

For over six decades, maintaining a strong NATO Alliance has been one of the most important strategic objectives of the United States. Every American President since Harry Truman, Republican and Democrat, has believed that defending our alliance of democracies is a vital U.S. interest, especially the core commitment enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO treaty -- that an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us.

Donald Trump's recent statements casting doubt on whether he would honor that commitment should one of our allies be attacked compels us to respond. Just last week, Trump said he would consider recognizing the Russian annexation of Crimea and lifting sanctions on Moscow. He also encouraged the Russian government to hack into Secretary Clinton's emails. These are disgraceful statements that betray our long-standing values and national interests embraced by Presidents of both parties.

All of us have served our government as cabinet officers, senior officials, and career military officers. We find Trump's comments to be reckless, dangerous, and extremely unwise. They contradict a core, bipartisan principle found in every U.S. Administration - - that our security in North America is indivisible with our democratic allies in Europe.

Trump's ill-considered statements have already sown doubt in the minds of our European partners as to whether they can count on American resolve, commitment, and strength in the future. Those statements also threaten to weaken our collective deterrence against Vladimir Putin from further territorial aggression in Europe after his invasions of Ukraine and Georgia. If Trump's policy was implemented, it would undermine the essential credibility of the United States in Europe and around the world.

NATO and our other alliances strengthen, not weaken us. They are our greatest strategic advantage over countries like Russia that have no allies. They help the American people to shoulder the military and financial burden as we seek to maintain the peace around the world. To treat our alliances as base transactions, as Trump appears to do in his consistent criticism of our allies, is to misunderstand their essential importance to our own security.

Hours after the catastrophic 9/11 attacks against our country, Canada and our European allies invoked Article 5 for the first time in NATO's history and pledged to defend the United States in our time of need. All of our allies then joined us in our fight in Afghanistan against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Many of them still fight with us today. A solemn obligation of the American President is to lead NATO, to remain resolute in defense of our allies and to convince potential adversaries that we will stand up for NATO without fear or reservation. Every President, without exception, has accepted the wisdom of this strategy. That is why we find Trump's cavalier denigration of NATO so worrying and so objectionable. Strong alliances are essential to U.S. national security. America needs a President who will strengthen our alliances not denigrate and destroy them.

Signed,

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