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NATO Summit 2016: NATO Must Reaffirm Its “Open Door” Policy

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NATO has underpinned Europe and North America’s security for more than 67 years, so it is no surprise that many countries in the transatlantic region that are not already members want to join the Alliance. NATO’s “open door” policy is critical to mobilizing Europe and its allies around a collective transatlantic defense. The U.S. should use the 2016 Warsaw Summit in early July to ensure that NATO’s open door policy remains in place, and take measures to help aspirant countries reach eventual membership.

The Enlargement Process

According to Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, any European state that fulfills the requirements of the treaty and demonstrates the competence to contribute to the alliance’s security is eligible for membership.¹

NATO is a collection of 28 democracies (soon to be 29 when Montenegro completes the formal process to join). All decisions made by the Alliance require unanimity, including those regarding enlargement of the Alliance.

Since taking office, President Barack Obama has done little to support NATO enlargement. The past three NATO summits did not feature any new invi-

tations. In fact, until Montenegro was asked to join last December, President Obama was on track for being the first U.S. President since the end of the Cold War *not* to oversee NATO enlargement.

There are three official candidate countries to join NATO: the Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia. Some are making better progress than others.

Georgia

Georgia was promised eventual membership at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. Since then, not all members of the Alliance have been supportive. This is especially true of France and Germany, which have an uncomfortably close relationship with Russia.

After the Russian invasion in 2008 and the subsequent occupation of 20 percent of Georgia’s territory, Georgia has transformed its military and has been steadfast with its support for overseas security operations. Georgia has contributed thousands of troops to Iraq, and hundreds of peacekeepers to the Balkans and Africa. Perhaps Georgia’s greatest contribution is found in Afghanistan. Georgia currently maintains 860 troops in the country. This is the third-largest contribution after the U.S. and Germany. Moreover, Georgia contributes an infantry company to the NATO Response Force.

Even though Georgia has not been given a Membership Action Plan (MAP), it has a relationship with NATO that far exceeds the traditional MAP; such as the Annual National Program, the NATO–Georgia Commission, and the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package that was agreed at the last summit.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4583>

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The Republic of Macedonia

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia became an independent state under its new constitutional name: Republic of Macedonia. Greece quickly protested on the baseless grounds that the name Macedonia, which is the same as that of Greece's northern province, implied regional territorial claims by the new nation.

In 1993, Macedonia joined the United Nations under the provisional name "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." In 1995, Macedonia and Greece agreed to a U.N.-brokered interim accord in which Athens agreed not to block Macedonia's integration into international organizations, such as NATO, so long as it called itself "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" until both sides agreed on a mutually acceptable name.

Macedonia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1995 and received a MAP in 1999. Upon completing its MAP in 2008—meaning it had met all requirements to join the Alliance—Macedonia anticipated an invitation to join that year at the NATO summit in Bucharest. At the last minute, Greece unilaterally vetoed Macedonia's accession over the name issue. In December 2011, the International Court of Justice ruled that Greece's veto was in blatant violation of the 1995 interim accord. Even so, Greece continues to clock Macedonia's membership to the detriment of the Alliance.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In April 2008, Bosnia and Herzegovina stated its desire to join NATO, and the country was offered its MAP in 2010. Bosnia and Herzegovina has made some progress in defense reform and has even deployed troops to Afghanistan, but the country is still far off from joining the Alliance.

First and foremost, Bosnia and Herzegovina must register all immovable defense properties as state property for use by the country's defense ministry. Little progress on this has been made. In addition, the internal politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina make NATO membership controversial.

This is especially true in the ethnically Serb region, Republika Srpska, one of two sub-state enti-

ties inside Bosnia and Herzegovina that emerged from that country's civil war in the 1990s.

The Ukraine Question

Even though NATO stated in 2008 that someday Ukraine would be invited to join the Alliance, until recently, the Ukrainians made little effort to help make this invitation a reality.

Once an aspiring NATO ally under the leadership of President Viktor Yushchenko, Ukraine's previous pro-Russia government under President Viktor Yanukovich blocked membership progress. In 2010, the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill that barred Ukraine from committing to "a non-bloc policy which means non-participation in military-political alliances."²

In light of Russia's aggression, the Ukrainian people have demonstrated, whether on the streets of the Maidan or through the ballot box, that they see their future in the West, not under Russian domination. This is especially true under the leadership of Petro Poroshenko. Even so, the country has a long way to go before NATO membership becomes a serious possibility.

Keeping the Door Open

To show that NATO's open door policy still applies, the U.S. should do the following at the Warsaw Summit:

- **Keep the door open.** The U.S. should ensure that NATO's open door policy is explicitly clear in the 2016 summit's declaration.
- **Show support for Macedonia.** The U.S. should pressure Greece behind the scenes to allow Macedonia to join NATO under the terms of the 1995 interim accord.
- **Make clear that Russia does not have a veto right.** Russia should never be seen as having a veto over a potential country's membership in NATO. Just because a country was once occupied by the Soviet Union or under the domination of the Russian Empire does not mean it is blocked from joining the Alliance in perpetuity.

1. North Atlantic Treaty, April 4, 1949, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-857936BB-66246E10/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm (accessed June 3, 2016).

2. Valentina Pop, "Ukraine Drops Nato Membership Bid," *EuObserver*, June 4, 2010, <https://euobserver.com/news/30212> (accessed June 9, 2016).

- **Ensure that NATO meets with the three aspirant countries at the heads-of-government level.** NATO heads of government should meet with the leaders of the three aspirant countries. This meeting should not be relegated to the level of foreign minister, as it was at previous summits.
- **Establish realistic expectations for Ukraine.** The U.S. should seek to improve relations between NATO and Ukraine while recognizing that NATO membership is not currently a realistic option.
- **Support Bosnia and Herzegovina.** The U.S. should help NATO keep Bosnia and Herzegovina on track for eventual membership once MAP requirements are completed.
- **Ensure that the Alliance is clear on Georgia's future membership.** The summit declaration should make it clear that Georgia's successful completion of subsequent Annual National Programs, the close relationship through the NATO-Georgia Commission, and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package are the true markers of progress that will bring Georgia closer to membership.

Stability and Security

NATO has done more than any other organization, including the European Union, to promote democracy, stability, and security in the Euro-Atlantic region. This was accomplished by enticing countries to become a part of the club. NATO's door must remain open to deserving European countries.

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