

NATO and Donald Trump's Dangerous Proposition



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“Congratulations, you will be defending yourself.”¹ That’s what Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, is saying to U.S. NATO allies. In an interview with the New York Times on July 21st, he vowed the U.S. would not come to the defense of our NATO allies unless they’ve paid their dues under a Trump administration. Here’s what’s wrong with this:

NATO — the North Atlantic Treaty Organization — developed soon after World War II as a mutual assistance agreement to counter the Soviet Union’s attempts to expand into Europe. The alliance now has 28 members, from Europe to North America. Article V of the pact states that if a NATO member is attacked, it is an attack on all members, and the alliance will come together to take appropriate action in defense of their ally, exercising their right of collective self-defense.² The U.S. has made a commitment to come to the defense of these allies if the worst should happen. But what good is our word if we no longer keep our promises?

NATO not only secures U.S. allies; it secures the U.S. When we were attacked on 9/11, NATO invoked Article V for the first

time in the alliance's history, stating the attack on the U.S. was an attack on all. The U.S. led an international military campaign in Afghanistan to wipe out al Qaeda and bring down their protectors, the Taliban. From 2003 to 2014, NATO commanded the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan to prevent the country from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists.³ Without NATO allies coming to aid America, the mission would have been squarely on U.S. shoulders alone. Under a Trump administration, do we really want our NATO allies to abandon us?

Collective self-defense is an essential part of the NATO alliance. Given recent Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, the pact's importance is even clearer. Smaller NATO countries that border Russia depend on this alliance to protect them if Russia challenges their sovereignty. The very existence of NATO and the real threat that the alliance will come to members' aid under Article V prevents Russia and other aggressors from threatening NATO members.

We also have a key NATO ally in the Middle East: Turkey. Russia continues to prop up Assad in Syria to maintain their strongman in the region. But if we abandon Turkey, a NATO ally since the 1950s and on Syria's border, its security could be threatened by its neighbors and potentially Russia. What is American leadership if we can't come to the aid of our allies?

Retreating from NATO and our commitments is exactly what Putin and our adversaries want. Isolating our allies would present an opportunity for Russia to easily expand their influence in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Donald Trump has made a dangerous proposition to disregard commitments we've made to allies since 1949. And it's a cowardly suggestion to forget the security of those who helped defend us when we needed it the most.

TOPICS

END NOTES

- 1.** “Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey’s Coup Attempt and the World,” *The New York Times* July 21, 2016. Accessed July 21, 2016. Available at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html>.
- 2.** Partial text of Article V: “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-defence 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.”
Available at:
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm.
- 3.** “NATO and Afghanistan,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 14, 2016. Accessed July 21, 2016. Available at:
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm.