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NATO SUMMIT AND TRUMP'S ART OF THE DEAL

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The last year's NATO summit, held in Warsaw on July 8-9, was all about the European allies expecting a strong reassurance from President Barack Obama of the US commitment to deter any Russia's military adventurism and to defend the eastern flank of the alliance. The promised deployment of a rotational US armored brigade in Eastern Europe which started in January 2017 and a significant increase in funding for the European Reassurance Initiative (3.4 billion USD in 2017) provided a strong confirmation of this commitment. This year's summit is a different story. While the European allies would like to hear again words of reassurance from the new US administration about maintaining in the future the same level of engagement to defend Europe and deter Russia; President Donald Trump is coming to attend the Brussels' summit with an agenda on his own. He strongly counts on the alliance to step up its engagement in the fight against terrorism and on the European allies to respect their commitment to pay a fair share of the NATO spending. No formal declaration is expected to come out of the meeting on May 25; the summit is all about testing the waters and checking whether Donald Trump can make a deal with the European partners that will be satisfying for both sides.

The agenda of President Trump's first foreign trip reveals his foreign policy priority. Four visits in Saudi Arabia, Israel, Vatican and Brussels aim at building unity and partnership around the issue of combating extremism. Before arriving to Belgium to attend the NATO Summit, Trump started his trip abroad with a visit in Saudi Arabia where he addressed 50 Arab and Muslim leaders about the importance of building a broad coalition to fight terrorism. In his speech, the US President called on Muslim countries to share the burden and lead the fight to eradicate extremism in the Middle East and Africa. Trump inaugurated together with the Saudi King Salman and Egypt's President al-Sissi a Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology in Riyadh and announced a 110 billion USD arms sale deal between the US and Saudi Arabia, which should increase in Trump's view the Saudi capabilities in combating terrorism in the region.

In line with Trumps' previous calls for the alliance to do more to combat terrorism, the European allies can expect from the US President a direct request that NATO joins the broader coalition he is trying to establish and take a bigger role in the

fight against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. While Islamic State is on the verge of defeat in its Iraqi stronghold of Mosul, and bracing for an assault against its de facto capital in Raqqa in Syria, US officials are concerned that fleeing militants could leave a vacuum that could prompt Arab tribal fighters on each other to gain control. NATO as organization could potentially contribute equipment, training and the expertise it gained leading a coalition against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. It could also mean NATO stepping up its role and use surveillance planes over Syria, run command-and-control operations or provide air-to-air refueling. The US has been putting pressure on the NATO to formally join, as an institution, the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS. While each NATO member country has already joined the US-led coalition, the Europeans are wary about the implications of such a move on NATO's involvement in the fight against ISIS. While there is a general agreement about a further extension of the NATO mission in Afghanistan (operation Resolute Support) beyond 2018, the role that the alliance could play in Iraq and Syria is more sensitive and will be discussed in Brussels. France and Germany are reluctant to increase NATO's role beyond training, advice and assistance to the Iraqi institutions and forces, other countries have raise concerns about the costs of the anti-terrorism operations. President Trump holds two strong bargaining cards that might help him to 'make a deal' and increase considerably NATO involvement in the fight against ISIS: US military presence in Eastern Europe and the level of US contribution to the alliance spending.

The US military presence in Eastern and Central Europe has become significant and its further extension depends on the White House proposals and the Congress' approval. All current US efforts in support of NATO fall under the umbrella of Operation Atlantic Resolve funded under the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). This initiative has been included since 2015 in the US war funding (Overseas Contingency Operations – OCO) which is not restricted by the US budget caps. Maintaining ERI does not require offsets from elsewhere in the US defense budget. Despite residing in OCO, ERI is perceived as a long-term commitment. However, each year the decision about its extension will depend on the President's request and congressional approval. According to President Obama's request from 2016, the ERI budget 2017 of 3.4 billion USD covers 5 different categories of engagement: 1,050 million USD - Presence in Eastern Europe of a rotational armored brigade combat team (BCT); 163 million USD - Exercises and training activities; 1,904 million USD – Preposition Equipment (maintenance and expansion of prepositioned sets of war-fighting equipment); 217 million USD – Infrastructure (improvement of air fields and bases in Eastern Europe) and 86 million USD – Building partner capacity and increasing the resilience of allies and partners through institutional development and training. The new US administration has a power of making this level of commitment conditional and use it as a bargain for an increased involvement of NATO in countering ISIS.

In addition to Operation Atlantic Resolve, Donald Trump will also discuss with the European leaders burden sharing in collective defense. While 2017 has been a good start for improving and rebuilding the NATO's war-fighting capabilities in Eastern and Central Europe much more need to be done to keep up with the evolving requirements for countering Russia's military forces and hybrid warfare capabilities. While NATO needs to rebuild its capabilities in the areas such as anti-access/area-denial, electronic warfare or unmanned aerial vehicles, European contributions to NATO's overall readiness have been a concern for the past few years. **Between 2007 and 2014** the security spending dropped 14 percent. Though all 28 NATO allies have contributed to NATO's assurance and deterrence efforts, the scope and scale of individual states' contributions varies greatly. A consensus has been reached in 2014 to draw up individual national plans outlining increases in defense spending with the aim of reaching a commonly agreed target of 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2024. **Only four European NATO members** - Estonia, Greece, Poland and

Britain - met the two-percent standard last year. France came in at 1.79 percent, while Germany stood a 1.2 percent. Donald Trump has a point in noting that the US commitment is disproportionately large. Last year the US spend 3.6% of its GDP on defense. In February, the US defense secretary James Mattis, warned allies that they must adopt plans to raise their military spending or risk seeing its most powerful member to 'moderate its commitments to the alliance'. Donald Trump will most probably use a similar message in order to obtain fair burden sharing commitments from the European partners. The main question is not about whether Trump will use his bargaining cards to 'make a deal' but rather in what fashion he will do so.