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Issue Brief

NATO and the US

June 15, 2017

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Post the events of September 11, 2001 and the US invasion of Afghanistan, NATO has been an integral part of the US national security strategy. It has been an active part of US policy to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan, in Iraq and in its fight against the ISIS. However, post the Trump presidency, there exists an atmosphere of



confusion regarding the US changed approach towards NATO. President Trump has openly criticized the NATO calling it “obsolete” and that it wasn’t taking care of terror¹ as it should. He has been critical of NATO and its policies bluntly and has repeatedly asked his NATO partners to "pay their fair share" out of their respective 2 per cent of the GDP, otherwise the US will not come to their defense if need be, or limit its role in NATO altogether as a consequence. At the moment, President Trump have been successful in creating anxiety among many European countries.

The larger debate arises when the contrasting views of Donald Trump and his appointed defense secretary are held together. While Donald Trump strongly criticizes NATO, calling it old-fashioned, General James Mattis reaffirms European allies of their full support². This asymmetry if looked at closely is not different at all; President Trump is evaluating NATO from a completely different point of view which is more business in nature. Whereas his administration officials look at it from more of a strategic and tactical point of view. In either case, the US is to get the most out of NATO as it will maintain an upper hand either by directly bullying NATO members to pay the required monetary support, pushing them to do as the US says, or reevaluating and changing the existing NATO policies as per US wants and desires.

Secondly, Donald Trump views’ regarding NATO comes at a time when he propagates lifting sanctions on Russia imposed after the annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine by Russia, followed by a deal with Russia to reduce nuclear weapons stockpile.³ This move further upsets the US relations with

¹ Tara John, "Donald Trump's Interview on Russia, NATO and Brexit Gives Some in Europe the Jitters," January 16, 2017, The Time, <http://time.com/4635720/donald-trump-interview-nato-russia-sanctions-brexit/>

² "Trump defence chief Mattis hails Nato as 'bedrock' of co-operation," BBC News, 15 February 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38979190>

³ Michael R. Gordon and Niraj Chokshijan, "Trump Criticizes NATO and Hopes for 'Good Deals' With Russia," The New York Times, January 15, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/15/world/europe/donald-trump-nato.html?_r=0

one of its strongest allies; Germany, who was up front in negotiating the sanctions on Russia. Simultaneously, this move will make it obligatory for the US itself to reduce its nuclear weapon stockpile at a similar rate; an idea which is not welcomed in the US. The timeline of these events is more than a coincidence, it has nothing but added to the existing confusion for many of the US European allies, especially ones which are closer to Russia, fearing the same fate as Ukraine.

A wiser more appropriate option for the NATO member countries would be in coming together as one unit and work to strengthen the essence of NATO even if US withdraws itself in a limited manner, if not completely. At the very most, they need to engineer a framework that anchors the US in NATO as much as possible, leaving little for Russia to capitalize on this opportunity in time to come. At the moment, President Trump should realize that it is the US that needs NATO for its fight against terrorism whether in the form of the Taliban or the ISIS.

On a broader level, Europe and the world at large should get accustomed to the indifference of Donald Trump on many issues unless and until it directly affects the US either in security or business terms. Equally important to keep in mind is President Trump's short sighted approach to a lot of organizations that the US is a part of and its resourcefulness. NATO's policies and its efficacy is embedded in the US security policies and changing those will be to rewrite or to completely reassess US security policies. The mindset prevalent in the White House today may take a U-turn in future if a serious security threat arises to the US or its other closer allies like the UK.