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NATO Summit 2014: Time for the Alliance to Get Back to Basics

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The 2014 NATO summit will be held in September in Wales. The last time the United Kingdom hosted the NATO summit was in 1990, when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister, the Cold War was coming to a close, and the alliance was questioning its future role in the world. Today's situation is not dissimilar.

This will be the last summit before NATO ends its combat operations in Afghanistan and the first since Russia illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula and brought instability to eastern Ukraine. The U.S. should use this opportunity to get NATO refocused on collective security and territorial defense. Refocusing the alliance on the core tenets of the original 1949 North Atlantic Treaty is a good place to begin.

Refocus on North Atlantic Region

NATO's mission in 1949 and throughout the Cold War was to deter and (if required) defeat the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, to protect the territorial integrity of its members, and to stop the spread of Communism in Europe. Although the nature of the threat might have changed, the threat itself has not gone away.

NATO does not have to be everywhere in the world doing everything all the time, but it does have to be capable of defending its members' territorial

integrity. The 1949 North Atlantic Treaty is clear that NATO's area of responsibility is "in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer."

Although it is completely inconceivable to those in Western Europe, there are those in NATO's east that face legitimate security concerns from Russia. For those NATO members that lived under the iron fist of the Warsaw Pact or in fact were outright absorbed into the Soviet Union after World War II, Russia's bellicose behavior today is seen as an existential threat. Even though the Cold War is over, there is still plenty for NATO to do to defend against 21st-century threats in the North Atlantic region.

The Decline of European Military Capability

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. In 2013, 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.

There is also an actual treaty requirement to maintain capacity to resist armed attack. Article 3 of the 1949 treaty states that member states will, at a minimum, "maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack." Not many NATO members can say they are living up to this commitment, which applies equally today.

Europeans have glossed over this funding crisis by creating initiatives such as Smart Defense.

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<http://report.heritage.org/ib4263>

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Smart Defense aims to encourage allies to cooperate in developing, acquiring, and maintaining military capabilities in a more economically efficient manner in the current age of defense cuts. However, Smart Defense risks allowing European countries to believe that they can do more with less when, in reality, they will be doing less with less. Until additional money is invested in defense that delivers real capabilities to the modern-day battlefield, Smart Defense will be meaningless to the men and women on the front lines.

Enlargement of the Alliance Cannot Be Ignored

NATO should be used to promote democracy, stability, and security in the North Atlantic region. In the past, this was often accomplished by enticing countries to become a part of the club. Article 10 of the 1949 treaty states very clearly that NATO, by unanimous agreement, may invite any other European state to join the alliance.

Currently, there are four official candidate countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Georgia. To the surprise of many, enlargement was not on the agenda at NATO's most recent summit in Chicago in 2012. Responding to criticism at the time, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the Chicago summit "should be the last summit that is not an enlargement summit."¹ Even so, her successor, John Kerry, has shown no enthusiasm for enlargement at the Wales summit, and President 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.

Wales could be an enlargement summit, and enlargement at Wales would prove to other countries that democratic and military reforms pay off. Sadly, the only country stopping enlargement in September is Greece with its perpetual veto of Macedonia, which is the only candidate country that is fully ready to join.

Get the Alliance Back on Track

NATO is, first and foremost, a collective security alliance; everything else the alliance does is secondary to its main mission. In order to stay relevant, NATO needs to prepare to defend against 21st-cen-

tury threats in the North Atlantic region. To meet these challenges, the U.S. and NATO should:

- **Ensure that the alliance is clear on its mission and purpose.** The summit declaration should make it clear that collective security and territorial defense will underpin everything NATO does.
- **Establish a permanent NATO presence in Eastern Europe.** It makes no sense, either militarily or diplomatically, not to have robust capability in Central and Eastern Europe. It will be far easier to deter threats and defend the region from Russia than it will be to liberate them.
- **Slowly shift NATO training in Europe from counterinsurgency operations to collective security operations.** For the past several years, training has focused on NATO's counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan—and rightly so. As the NATO-led combat mission in Afghanistan winds down, NATO should also get back to carrying out regular training exercises for its Article 5 mission.
- **Get the finance ministers involved.** There should be a special session for finance ministers (or their equivalent) at the NATO summit. In many parliamentary democracies, the finance minister controls public spending. Educating the finance ministers on the importance of military investment might help secure more defense spending in the long term.
- **Press 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.

Do Not Waste This Opportunity

Since its creation in 1949, 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

1. 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 August 14, 2014).

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 and chart a course back to basics.

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