



# RUSSIA INSIDER

## Another Facebook Friend: What Does US Gain From Montenegro in NATO?

- *What is the threat that requires the US to enlist the help of Montenegro - a heavily divided country of 650,000 people with an armed force of 2,000?*
- *The answer that eludes Bandow - growing NATO isn't Washington's security welfare for non-Americans. It's a way to extend its military-industrial complex Empire*

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

Montenegro split off from Serbia a few years ago, after the other Yugoslav republics left Serbia. Montenegro is a country of about 650,000 people with a GDP a bit over \$4.6 billion. Its military employs 2,080—1500 in the army, 350 in the navy, and 230 in the air force.

Wow!

The official invitation, long in the making, came today, after NATO's 28 foreign ministers met in Brussels. 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," signalling "our continued commitment to the Western Balkans," he added. Completing the membership process is expected to take up to a year and a half.

Montenegro is a nice country. But what does it have to do with American 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. No one is threatening Montenegro. And no one in Europe would notice if someone was threatening Montenegro. But the small Balkan land wants to join NATO and its people are presentable. So Podgorica is being invited to enter the "North Atlantic" Treaty Organization.

It's hard to blame Montenegro's government and people—though many are opposed—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 will lavish aid upon Podgorica to upgrade its armed services. Membership lets Montenegro one-up Serbia, which remains outside NATO's charmed circle. And the country will be protected from the next Hitler, presumed to be lurking just over the horizon plotting global domination.

But what is in the deal for America? The U.S. collects allies like most people accumulate Facebook FB -0.94% 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. Imagine what would happen if Podgorica was left alone, adrift in international waters. Well nothing, actually. Montenegro, and more importantly, America, would be just fine.

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"—who likely will run for cover in Brussels—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.

America's commitment to Turkey, a frenemy moving in an authoritarian and Islamist direction, may prove equally dangerous. By downing a Russian plane for entering Turkish airspace for a few seconds—Ankara routinely violates Greek airspace—the Erdogan government risks dragging NATO into a conflict with Moscow. Suspicions abound that Turkey acted to protect the illicit oil trade with the Islamic State or punish Russia for backing Syria's Assad government.

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. Never in its history was the U.S. bothered because either land was dominated by its north—the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now the Russian Republic. Moscow's role may not be fair or just, but not everything is worth going to war over.

Ukrainian government soldiers from battalion “Donbass” search from house to house in village Mariinka near Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, Monday, Aug. 11, 2014. (AP Photo/Evgeniy Maloletka)

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 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 Scales, 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? Why aren't there European soldiers in North America defending the U.S.?

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 spending their money to subsidize Europe's generous welfare states? And risking their lives because Europe can't be bothered to put enough of its own men and women into uniform?

Montenegro. A nice place to visit. It doesn't threaten anyone. It isn't threatened by anyone. And it doesn't matter to the U.S. At all.

Why is it being brought into NATO?

Stoltenberg announced: “This is the beginning of a very beautiful alliance.” Maybe for Montenegro, but not for Americans who will do the paying. 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.

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