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President Trump Should End NATO Expansion Charade

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The postage stamp country of Montenegro expected to be rushed into NATO during Washington's lame duck period before the unpredictable Donald Trump became president.

But Senators Rand Paul and Mike Lee, more concerned about America than wannabe foreign dependents, blocked ratification of the ratification resolution. The president should kill the measure.

What are alliances supposed to be about? Michael Haltzel of Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies called for the Senate to waive the microstate through as "to do otherwise would show the world that during (Trump's) presidency the Kremlin will exercise unprecedented influence on U.S. foreign policy."

In his view apparently only a traitor would ask whether issuing yet another security guarantee is in *America's* national interest.

But the question recurs, what are alliances for? Most obviously, to increase U.S. security. Adding Podgorica won't do that, however.

Montenegro has 1,950 men under arms. That's not likely to stop the Russian hordes on their way to Berlin or Paris.

Haltzel pointed out that Podgorica sent 45 personnel to Afghanistan. A nice gesture, but such tiny deployments probably cost the alliance as much to manage as they are worth.

Still, argued Haltzel, Montenegro "is on a pace to fulfill the two percent of GDP spending for defense ahead of the 2020 target." Which would have added about \$15 million to Podgorica's military spending last year — a rounding error in the Trump administration's proposed \$54 billion boost.

Finally, any benefit would come at a high price. Washington would likely spend more money on aid to help Podgorica conform to alliance standards. Moreover, the U.S. would be expected to go to war if necessary on Montenegro's behalf.

How about viewing expansion as an act of charity to protect Montenegro from enemies unnamed? No one has obvious designs on the microstate — which has fewer people than the typical American congressional district. Why should such a country gain a say in the affairs of what is supposed to be a serious military organization, one in which Washington is expected to do the heavy lifting whatever the conflict?

Podgorica claims to have met NATO's standards, but Washington has no obligation to defend any other state. The decision should be based on what best serves the interests of the American people, whose defense is entrusted to the U.S. government.

The Hoover Institution's Kori Schake claimed that the invitation demonstrated that the "West can actually take a stand in defense of its values and security." However, Podgorica merits only a "partly free" rating from the group Freedom House. Better would be to encourage the country to focus on fulfilling European Union membership criteria, which would satisfy Schake's desire to draw states to the West.

Moreover, Montenegrins are sharply divided: a December poll found 39.7% against and 39.5% for membership. That's hardly a strong commitment to what remains a military alliance with theoretically serious security responsibilities.

One of the Senate's most militaristic members, Lindsey Graham, touted membership as "a clear signal to our friends in Montenegro and to the Russians about how we feel." But military alliances are about going to war, not sharing feelings. And with Moscow not threatening to invade Montenegro it is not clear what the signal might mean.

Podgorica claimed that Russia recently promoted a coup, though the truth is unclear and political divisions within the country are real. Anyway, NATO membership offers no guarantee of democratic governance, just ask the tens of thousands of Turks oppressed by Turkey's increasingly authoritarian Recep Tayyip Erdogan

The only argument for Montenegro's inclusion that has any logic is to signal that the alliance is continuing to accept new members, no matter how irrelevant and insignificant the country. But NATO was created during the Cold War to prevent the Soviet Union from dominating Eurasia. America's participation in the alliance was not conceived as a means to guarantee the independence of distant lands of virtually no significance to America.

Bringing in Georgia and Ukraine would be even more dangerous, since both have been involved in shooting conflicts with Russia. Moreover, as border states once part of both the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, their status matters far more to Moscow than to either Washington or Brussels. Neutralization rather than participation in NATO would be far more likely to promote regional peace and stability.

NATO already is too big and has added countries that never belonged in the alliance. The president should focus on America's interests and withdraw the Obama administration's Resolution of Ratification for Montenegro.

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