

# The Japan Times

## Why is the U.S. adding Montenegro to NATO?

Doug Bandow

December 4, 2015

WASHINGTON – Why does NATO exist? Certainly not to defend American or European security. After all, the North Atlantic alliance’s latest policy move is to invite Montenegro to join.

Montenegro is a country of about 650,000 people with a GDP a bit over \$4.6 billion. Its military employs 2,080 — 1,500 in the army, 350 in the navy and 230 in the air force.

Wow!

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg opined that “Montenegro has come a long way on its path to join the Euro-Atlantic family.” Extending the invitation was “a historic decision. It would signal our continued commitment to the Western Balkans,” he added.

Montenegro is a nice country. But what does it have to do with Europe’s security?

What was once an alliance expected to defend wrecked and impoverished Western European nations from mass murderer Joseph Stalin and his Red Army has turned into the geopolitical equivalent of a Gentleman’s Club. Everyone wants to be a member simply because it’s the thing to do. So Podgorica is being invited to enter the “North Atlantic” Treaty Organization.

It’s hard to blame Montenegro’s government and people for wanting to join. The Montenegrin ambassador will sit in military councils in Brussels as the equal of representatives of Germany, France, Britain and America. Washington and Brussels will lavish aid upon Podgorica to upgrade its armed services.

But what is in the deal for America? The U.S. collects allies like most people accumulate Facebook friends. America nominally is a superpower, but Washington officials crave attention and affection from other states. So presidents and legislators continually write guarantees on the money and lives of the American people for foreign countries, even when, like Montenegro, they are utterly irrelevant to U.S. security.

At least Montenegro doesn’t matter. Expansion to the Baltic States turns out to have been a huge mistake, bringing in helpless nations which the rest of Europe has no interest in defending, countries of no geopolitical importance to America but involved in bitter disputes with Russia.

If anything bad happens, America will be expected to confront, with minimal support from its European “allies,” nuclear-armed Russia over a controversy of far greater interest in Moscow than Washington. U.S. security has suffered dramatically from adding Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Bringing in Georgia and Ukraine would be far worse. The former irresponsibly started a shooting war with Russia. The latter has been involved in a shooting war with Russian proxies if not Russia.

Both countries are unlucky and exist in bad neighborhoods viewed as critical security concerns by Moscow. Neither matters much for American security. Moscow’s role may not be fair or just, but not everything is worth going to war over.

Particularly strange are proposals to treat Georgia and Ukraine like formal allies even if they aren’t. For instance, speaking of Crimea, former NATO supreme commander James Stavridis argued: “We need to push back against that kind of Russian advancement, that Russian aggression, to show them that that’s simply not appropriate behavior in the 21st century.”

Commentators have advocated flying air patrols and introducing troops in Ukraine. During the short-lived Russo-Georgia war the Bush administration reportedly considered bombing the tunnels through which Russia was moving its forces.

After getting through the entire Cold War without a shooting war with Moscow, why would Washington and Brussels take action which essentially would force Russia to strike back militarily? NATO originally was created to act as a firebreak to war. Current policy threatens to turn it into a transmission belt of war.

American disengagement would not leave Europe defenseless. Withdrawing would simply change who does the defending.

Robert Scates, retired commandant of the Army War College, complained that “at 30,000, there are fewer American soldiers protecting Western Europe” than cops in New York City. Actually, he should ask, why are there even 30,000 U.S. soldiers protecting Western Europe?

After all, 70 years have passed since World War II. The European Union has a larger GDP and population than America, and dramatically larger than Russia. Isn’t it time for Washington’s rich friends and allies to defend themselves? Or will Americans have to wait another 70 years before their government stops subsidizing Europe’s generous welfare states?

Montenegro. A nice place to visit. It doesn’t threaten anyone. It isn’t threatened by anyone. And it doesn’t matter to America or Europe.

Why is it being brought into NATO?

It’s time for a serious debate in Washington about turning alliances into welfare for the well-to-do overseas. The Europeans. The South Koreans. The Japanese. The Saudis. All expect Americans to risk their lives and spend their money so others may live in comfort.

It truly is time for a change.

*Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. He writes frequently on military non-interventionism.*