



## **Transatlantic Democracy Working Group**

### **Statement on Recommitting to Democratic Values for NATO's 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

*April 4, 2019*

As the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) marks its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 4, the alliance's commitment to advancing democratic principles as well as mutual defense has been hugely beneficial for North America and Europe. Yet today is no time for celebrating. Despite seven decades as the world's preeminent military alliance, NATO's future is in danger, as it faces urgent challenges that require immediate attention, above all a recommitment to democratic values.

NATO's founding treaty requires members to "contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being." That has helped underpin an alliance that, in the words of former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Douglas Lute, "bound together the U.S., Canada, and European allies in a way that has been fundamentally stabilizing for the world order."

As members of the Transatlantic Democracy Working Group (TDWG) and/or strong bipartisan supporters of NATO, we are deeply concerned that the alliance's democratic values are under enormous strain, with fault lines emerging as some NATO members flout the treaty's founding principles and values. Democratic backsliding in several NATO states is simultaneously being kindled by Russia and economically exploited by China.

NATO was founded in the face of external threats mainly from the Soviet Union. Its success during the Cold War helped make a Europe "whole, free and at peace" a realistic goal after the fall of communism. But despite the Soviet collapse and an era of rapprochement, the Russian government is again seeking to undermine NATO's strength in increasingly aggressive ways, both overt and covert, violating or abandoning multiple arms control agreements, ignoring maritime and safety agreements, and disregarding other international norms.

Moscow began to undermine European post-war security in earnest starting with the invasion of Georgia in 2008 before moving to the illegal occupation and purported annexation of Crimea in 2014, its destabilization of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, and more recently, its direct aggression against Ukrainian naval ships in and around the Kerch Strait and Azov Sea last November.

Russia is becoming increasingly sophisticated in the use of 21st-century cyber warfare, including meddling in the democratic elections of NATO member states, most infamously the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Moscow is also using Hungary and other NATO members as backdoors of influence in Europe, fueling distrust, spreading corruption, and exploiting and enabling the rise of nationalist populism throughout the continent.

NATO has been poorly prepared for internal attacks on its democratic values by member states including Turkey, Poland, and Hungary. Turkey especially has waged a widespread crackdown on free expression and carried out mass arrests of dissidents that threaten to undermine the rule of law in that country and the shared values at the core of our alliance.

Former Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell spoke about the tandem threats posed by rival powers in October 2018, saying, “Russia and China are engaged in a full-court press in sensitive regions around the world. The U.S. must show up or expect to lose.”

But a new, perplexing threat—particularly for our NATO allies and even some American diplomats and military leaders—lies in the changing U.S. role. America is no longer viewed as a reliable leader and stalwart guarantor of the alliance’s security and democratic values. A gap between rhetoric and action has developed, with Washington adopting an assertive rather than collaborative posture toward some European allies.

Retired General Jim Mattis’s public letter of resignation from his position as Secretary of Defense in December starkly warned of the risk to NATO specifically and American alliances generally: “We must do everything possible to advance an international order that is most conducive to our security, prosperity, and values, and we are strengthened in this effort by the solidarity of our alliances.”

NATO helps advance global peace and American interests in many ways. It is a bulwark against threats not only from Russia and China, but also the Islamic State group and other rivals and adversaries. Since September 11, the alliance has been present in Afghanistan for its largest and most sustained operation. NATO helped stabilize and bring peace to the Balkans. It has also been deeply engaged on Turkey’s border with the Syria crisis, and is helping cope with the refugee crisis in Europe.

Viewing NATO solely through a transactional lens of security and cash, undervaluing the need to protect democracy as an essential guarantor of stability and peace, is dangerously myopic about the importance of the liberal world order. President George H.W. Bush underscored that point during NATO’s 40th anniversary in 1989 in Germany. “The foundation of lasting security comes not from tanks, troops, or barbed wire,” he said. “It is built on shared values and agreements that link free peoples.”

If the United States and our allies are to continue advancing the vision of collective security and democracy that brought Europe and America together in Washington 70 years ago, we must remember that we will be weakened in a world not based on the values and rules that have long fueled our strength and prosperity.

Now is no time for complacency. We must respond to the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges facing NATO and reaffirm our commitment to defending and promoting democratic values as the essential foundation of our freedom and security.

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