. and allied forces is vital. Preparing the militaries of European allies to deploy outside NATO's borders offers huge benefits for the United States. However, NATO is an alliance based on the principle of collective defense. Therefore, it is equally important

that NATO countries are able to react to unexpected events inside Europe as part of the alliance's collective defense.

Steadfast Jazz 2013 will be next in a long list of "Steadfast" military exercises being conducted by NATO. Steadfast Jazz 2013 is important for three reasons:

1. The training exercise will be the largest NATO training exercise since the end of the Cold War, and it is taking place in a region of Europe where there is a real fear of external aggression.
2. The training exercise is taking place at a critical time for NATO. The NATO-led combat mission in Afghanistan will be coming to an end in 2014. Consequently, the main driver of defense cooperation in Europe will slowly evaporate as the mission in Afghanistan winds down. As NATO redefines its mission in a post-Afghan War world, training events such as Steadfast Jazz help to focus the alliance on its collective defense.
3. This is the first major NATO exercise since the Obama Administration announced the so-called Asia Pivot and signaled that it would be significantly reducing U.S. troop presence in Europe. Therefore, friend and adversary alike will be watching the training event closely to see to what degree the U.S. participates.

President Obama's Neglect of Eastern Europe. In terms of trans-Atlantic security, the Obama Administration has shown little interest in Central and Eastern Europe. It abruptly, and

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without advanced warning, cancelled the emplacement of missile defense components in the Czech Republic and Poland (commonly referred to as the “third site”) back in 2009. In addition, the reduction of 10,000 U.S. troops in Europe, including the two heavy Brigade Combat Teams and an A-10 Squadron, has made many in Europe question America’s commitment to NATO.

More recently, the most senior U.S. officer in Europe, Admiral James Stavridis, told Congress that he is cancelling about 140 security assistance programs with European allies due to defense cuts resulting from sequestration.¹ John Kerry traveled to Europe but did not visit any American allies in Eastern Europe during his first overseas trip as Secretary of State. The sum of these policies taken by the Obama Administration sends the wrong signal about America’s commitment to the security of the Euro–Atlantic region.

A Measure of America’s Commitment to NATO. Although the Department of Defense has not stated how many U.S. troops will participate in Steadfast Jazz 2013, some sources are reporting that only one company of U.S. troops (fewer than 200 soldiers) will be made available.²

When the decision was announced in 2011 to bring two Brigade Combat Teams home from Europe, the Administration said that the reduction in capability will be replaced with a rotational battalion that will be sent to Europe for training missions when necessary. This move has unsettled America’s allies, because a rotational battalion clearly does not offer the same capability as two permanently based Brigade Combat Teams.

Steadfast Jazz 2013 is particularly important to America’s allies in the Baltic region of Europe. Since joining NATO in 2004, the Baltic States have felt the most vulnerable to outside hostile attack. In fact, Estonia was the target of a cyber attack in 2007 that was thought to have originated in Russia. With the Cold War over, Russia no longer poses a direct military threat to Europe, but Russia’s future is uncertain.

For some NATO members, Russia is still a force driver in military planning. Moscow has undertaken

numerous large training exercises in the west of the country in recent years, including a 2009 exercise that simulated an invasion of the Baltic States. In fact, coinciding with Steadfast Jazz 2013 is another military exercise called Baltic Host 2013, which will test how the three Baltic States would accommodate a deployment of NATO troops in the event of a foreign invasion or military aggression.

Although small, the Baltic States are willing to contribute to NATO operations in a way that many fellow NATO partners do not. In 2009 (the third deadliest year in Afghanistan), Estonia’s casualties as a proportion of its population were nearly twice those of the U.S. That same year, Estonia was the highest troop contributor per capita in Afghanistan, and all were fighting in the deadly Helmand Province. All three Baltic States and Poland have deployed troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. It is important that the U.S. shows its appreciation.

Setting the Example. NATO needs American leadership now more than ever. The mission for NATO after Afghanistan is unclear, leaving the future of the alliance in doubt. Unless the U.S. continues to take NATO seriously, it is doubtful that Europe will. The U.S. should refocus NATO’s primary mission around collective defense, and Steadfast Jazz 2013 is an important part of this refocus. In order to demonstrate that the U.S. takes trans-Atlantic security seriously, the U.S. should:

- Contribute a sizeable number of troops to Steadfast Jazz 2013, and
- Use a strategic review of U.S. interests in Europe, not a desire to slash the defense budget, to guide important decisions such as the number of bases and the distribution of troops in Europe.

Reaffirm U.S. Commitment. After the NATO-led combat mission in Afghanistan comes to an end, collective defense should be at the heart of everything NATO does. By actively contributing to and participating in Steadfast Jazz 2013, the U.S. can reaffirm its commitment to trans-Atlantic security and to the NATO alliance. It would also show

1. News release, “Cuts Create ‘Difficult, Challenging’ Picture, Eucom Commander Says,” American Forces Press Service, March 19, 2003, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119569> (accessed April 16, 2013).

2. Edward Lucas, “What Can Europe Expect from Obama Part Two?,” *European Voice*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/what-can-europe-expect-from-obama-part-two-/76926.aspx> (accessed April 16, 2013).

America's allies in the Baltic States and Poland that their contributions to overseas military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were appreciated.

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