

A MEMORANDUM: Advancing the National Interest in Europe through NATO

SCUSA 71 Policy Paper - Europe

PURPOSE

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance is currently facing challenges due to the instability in the transatlantic relationship, yet it remains vital to European and American security, stability, and prosperity. The US must improve the perceptions of NATO domestically and abroad in order to retain these benefits and continue a close relationship with Europe.

BACKGROUND

NATO was created in 1949 in response to the growing threat of the Soviet Union, aiming to ensure the “freedom and security of its members through military and political means.”¹ The following factors contribute to the current state of NATO

- Domestically, President Trump has publicly voiced his skepticism of the alliance. However, the US public does not echo this skepticism, as 75% of Americans support maintaining or increasing the US commitment to NATO.²
- In Europe, right-wing parties increasingly invoke euro-skeptical and/or isolationist arguments, often reminiscent of President Trump’s “America First” rhetoric.
- NATO has successfully applied hard power to a wide variety of situations (e.g. Afghanistan and Libya) without requiring members to revise the treaty, illuminating its versatility.
- The US spends the highest amount of all NATO members on defense (3.6% of GDP). Following the US in gross spending in the UK (\$55.2 billion), but in terms of percentage of GDP, Greece is second at 2.4%. NATO member states voted to spend 2% of GDP on defense, and to do so, have put into place comprehensive plans to track and monitor these spendings.³

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The US must reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to NATO and our European allies. The NATO alliance provides an advantage for the United States in the context of broader global competition. The EU member states spent \$284 billion on defense last year, ranking its spending ahead of current Chinese figures.⁴ This defense allocation from European countries is a tangible example of why our partnership is necessary. As an entity, NATO outspends all of our competitors, and a strengthened collaboration postures the liberal world order against the threat of revisionist powers, as it has successfully done since WWII.

Given current Russian and Chinese threats, the United States must further develop cohesion with NATO countries. Russia already seeks to influence Europe geopolitically through election interference and support of right-wing parties that demonstrate skepticism towards multilateral institutions. Furthermore, China continues to pursue a close relationship with Europe by leveraging its technological advancements in 5G and AI. A stronger NATO relationship positions the US to better strengthen our modern economic relationship with Europe, as China poses a potential threat to this privileged relationship. Without demonstrating our commitment, we risk Europe succumbing to these alternative powers. Affirming our commitment to NATO

¹“Basic Points - What is NATO?” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>

² “On the Eve of NATO Summit, Majority of Americans Say Alliance Is Essential.” July 2016.

³“NATO Spending by Country Population.” October 2019.

⁴ “Defense Expenditure in NATO Countries (2012-2019).” June 2019.

must include improving NATO's image, increasing NATO's relevance and capacity, and pushing for a cohesive global customs policy with the EU. All of these solidify our shared military direction with Europe and fend off adversarial geopolitical and economic threats.

POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1) *Improving NATO's Popular European and US Image:*

a) The US military must invite European allies to participate in our day-to-day operations in the US in order to strengthen not only our military alliance, but relations between our citizens as well. This would entail inviting RPA pilots, logisticians, doctors, and other professions that allows more of a European presence in our society.

b) The US must pursue a more multilateral approach at the executive level to global foreign policymaking by consulting and cooperating with NATO allies on major decisions when possible, such as a military intervention or a trade conflict. The US should avoid unilaterally making controversial decisions, such as the process for withdrawal from Afghanistan, when possible.

c) The US must increase its support for international organizations, such as the UN and the ICC, environmental initiatives, and human rights ideals, and reaffirm its commitments to pre-existing agreements to improve its image amongst European allies.

d) The United States should ensure that European allies meet the goal of raising military expenditure to at least 2% of GDP by 2024, to repair the perception that the burden for the alliance falls on the US.

2) *Increasing NATO's Relevancy and Capacity:*

a) Re-establishment of the Military Assistance Program to increase the capacity and capability of NATO members in Eastern Europe. The U.S. will supply weapons systems and technical training to allies to strengthen NATO.

b) Increasing common naval operations to keep sea lanes open for trade.

c) Focus on cooperating with members and partners who are directly threatened by Russia, including the Baltic states and Eastern Europe. This can be achieved by conducting more military exercises with NATO allies in countries bordering Russia.

3) *Strengthening Economic Ties by Harmonizing Customs Policy with the European Union:*

a) The US trade representative in concert with the U.S Ambassador to the EU and the State Department will push to start negotiations with their European counterparts. The goal of negotiations will be to achieve a stable common policy.

a) Negotiations would use precedent studies and documents prepared for TTIP as starting point; the U.S will appoint third party experts to oversee the process.

b) The focus of the pursued global policy will be on customs and east-west trade. It aims to promote a mutually beneficial relationship between U.S. and European partners as a response to current challenges posed by Russia and China.

Works Cited

“Basic Points - What is NATO?” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*.

<https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>

“Defense Expenditure in NATO Countries (2012-2019).” June 2019.

https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf

“NATO Spending by Country Population.” October 2019

https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_03/190314-pr2018-34-eng.pdf

“On the Eve of NATO Summit, Majority of Americans Say Alliance Is Essential.”

July 2016.

<https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/eve-nato-summit-majority-americans-say-alliance-essential>