

Head of NATO Calls for Preserving Unity that Does Not Exist: Prospects for the July Summit

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Global Research, June 24, 2018

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 22 June 2018

Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

In an interview with the Guardian published on June 19, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made a [desperate appeal](#) for the bloc's unity before the upcoming summit in July. The transatlantic bond and political cohesion must be preserved at any cost and it is essential that any potential diplomatic bust-up be avoided. There's a good reason he made such a statement at this particular moment — the US and its European allies are divided over trade, climate change, the [Iran nuclear agreement](#), military spending, security priorities (including differing attitudes toward Russia), relations with Turkey (a NATO member), and a lot of other things. Frederick Kempe, the president and chief executive officer of the Atlantic Council, a prestigious think tank that drafts recommendations for the US government, [warned about](#) a "potential transatlantic train wreck of American making."

Last year, US President Trump brought the issue of burden-sharing into the open, by berating his European allies for failing to spend enough on defense. The [rift](#) was apparent. This time, this controversial issue is expected to dominate the agenda. Some of the more contentious topics (the [elephants in the room](#)) are being kept off the program but they will certainly cloud the atmosphere of the meeting. The US ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, [has warned](#) that the spending issue will remain a sore point for President Trump. German Chancellor Angela Merkel [has already said](#) her country will miss the target deadline, thus making the possibility of an open US-German clash at the summit very real.

If the planned [Trump-Putin summit](#) takes place prior to or immediately after the NATO meeting, it will be another blow to the West's unity after the scandalous G7 event. National security adviser John Bolton [will travel](#) to Moscow next week, after stops in London and Rome, to prepare for the much-anticipated event. Just imagine the setback this will be to British PM Theresa May's efforts to isolate Russia internationally over the Salisbury nerve-agent attack! Actually, the very announcement on June 21 of Mr. Bolton's visit to Moscow has been a serious blow to the UK government, as it was delivered right before Mr. Trump's working visit to that country on July 13. And there's more. President Trump publicly [taunted](#) German Chancellor Angela Merkel on June 19 over migration, a vital security problem for Europe, but which has no direct impact on the United States. Today the West's unity looks more like a thing of the past. Not since the [1956 Suez Crisis](#) have divisions within the North Atlantic Alliance been so deep.

The idea is to set these differences aside at the summit and to show unity by approving the main proposals on the [agenda](#), such as a new plan to improve rapid-response capability by deploying 30 troop battalions, 30 squadrons of aircraft, and 30 warships within 30 days. The naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea and the joint training in Iraq are also issues that

will be subject to discussion. All these steps are to be taken while decision-making is being streamlined, deployment flexibility is being enhanced, and the rules of engagement are being made more robust.

But whatever is decided and signed will not eliminate the root of the problem. Looking at the world while wearing his “America First” glasses, Donald Trump sees Europe as a competitor that needs to be weakened in order to make the US stronger. And exacerbating differences and divisions inside the blocs, be they the EU or NATO, is the way to do it.

With [Brussels in revolt](#) against Washington, Poland and the Baltic States may become the core of another 100% pro-American alliance to protect US interests in Europe. The EU-Poland [rift is growing](#), which increases the possibility of a [Polexit](#) while the majority of European states [are trying to fend off](#) US domination. The UK finds itself increasingly neglected in Europe and more deeply interested in closer interaction with the US. Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova appear to be fascinated by anything the US does and are [ready to do whatever it says](#). A special relationship between the US, Sweden, and Finland is obviously [being shaped](#). France has become an American ally, joining Washington in the conflicts in the Middle East while vigorously opposing the US policy of trade wars.

The European political landscape is shifting. America is not the only problem Brussels faces. The EU rift over migration has exacerbated to the point that an emergency summit is being planned for June 24, just five days before the “big” summit on June 28-29, which will also include a discussion of that problem. The German coalition government has barely survived the crisis over migrants and appears to be on its last legs. [Building refugee camps](#) in North Africa and strengthening the Frontex border agency is a matter of survival for Europe and a problem the US does not care about. The West [is deeply divided](#). Everyone is operating with their own agenda.

The only way to preserve at least the pretense of unity is to find a common enemy, a peril that is jeopardizing the security of all. Those who are striving to save NATO and the EU from collapse are clutching at that straw, which is Russia, an imaginary bogeyman that poses a nonexistent threat. Indeed, escalation is the best way to preserve this eroded unity. But Moscow is an important player that others can turn to and side with on the world chessboard. For instance, there is a wide disparity between the attitude toward Russia held in the UK vs. in Italy. Turkey is a good example of a NATO member that is able to protect its national interests thanks to Russia’s support.

This isn’t just about Donald Trump and his political views. The essence of the problem is the emergence of the fault lines that run too deep to make the idea of a united West anything but a pipe dream. NATO and the EU have forgotten about their standards. They have been expanding too fast, trying to bring together nations at different levels of development and, correspondingly, with different interests to pursue. Those organizations have grown too large to be able to boast of their unity on all major issues. Having achieved a certain level of expansion, they have begun a transformation into amalgams of groups united by regional or other interests that are challenging the central leaderships.

Growing too fast and too large is not always a good thing. Expansion does not always make alliances stronger. The empire of Alexander the Great did not last long after his death. The last thing the West needs under the current circumstances is a confrontation with Russia. It has enough grievances to grapple with.

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