

Trump Was Right: NATO Should be Obsolete

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The three smartest words that Donald Trump [uttered](#) during his presidential campaign are “NATO is obsolete.” His adversary, Hillary Clinton, [retorted](#) that NATO was “the strongest military alliance in the history of the world.” Now that Trump has been in power, the White House [parrots](#) the same worn line that NATO is “the most successful Alliance in history, guaranteeing the security, prosperity, and freedom of its members.” But Trump was right the first time around: Rather than being a strong alliance with a clear purpose, this 70-year-old organization that is meeting in London on December 4 is a stale military holdover from the Cold War days that should have gracefully retired many years ago.

NATO was originally founded by the United States and 11 other Western nations as an attempt to curb the rise of communism in 1949. Six years later, Communist nations founded the Warsaw Pact and through these two multilateral institutions, the entire globe became a Cold War battleground. When the USSR collapsed in 1991, the Warsaw Pact disbanded but NATO expanded, growing from its original 12 members to 29 member countries. North Macedonia, set to join next year, will bring the number to 30. NATO has also expanded well beyond the North Atlantic, [adding](#) a partnership with Colombia in 2017. Donald Trump recently [suggested](#) that Brazil could one day become a full member.

NATO’s post-Cold War expansion toward Russia’s borders, despite earlier promises not to move eastward, has led to rising tensions between Western powers and Russia, including multiple close calls between military forces. It has also contributed to a new arms race, including upgrades in nuclear arsenals, and the [largest](#) NATO “war games” since the Cold War.

While claiming to “preserve peace,” NATO has a history of bombing civilians and committing war crimes. In 1999, NATO engaged in military operations without UN approval in Yugoslavia. Its illegal airstrikes during the Kosovo War left hundreds of civilians dead. And far from the “North Atlantic,” NATO joined the United States in invading Afghanistan in 2001, where it is still bogged down two decades later. In 2011, NATO forces illegally invaded Libya, creating a failed state that caused masses of people to flee. Rather than take responsibility for these refugees, NATO countries have turned back desperate migrants on the Mediterranean Sea, letting thousands die.

In London, NATO wants to show it is ready to fight new wars. It will showcase its readiness initiative – the ability to deploy 30 battalions by land, 30 air squadrons and 30 naval vessels in just 30 days, and to confront future threats from China and Russia, including with hypersonic missiles and cyberwarfare. But far from being a lean, mean war machine, NATO is actually riddled with divisions and contradictions. Here are some of them:

- French President Emmanuel Macron questions the U.S. commitment to fight for

Europe, has called NATO “brain dead” and has proposed a European Army under the nuclear umbrella of France.

- Turkey has enraged NATO members with its incursion into Syria to attack the Kurds, who have been Western allies in the fight against ISIS. And Turkey has threatened to veto a Baltic defense plan until allies support its controversial incursion into Syria. Turkey has also infuriated NATO members, especially Trump, by purchasing Russia’s S-400 missile system.
- Trump wants NATO to push back against China’s growing influence, including the use of Chinese companies for the construction of 5G mobile networks—something many NATO countries are unwilling to do.
- Is Russia really NATO’s adversary? France’s Macron has reached out to Russia, inviting Putin to discuss ways in which the European Union can put the Crimean invasion behind it. Donald Trump has publicly attacked Germany over its [Nord Stream 2 project](#) to pipe in Russian gas, but a recent German poll saw 66 percent wanting closer ties with Russia.
- The UK has bigger problems. Britain has been convulsed over the Brexit conflict and is holding contentious national election on December 12. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, knowing that Trump is wildly unpopular, is reluctant to be seen as close to him. Also, Johnson’s major contender, Jeremy Corbyn, is a reluctant supporter of NATO. While his Labour Party is committed to NATO, over his career as an anti-war champion, Corbyn has [called](#) NATO “a danger to world peace and a danger to world security.” The last time Britain hosted NATO leaders in 2014, Corbyn [told](#) an anti-NATO rally that the end of the Cold War “should have been the time for NATO to shut up shop, give up, go home and go away.”
- A further complication is Scotland, which is home to a very unpopular Trident nuclear submarine base as part of NATO’s nuclear deterrent. A new Labour government would need the support of the Scottish National Party. But its leader, Nicola Sturgeon, insists that a precondition for her party’s support is a commitment to close the base.
- Europeans can’t stand Trump (a recent poll found he is [trusted](#) by only 4 percent of Europeans!) and their leaders can’t rely on him. Allied leaders learn of presidential decisions that affect their interests via Twitter. The lack of coordination was clear in October, when Trump ignored NATO allies when he ordered U.S. special forces out of northern Syria, where they had been operating alongside French and British commandos against Islamic State militants.
- The US unreliability has led the European Commission to draw up plans for a European “defense union” that will coordinate military spending and procurement. The next step may be to coordinate military actions separate from NATO. The Pentagon has complained about EU countries purchasing military

equipment from each other instead of from the United States, and [has called](#) this defense union “a dramatic reversal of the last three decades of increased integration of the transatlantic defence sector.”

- Do Americans really want to go to war for Estonia? Article 5 of the Treaty states that an attack against one member “shall be considered an attack against them all,” meaning that the treaty obligates the US to go to war on behalf of 28 nations—something most likely opposed by war-weary Americans who [want](#) a less aggressive foreign policy that focuses on peace, diplomacy, and economic engagement instead of military force.

An additional major bone of contention is who will pay for NATO. The last time NATO leaders met, President Trump derailed the agenda by berating NATO countries for not paying their fair share and at the London meeting, Trump is expected to announce symbolic US cuts to NATO’s operations budget.

Trump’s main concern is that member states step up to the NATO target of spending 2 percent of their gross domestic products on defense by 2024, a goal that is unpopular among Europeans, who [prefer](#) that their taxdollars to go for nonmilitary items. Nevertheless, [NATO](#) Secretary-General [Jens Stoltenberg](#) will brag that Europe and Canada have added \$100 billion to their military budgets since 2016—something Donald Trump will take credit for—and that more NATO officials are meeting the 2 percent goal, even though a 2019 NATO report shows only seven members have done so: the U.S., Greece, Estonia, the UK, Romania, Poland and Latvia.

In an age where people around the world want to avoid war and to focus instead on the climate chaos that threatens future life on earth, NATO is an anachronism. It now accounts for about three-quarters of military spending and weapons dealing around the globe. Instead of preventing war, it promotes militarism, exacerbates global tensions and makes war more likely. This Cold War relic shouldn’t be reconfigured to maintain U.S. domination in Europe, or to mobilize against Russia or China, or to launch new wars in space. It should not be expanded, but disbanded. Seventy years of militarism is more than enough.

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