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Ukraine, NATO, Trade, and Afghanistan Should Dominate Obama's Visit to Europe

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On March 24–27, President Barack Obama will make his first trip to Europe in 2014. He will visit Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Vatican City. He will also attend the U.S.–European Union Summit in Brussels.

This trip will provide an opportunity for the President to demonstrate America's commitment to transatlantic relations. The President needs to get the transatlantic community united over the Ukraine, committed to NATO, supporting genuine free trade, and focused on Afghanistan.

Time to Unite over Ukraine. Ever since Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, the U.S. and its European allies have not been on the same sheet of music regarding how best to deal with Russia. There is a big gap between U.S. and EU sanctions. The U.S. targeted people who at one time or another have been close to Vladimir Putin. In stark contrast, the EU's larger list of 13 Russians targeted by sanctions (plus eight Crimeans) hits much lower-ranked figures. This demonstrates that the EU cannot move beyond a "lowest common denominator" approach to foreign policy making.

There have also been inconsistent messages coming from inside Europe on how to deal with Russia. For example, on one hand, NATO's Secretary Gen-

eral describes Russia's annexation of Crimea as the biggest threat to European security since the Cold War. Yet the French continue to sell Moscow warships, and the Spanish allow the Russian navy to use their territories in North Africa.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In February 2013, President Obama called for a free trade agreement between the U.S. and the EU during his annual State of the Union address. With a number of foreign policy decisions by the Obama Administration leaving Europeans questioning America's commitment to transatlantic relations, politicians and commentators on both sides of the Atlantic have seized on this announcement as the answer to the transatlantic relationship's woes. Failure of the trade deal to deliver the expected political and economic results could further damage transatlantic relations.

The promotion of economic freedom is a vital part of U.S. foreign and domestic policy. A TTIP that genuinely reduced trade barriers would contribute significantly to this aim. But even though negotiations are still at an early stage, there are reasons to be concerned that TTIP will not promote free trade but instead will build a transatlantic managed market. This would reduce or even eliminate U.S. gains from TTIP and would not promote economic freedom. The U.S. should continue negotiating but be cautious and assess any agreement on its merits.

Supporters of economic freedom and limited government should be prepared to support a TTIP that empowers consumers and opens market opportunities for entrepreneurs, but they should not start cheering for TTIP before they confirm that the agreement is not a Trojan horse for increased reg-

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ulation and the importation of the EU's managed market into the U.S. Such an agreement would be a bad deal for everyone, especially the U.S.

The Upcoming NATO Summit. The NATO summit taking place in September in Wales will be particularly important and should be high on the President's agenda during his visit. This will be the last summit before NATO ends its combat operations in Afghanistan and the first summit since Russia invaded Crimea. Many of the important issues that will be discussed at the summit will require the U.S. to prepare the groundwork now.

As NATO redefines its mission in a post-Afghan War world, it will need U.S. leadership. The alliance should make collective defense the underpinning of everything it does. In addition, 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. 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.

Remember Afghanistan? One of the most crucial periods of the Afghan campaign will commence in 2015, when Afghans take the lead for their security. The President should also use his visit to drum up financial and military support for Afghanistan after 2015. After NATO-led combat operations end this year, two important issues regarding Afghanistan remain to be resolved: the number of troops in Afghanistan and the funding for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

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. 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. NATO should demonstrate that it will stay engaged in Afghanistan after 2014.

Do Not Waste This Opportunity. President Obama's visit to Europe could not come at a more important time. With Ukraine, the future of NATO,

stability in Afghanistan, and free trade high on the agenda, President Obama should use his trip as an opportunity to show America's commitment to transatlantic relations.

The President should:

- **Show leadership on dealing with Russia.** The President should rally America's European allies around a common approach when dealing with Russia. This will require American leadership. Having a divided transatlantic alliance does no good for Europe's security and stability.
- **Promote transatlantic free trade.** An agreement that reduces trade barriers and empowers individuals over government bureaucrats would be beneficial. Talks that make the U.S. more like another member of the EU would not.
- **Keep NATO focused on territorial defense.** NATO's original mission of territorial defense has not been as important since the Cold War. In light of Russia's recent bellicose behavior, the U.S. should lead the alliance toward refocusing on policies that keep the North Atlantic region safe and secure.
- **Keep Europe focused on Afghanistan.** Too much blood and treasure has been spent the past 13 years in Afghanistan for the West to turn its back now. The U.S. needs to drum up financial support for the ANSF and seek concrete troop pledges for the mentoring mission in Afghanistan after 2015. This is no time for NATO to turn its back on the situation there.

Strengthen the Alliance. Regrettably, the Obama Administration has attached little importance to the transatlantic alliance, and Europe has barely figured in the Administration's foreign policy. Consequently, Europeans are left questioning America's commitment to transatlantic relations. A strong transatlantic alliance should be at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. The President should reinvigorate partnerships with America's key friends and allies in Europe.

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