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## Draining the Swamp - Part I | The NATO Swamp

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Trump is right on NATO. The twentieth century transatlantic military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is obsolete. It became obsolete not only because of its outdated mission, but because of corruption, its members' failure in defense spending (not meeting the 2% GDP requirement), and the lack of a rule of law within many NATO members, which allows transnational organized crime networks to flourish.

Corrupt Eastern European politicians are using NATO accession and membership to buy legitimacy. For example, the newest prospective member, Montenegro, is a center for transnational organized crime but has used ill-gotten gains to throw parties for visiting Americans. As World reported, John McCain had a 70th birthday party there; Madonna and Bill Clinton received gargantuan payments for flattering elite Montenegrins with a concert and a speech, respectively; and guests from The Heritage Foundation, the Atlas Network, the Cato Institute, and the Mont Pelerin Society have also been feted in Montenegro.

The paradox is striking - while lobbying and whitewashing by lobbyists and think tanks, for compromised NATO members, is being defended as freedom of speech in the US, journalists in NATO Balkan member countries can get thrown in jail, beaten up and sometimes killed for exposing colossal corruption and serious national security concerns. There is no way to reconcile the differences in application of freedom of speech and the rule of law within the same NATO alliance.

The Washington, D.C. swamp was instrumental in perverting NATO into a dangerous alliance, which is eroding the national security of each respective NATO member. The last two waves of the NATO accession brought new lawless members, which failed to meet the rule of law, as one the fundamental accession requirements. Most of these countries function as outright mafia states. The Carnegie Endowment's Moises Naim calls Montenegro a mafia state, describing "In a mafia state, high government officials actually become integral players in, if not the leaders of, criminal enterprises, and the defense and promotion of those enterprises' businesses become official priorities," and they, "... exploit the money, muscle, political influence, and global connections of criminal syndicates to cement and expand their own power."

In particular, NATO members Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Croatia lie on the Balkan Route, with unsecured borders, easily crossed by terrorists. Corruption is rampant. Organized crime co-exists in a symbiotic relationship with political corruption. Reports have shown that radical Islamists are using the Balkan Route for recruiting, getting their weapons supply and funding. More than one million migrants came through the Balkan Route into Europe within the last 18 months, including terrorists.

The Balkan Route's heroin, arms, human and organ trafficking merges with cocaine trafficking coming from Latin America. Reports indicate that Balkan heroin trafficking brings in more than \$28 billion in proceeds annually, financing Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and ISIS. The Balkan Route originates in Afghanistan, where 75% of the world opium is produced, and trafficked via Iran, Turkey, and the Balkan NATO countries into Western Europe and beyond.

Not to mention that NATO members do not spend 2% of their GDP on defense as required by NATO. Yet, corrupt establishments are siphoning off taxpayers' funds through illicit financial outflows via crime, corruption and tax evasion, robbing treasuries and hemorrhaging economies.

According to the report released by Washington, D.C. based Global Financial Integrity (GFI), the NATO Balkan countries' illicit financial outflows via crime, corruption and tax evasion amounted to staggering \$95.5 billion in the period from 2004 to 2013.

The above table shows that none of the Balkan NATO members meets NATO's 2% defense spending criteria, while significant amounts of illicit financial outflows end up on private accounts of corrupt politicians and their private partners in crime. Albania and Bulgaria, both spend 1.2% of their GDP on defense, while the illicit financial outflows reach 2.6% and 33% of GDP respectively. Croatia and Romania, both spend 1.4% of their respective GDPs on defense, though, 25.4% and 36.7% of GDP are flowing out through illicit financial outflows respectively.

The total amount of the illicit financial outflows via crime, corruption and tax evasion from the developing Europe NATO members amount to shocking \$397 billion in the period 2004-2013, with only Poland spending above 2% of its GDP for defense.

Despite its tiny size (600,000 inhabitants), adding Montenegro to NATO would bring more trouble. Italy's anti-mafia prosecutor, accused Montenegro's then-Prime Minister Djukanovic of "having promoted, run, set up, and participated in a mafia-type association." International Narcotics Control Report from 2007, mentions, "Heroin from the Middle East transits Albania and Kosovo, crossing Montenegro before being transported further into Western Europe." After being in power for most of the last 25 years, rotating as a Prime Minister and President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic just stepped down in October last year. He still controls vast businesses and a private university, with his family members owning the First Bank, reported for cronyism and money laundering for organized crime.

Any discussion of NATO's future has to address the reasons for NATO's obsolescence today - an outdated mission, corrupt NATO members, the Washington D.C. swamp, unenforceable defense spending and the absence of the rule of law. There is a need for a military alliance, comprised of countries belonging to the free world and committed to upholding the rule of law.

Countries which are committed to securing their borders, prosecuting corruption and upholding the rule of law, protecting life, liberty and private property, can work effectively to eradicate radical Islam terrorism and terrorists attacks.