



## FPI Bulletin: Trump vs. the Allies

June 6, 2017

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A [report Monday from Politico](#) raises significant concerns not only about President Trump's commitment to the transatlantic alliance, but also the state of decision-making within the administration. Susan Glaser writes that the speech Trump was to deliver last month at the unveiling of a memorial to NATO's response to the September 11, 2001 attacks contained an explicit commitment to collective self-defense under [Article V](#) of the North Atlantic Treaty. When he delivered his [remarks](#), however, the President failed to make such a commitment.

A senior White House official told Glaser that “[t]here was a fully coordinated other speech everybody else had worked on,” but it was ditched at the last minute. The missing language – which had been coordinated through Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster – appears to have either been deleted by the President or one of his other senior aides.

The President's omission was both short-sighted and dangerous. It has reconfirmed fears over his commitment to the NATO alliance and needlessly undermined the credibility of his cabinet. That McMaster, Tillerson, and Secretary of Defense James Mattis intensely lobbied the President to endorse Article V casts doubt as to whether they have the president's confidence.

Mattis' subsequent [pledge](#) at the Shangri-La Dialogue last weekend that “we are standing with the NATO allies 100 percent” rings hollow in light of these revelations. Far more truthful was his plea for America's allies to “bear with us.” But, as Kori Schake of the Hoover Institution [noted](#), “The dedication of our defense secretary to reassuring policies and friends cannot be a substitute for presidential commitment, and despite all of Mattis's good efforts, he's losing his ability to camouflage its absence.”

President Trump's response to last weekend's terror attack in London – the third such incident in the United Kingdom since March – presents another breach in transatlantic relations. Although Trump [expressed solidarity](#) with Britons in the immediate wake of the attack, he undermined any sense of decorum by [arguing](#) for his “Travel Ban,” [haranguing](#) London's mayor, and [drawing parallels](#) to America's domestic debate over gun violence.

Mr. Trump's tweets were in exceptionally poor taste and only served to antagonize America's most vital ally days before a national election. Furthermore, as today's *Washington Post* [warns](#), Trump's “disservice” will likely impair Anglo-American relations in the long term. “[Prime Minister Theresa] May has tried to build a constructive relationship with the Trump administration; even if she wins handily, she now will have less political leeway to do so.”

Today is the seventy-third anniversary of the D-Day invasion at Normandy, the embodiment of the wartime transatlantic alliance. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan [remarked](#) that the lesson of America's experience in the World Wars is that “It is better to be here ready to protect the peace, than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost. We've learned that isolationism never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments with an expansionist intent.”

In 2017, this lesson is no less vital. Russia continues to occupy Ukraine and Georgia – two nations that the alliance [had declared](#) “will become members” a decade ago – and continues to threaten and menace member states along its border. The terrorist threat, as the London attacks demonstrate, is not receding. Now, more than ever, the United States must stand shoulder-to-shoulder with its friends, not snipe at them from across the Atlantic. Now, more than ever, America must recommit to the alliance and demonstrate the steady hand and sureness of purpose that true leadership requires.

In [remarks yesterday](#) to the Atlantic Council, Vice President Mike Pence offered an important corrective to Trump’s missteps. “We will meet our obligations to our people to provide for the collective defense of all our allies,” he said “The United States is resolved, as we were at NATO’s founding and in every hour since, to live by that principle that an attack on one of us is an attack on us all.” This statement is commendable and welcome. However, it is no substitute for leadership from the Oval Office.

It remains to be seen if Mr. Trump has truly learned the lesson that Reagan articulated and his Vice President and cabinet officials understand. And while these officials can reassure both domestic and international audiences, there is no substitute for the president clearly making the commitment himself—and upholding it. If he does not do so, then in two years, when it is time for him and our allies to assemble in Normandy to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of D-Day, there may not be much of an alliance left to celebrate.