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2014 NATO Summit: Laying the Groundwork Now

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It was recently announced that the 2014 NATO summit will be held in the United Kingdom. The last time the U.K. hosted the NATO summit was in 1990 when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister and the Cold War was coming to a close. This will be a particularly important summit. The 2014 NATO summit will be the last summit before NATO ends its combat operations in Afghanistan, and it will likely be the first summit for NATO's next secretary general, who will take office in July 2014. Many of the important issues that will be discussed at the summit will require the U.S. to prepare the groundwork now.

The U.S. should use the next NATO summit to advance an agenda that keeps NATO focused on the future of Afghanistan, ensures that NATO enlargement is firmly on the agenda, and readies the alliance for the challenges of the 21st century. Here is an early look at some of the top issues that should be addressed.

The Mission in Afghanistan. The two most important issues at the summit regarding Afghanistan will be the number of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan and the financial funding for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) after

2015. One of the most crucial periods of the Afghan campaign will commence in 2015, when Afghans take the lead for their security. NATO should avoid using the summit as a victory lap for its mission in Afghanistan.

A major part of the transition strategy in Afghanistan has been training the ANSF to a level where it can meet Afghanistan's internal security challenges without tens of thousands of NATO troops on the ground. Maintaining the ANSF after 2015 will cost the international community approximately \$4.1 billion per year. To put this in perspective, the U.S. spent this amount every 12 days in Afghanistan on combat operations last year. The U.S. has committed to funding \$2 billion per year. Even so, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office, the international community is still short \$1.8 billion for the years 2015–2017 for ANSF funding.¹

The 2014 NATO summit will also be an opportunity for alliance members to commit troop numbers for the post-2014 training and mentoring mission. Senior U.S. military officials have called for up to 13,600 U.S. troops combined with up to 7,000 NATO troops.² Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Taliban, and others in the region need to see a clear NATO commitment on post-2014 troop numbers. NATO should demonstrate that it will stay engaged in Afghanistan after 2014.

NATO Enlargement. Missing from the agenda of NATO's last summit in Chicago in 2012 was NATO enlargement. Responding to criticism at the time, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: "I believe [the Chicago summit] should be the last summit that is not an enlargement summit."³ President

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Obama is on track for being the first U.S. President since the end of the Cold War not to oversee NATO enlargement on his watch.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia, and Montenegro are official NATO aspirant countries. Some are more ready to join NATO than others. For example, Macedonia should have been given full NATO membership five years ago and should have been given membership at the 2012 Chicago summit. The only thing stopping Macedonia from joining is Greece, which continues to veto over a name dispute with Macedonia. However, it is unclear what the Administration is doing to ensure that enlargement is firmly on the next summit's agenda.

Future of NATO. As the mission in Afghanistan winds down, the main driver of defense cooperation in Europe will slowly evaporate. As NATO redefines its mission in a post-Afghan War world, it will need U.S. leadership.

NATO is, first and foremost, a collective security alliance. In order to stay relevant, NATO needs to prepare to defend against 21st-century threats in the North Atlantic region. The alliance should make collective defense the underpinning of everything it does.

NATO should focus on preventing nuclear proliferation, defending against cyber attacks, ensuring energy security, combatting terrorism, and establishing a comprehensive missile defense system. It should also get back to training for its Article 5 mission.

NATO's Partnerships. In light of the uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, the continued threat in the region from al-Qaeda, and the nuclear threat from Iran, many in NATO have rightly decided to place a renewed focus on working with regional partners on NATO's periphery.

NATO already has structures in place to better cooperate with partners in this part of the world, such as Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. NATO relationships are vital to ensure the alliance's success. Sadly, beyond words

in communiqués, little has been done to enhance these relationships.

Europe's Lack of Defense Spending. As an intergovernmental security alliance, NATO is only as strong as its member states. European countries collectively have more than 2 million men and women in uniform, yet by some estimates only 100,000 of them—a mere 5 percent—have the capability to deploy outside national borders.⁴ In 2012, just four of the 28 NATO members—the United States, Britain, Estonia, and Greece—spent the required 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense. France fell below the 2 percent mark in 2011.

Europeans have glossed over this crisis by creating programs such as Smart Defense and the “pooling and sharing” initiative. Beyond a list of aspirations, neither has delivered considerable military capability to the alliance.

Military capability cannot be created quickly or cheaply. Without proper investment in Europe's armed forces, concepts such as Smart Defense and “pooling and sharing” will not lead to any additional capability.

Start Laying the Groundwork Now. To best ensure that the next NATO summit is a success, the U.S. should start laying the groundwork now by:

- **Keeping NATO focused on Afghanistan.** The U.S. needs to drum up financial support for the ANSF and seek concrete troop pledges for the mentoring mission in Afghanistan after 2014. This is no time for NATO to turn its back on the situation there.
- **Encouraging partnerships with NATO allies.** The U.S. should push to have a Mediterranean Dialogue meeting during the summit involving heads of state and government. Now that relations between Turkey and Israel are back on track, this should be a possibility, but it will require much diplomatic work leading up to the summit.

1. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Afghanistan: Key Oversight Issues*, GAO-13-218SP, February 2013, p. 22, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/652075.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2013).

2. Kristina Wong, “Marine Gen. Mattis Recommends 13,600 U.S. Troops in Afghanistan After 2014,” *Washington Times*, March 5, 2013, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/mar/5/gen-mattis-13600-us-troops-afghanistan-after-2014/> (accessed September 30, 2013).

3. Karen Parrish, “Clinton Affirms NATO Open-Door Membership Policy,” American Forces Press Service, May 21, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=116433> (accessed October 4, 2013).

4. Nick Whitney, “Re-Energising Europe's Security and Defence Policy,” European Council on Foreign Relations July 2008, p. 20, http://ecfr3cdn.net/678773462b7b6f9893_djm6vu499.pdf (accessed September 30, 2013).

- **Advocating for enlargement.** NATO’s “open door policy” is critical to mobilizing Europe and its allies around a collective transatlantic defense. Leading up to the summit, the U.S. should work to continue the open door policy for European countries that qualify.
- **Pressing allies on defense spending.** President Obama should address this directly with his European counterparts leading up to the summit. To date, President Obama has been reluctant to do so—usually leaving this task to his Defense Secretary.

Invest in NATO. NATO has done more to promote democracy, peace, and security in Europe than any other multilateral organization, including the European Union. The 2014 NATO summit will come at a pivotal time for the alliance. It is essential that the U.S. continue to be an active participant in the alliance’s future.

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