



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on July 12, 2018

Trump Backs off Threat to Pull out of NATO — But Should He?

“NATO is much stronger now than it was two days ago,” President Donald Trump told reporters in Brussels, Belgium, following a meeting of member nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Trump came to the NATO meeting this week demanding that other NATO countries should increase their defense spending to four percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Trump recently wrote to about a dozen NATO members, chastising them for not following through with a pledge they had made in 2014 to spend two percent of the GDP on their own defense. Currently, only four European countries have managed to achieve this goal. This has led Trump to accuse many NATO allies of expecting America to carry the financial burden of the alliance, treating the United States like “schmucks.”



The United States presently spends 3.57 percent of its own GDP on defense, causing Trump to charge the other major powers in the alliance of “freeriding” on America.

In fact, the United States is one of only five nations in the 29-nation alliance that spends two percent or more of its GDP on defense. The other four countries are the United Kingdom, Greece, Estonia, and Poland. Trump had special criticism for Germany, which has the largest economy in Europe and fourth-largest in the world, but only spends a little over one percent of its GDP on defense.

Amazingly, the nation with the next-largest number of military personnel is Turkey, with 1.3 million, followed by Poland, at 635,000 and Greece, at 460,000. By comparison, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom all have less than 400,000 in their armed forces.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg scoffed at Trump’s insistence that NATO members spend four percent of GDP on defense. “We should first get to two percent.”

At the end of the meeting, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, “We had a very intense summit,” but reassured reporters, “There was a clear commitment to NATO by all.”

Apparently, even Trump renewed his commitment to NATO. Trump said that he could have pulled out of the alliance on his own, without congressional approval, had he wished. But now, with alliance members promising to up their defense spending, he now thinks that is “unnecessary.”

But putting aside questions of whether Trump could, as president, end the U.S. membership in NATO on his own, or whether the other member nations should quit “freeriding” on the United States and



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spend more on their own defense, is American membership in NATO a good idea at all, much less “necessary”?

NATO was formed in a much different era, in the aftermath of World War II, as the Stalin-led Soviet Union brought many countries in eastern Europe behind the tyranny of the Iron Curtain — nations such as Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. The Russian war machine appeared to many in the West as poised to sweep across western Europe as well, all the way to the English Channel.

Certainly, that was the stated reason given for creating the extraordinary NATO alliance, as an attack upon one of its members was considered an attack upon all of its members: Article 5 of the NATO agreement stated, “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.” This, essentially, told Stalin that he would face the military might of the United States should he attempt to expand the Soviet empire westward.

This raises some very serious questions. First of all, Article 5 is a clear violation of the Constitution of the United States, as it circumvents the requirement that all military actions by the United States be authorized first by the U.S. Congress. Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war. Congress does not have the option of delegating this power to the president, NATO, or the UN.

Secondly, Article 5 commits the United States to go to war even if the conflict has no impact upon the vital national interests of the United States. A border conflict between, say, Russia and Estonia could lead to a war between the United States and Russia — both nuclear powers.

Thirdly, Article 5 ties the hands of the United States once we are involved in a military conflict. “Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof,” the Article concludes, “shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.” In other words, the United States is part of an alliance known as NATO that is subject to the jurisdiction of the Security Council of the United Nations!

It is vitally important to understand, however, that NATO also had a deeper purpose, which was to end forever America’s traditional non-interventionist foreign policy and tie us to Europe. And as long as the Soviets were a military threat, Europeans could count on the United States as being heavily involved in the affairs of Europe. The alliance’s purposes have even been summarized as “keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” (The Germans are hardly down, as they have achieved economic and political dominance of the European Union.)

Bluntly put, NATO reduces the national sovereignty of the United States, and its rights to use that national sovereignty to protect its own interests. “America First” becomes “America stand-in-line behind Europe and the UN.”

Trump ran on a platform of “America First,” and continued membership in NATO is not putting America First. As former UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick put it in a 1990 article, “The United States performed heroically in a time when heroism is required,” but “the time when America should bear such



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unusual burdens is past.”

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