



## **NATO had our back; we mustn't turn ours**

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The United States is at our strongest and safest when we stand alongside our allies. With last week's North American Treaty Alliance summit in Brussels and this week's summit between President Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, we as Americans should pause to appreciate NATO's role as a fundamental cornerstone of post-World War II peace and prosperity. Not only has NATO protected European and North American interests from threats like communism and the Soviet Union, but NATO has also continued to protect Western values of democracy, transparency, and freedoms of religion and speech.

Today, NATO exists to protect America against anti-capitalist and fascist enemies, including Russia and Iran, who seek to undermine our religious, economic and government values. Republicans, Independents and Democrats are alarmed with President Trump's bizarre overtures toward the Russian dictator this week. A representative of the CATO Institute, a Republican think tank, acknowledged the awkwardness of President Trump's meeting. Senators from Ben Sasse (R-NE) to Jim Risch (R-ID) and Congressmen from Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) to Will Hurd (R-TX) denounced the summit, using words such as "shameful" and "disgraceful" and saying that Trump makes the United States "look like a pushover" and Russia is "no friend of the United States." Congressman Mike Simpson (R-ID) is already on record saying he believes Russia interfered with American democracy.

In such times, allies are crucial; however, President Trump spent his last week criticizing our longtime NATO allies by demanding they spend more on defense spending. The United States, Greece, the United Kingdom, Estonia and Poland are currently the only countries to be meeting the goal of spending 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense; however, the other 24 NATO allies have until 2024 to meet this goal. While our NATO allies do need to increase defense spending, presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama urged our allies to do so not by means of antagonistic threats like President Trump, but by using a tone of genuine friendship, civility and respect of democratic relationships.

After all, it is important to remember that the only time in NATO's history that the alliance declared war (i.e. invoked Article V) occurred when the United States was in desperate need of military, moral and emotional support after 9/11. During that time, our NATO friends stood with us as we faced a significant threat to our freedoms and values. Therefore, while it is fair of

President Trump to encourage our allies to increase their contributions to NATO, it is wrong of the president to use tactics more commonly used by foes and forces that seek to undermine Western values of civility and democracy, as well as religious values of loving thy neighbor, unconditional love and renunciation of vengeance.

Plus, two out of three Americans have a favorable view of NATO given their understanding that the alliance continues to protect our religious and government values and serve our economic interests. Our values and freedoms depend on NATO as protection against rogue terrorists, anti-capitalist crusaders like Russia's Vladimir Putin and unstable totalitarian despots like embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

American partnership, civility and generosity are part of the recipe to ensure Western values are protected and secured. Continued membership in NATO is in the interest of the United States and the world over; after all, when we needed and asked for aid, our NATO allies had our back. It's time President Trump and the American people have their back now as Europe faces intimidation and threats from Russia and other forces seeking to undermine Western religion, democracy and capitalism.