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Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Assessing the Value of the NATO Alliance
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Menendez and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I served as U.S. Ambassador to NATO from 2001 until 2005 during the Administration of President George W. Bush. NATO remains our most important alliance. It is an irreplaceable asset for the security of the United States. We must do everything possible to work with Canada and the European allies to strengthen it for the many challenges ahead.

NATO is facing, however, one of its most difficult crises in seven decades. It is not a crisis of military strength or readiness. The Alliance is preserving the peace in Europe and containing an assertive Russia. It is not a crisis of relevance. NATO troops continue to serve in Afghanistan, in the fight against the Islamic State, in preserving the peace in Kosovo and in providing security in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic Sea and Balkan regions. It is assisting the EU in managing the migration crisis through its maritime capacity.

The allies also remain with us in NATO's most important mission—the defense of free, democratic countries in North America and Europe.

The crisis is one of allied trust and confidence in America's leadership of NATO. During the eighteen months of the Trump Administration, the President's personal leadership of NATO has been called into question on several key fronts.

President Trump's repeated public doubts about NATO's importance to the U.S. have had a highly negative impact on European leaders and European public opinion. For the first time in NATO's seven-decade history, there is growing concern in Europe and Canada about an American President's commitment to the alliance.

The U.S. has been the acknowledged leader of NATO since its founding in Washington D.C. in 1949. As the strongest ally, the U.S. has always played an outsized role within the Alliance. While differences among allies are normal and criticism of each other is warranted on serious issues, our Presidents also need to project confidence in NATO and its member states in order to deter potential aggressors such as Russia and provide the leadership that alliances need to stick together.

As a Presidential candidate, Donald Trump called NATO "obsolete". As President, he refused to confirm his support for NATO's Article 5 security guarantee at this first NATO Summit meeting in

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2017. He has suggested that U.S. support for our allies will be conditioned on the level of their defense spending. While rightly pushing allies to meet their defense budget commitment of two percent of GDP, he proposed impulsively at the recent Summit a doubling of that goal to four percent—a level the U.S. had never discussed before with the allies and is itself unprepared to meet.

This crisis has been exacerbated by the contrast between the President's negative public comments about allied leaders Chancellor Angela Merkel and Prime Minister Teresa May with his refusal to utter a word of criticism of Russian President Vladimir Putin, NATO's most dangerous adversary, before, during or after their recent Helsinki press conference.

The President did not criticize Putin publicly for his annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine, Russia's nerve agent attack against the United Kingdom, its support for the Asad regime in Syria and its cyber assault on our 2016 elections. The President's performance in Helsinki was weak and submissive.

The President was also ambivalent in a prominent interview following the Helsinki Summit about whether the U.S. would meet our Article 5 security obligations to Montenegro, the smallest and newest member of NATO and a victim of an attempted Russian-inspired coup just two years ago.

Words matter in diplomacy. NATO's ability to deter Russia and other potential foes has always rested on the strength and clarity of American Presidents starting with Harry Truman. President Trump is the first President to equivocate on the issue of America's commitment to the security of our allies. Such lack of resolve concerns allies who worry the U.S. may not be prepared to defend a NATO member from Russian aggression. As the NATO leader, the U.S. President must remain strong and clear about our resolve in order to reassure allies and to deter political foes.

Finally, the President is seen by many Europeans as more committed to authoritarian leaders in Hungary, Poland and Italy than democratic leaders such as Merkel. Based on recent visits to four European countries this summer, I believe allied governments are most concerned by the rise of extreme anti-democratic forces in their countries. They would welcome rhetorical support from the U.S. in their battle to preserve the rule of law and democratic freedoms. They have not received it.

The crisis in NATO today is not the first the U.S. has had with the allies and likely will not be the last. The U.S. disavowed the actions of France and the United Kingdom in the Suez Crisis of 1956. The U.S. and some of the allies argued about the deployment of American nuclear missiles to Europe in the early 1980s. We experienced a major division within the Alliance over the Iraq War in 2003 when I was Ambassador to NATO. In none of these crises, however, did the U.S. and the allies question each other's basic commitment to NATO itself.

This is what is happening now. It makes this crisis different from those in the past. As a result, a dangerous breach of trust has opened across the Atlantic. The former Polish Defense and Foreign

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Minister, Radek Sikorski, a friend of America, summed up the fear of many in Europe after the Helsinki Summit when he said publicly, "We have no idea what President Trump would do in a crisis with Russia."

Such a situation is a gift to Putin whose strategic aim is to weaken NATO and to divide it from within. It has also caused some Europeans to prepare for a future without a strong U.S. presence in NATO. The debate in Germany has already begun with some outside the government advocating the country consider creating its own nuclear deterrent if it cannot count on the U.S.

The Role of Congress

Barring a fundamental change in President Trump's attitude toward NATO as well as Russia, this crisis calls for concerted action by Congress to revive and reinforce American leadership in the Alliance. The Senate's overwhelming vote to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to NATO before the recent Summit was received very positively in Europe. The recent Menendez-Portman Resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea was another important step to assert Congressional authority.

The proposed McCain-Kaine bill to give Congress a voice and role in any decision by the Administration to reduce U.S. force strength in Europe or to withdraw from NATO is now a critical next step for Congress to take. The Senate ratified the Washington Treaty with a two-thirds majority in 1949. No President should be able to walk away from that commitment unilaterally without the advice and consent of the Senate.

The Graham-Menendez bill would be an effective way to counter Putin by strengthening sanctions against Russia and providing greater support to democracies at risk.

These are among the most important measures Congress can take at a time when the President's basic commitment to NATO appears so tenuous.

Congress can also help to convince the American public that NATO remains vital for our own security at home. Until President Trump's election, most polls showed strong support for NATO among Americans. We should be concerned that the President's constant belittlement of NATO before American audiences may diminish public support for an alliance that cannot be truly effective without the allegiance of our citizens.

NATO's Value to the United States

Mr. Chairman and Mr. Menendez, you have asked for an assessment of NATO's value to the United States. In my judgment, NATO continues to be of vital importance to American security interests in five principal ways.

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First, NATO is at the core of one of the most significant foreign policy accomplishments in American history—the creation of a long-term peace in Europe following the close of the Second World War. Because of NATO and the emergence of the European Union, Europe is united after centuries of division and war. NATO's military strength has been a major reason for the absence of war with the Soviet Union and Russia since 1949.

A recent Atlantic Council study reminds that America spent 14.1 percent of its GDP on defense during the First World War, 37.5 percent during the Second World War and 13.2 percent during the Korean Conflict. We spend nothing close to those levels now in large part due to the great power peace we have enjoyed for over seventy years. NATO has been a major factor in that peace.

And due to the expansion of NATO and the European Union eastward after the fall of the Soviet Union, millions of East Europeans now live in free, democratic societies—a significant success for U.S. diplomacy.

Second, NATO delivers additional benefits to U.S. military objectives and operations beyond our shores.

- NATO is at the heart of our defense of North America and Europe from nuclear and conventional threats. British and French nuclear weapons join ours in deterring aggression in the North Atlantic area. Since the late 1940s, every Administration has believed that the best way to defend our country is through American forces forward deployed in Europe with the NATO allies. This strategy remains right for today given Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and its current pressure on Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. NATO remains our primary vehicle for deterring Putin in Eastern Europe.

- The NATO allies host a great number of critical bases for U.S. forces—Ramstein in Germany, Aviano in Italy, Rota in Spain, Souda Bay in Greece and Incirlik in Turkey—that serve as a platform for our presence in Europe, as well as for U.S. force projection against terrorist groups in North Africa and the Middle East and for our continued military operations in Afghanistan.

- Europe is a critical link in the development of our Ballistic Missile Defense network focused on the Middle East with Turkey, Romania, Poland, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK and other allies all hosting elements of this system.

- NATO allies continue to participate in the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State in the Middle East.

- Many of the allies play lead roles in other counter terror operations such as French forces in Mali supported by the U.S.

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- In Afghanistan, the NATO allies remain with us in combat operations and in training the Afghan military. Over 1000 soldiers from European and other partner nations have died there during the last seventeen years.

- NATO continues to maintain the hard-earned peace in Kosovo with European troops bearing the large share of the burden. An EU-led force has taken on all of the peacekeeping responsibility in Bosnia, freeing up the U.S. for other activities.

Third, the NATO allies are among our closest and most supportive global partners as we confront the great transnational challenges that define this century—the fight against terrorism, the entire complex of cyber threats, climate change, the risk of pandemics, mass migration and others. The NATO allies and our partners in the European Union act together with us on these and other issues. This is of incalculable benefit to the U.S. Neither Russia nor China have treaty allies. NATO is a significant advantage for the United States when it acts as a force multiplier for American interests.

Fourth, the great majority of the NATO allies are also members of the European Union. Every U.S. President has seen the EU as a strategic partner. After all, the EU is our largest trade partner and largest investor in the American economy. Our combined economic might has been a major reason for the effectiveness of sanctions against both Russia and Iran in recent years. While we also compete with the EU in trade, previous Presidents have worked hard to prevent those differences from overwhelming our military and political ties to the EU countries. Let us hope that President Trump's recent meeting with the EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker might ease the trade battles of the last few months across the Atlantic.

Fifth and most importantly, the European countries are our most faithful partners in promoting and preserving democracy in the world today. The strongest link we share with the NATO allies is one of values—our mutual commitment to "democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law" as the Washington Treaty states. At a time when democracies are being challenged around the world and when anti-democratic populists are on the rise in several European countries, this link with Europe is vital to the U.S.

The sad irony in NATO's current crisis of trust is that the Alliance has made significant progress in many areas.

Alliance defense spending has been on an upward trend since Putin's invasion of Crimea in 2014. But there is no doubt that President Trump's persistent campaign to convince allies to raise defense spending has also had an important impact. And allies such as Germany must not only raise their defense spending levels but also reform their militaries to achieve a far greater capacity to be more effective militarily.

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The recent NATO Summit Declaration noted substantial positive progress starting with four years of real growth in allied defense budgets. Two thirds of the allies have plans to reach two percent of GDP by the target date of 2024. More than half of the allies currently spend more than twenty percent of their military budgets on defense technology and research and development. NATO expects that twenty-four of the allies will reach the twenty percent level by 2024.

In addition, NATO agreed at the recent summit to expand its readiness to deploy forces and to create two new commands that should add to its operational strength. Together with the deployment of a battalion of troops each to Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, much has been done during the Obama and Trump Administrations to beef up NATO's armored presence to deter Russia and other potential foes. Secretaries Jim Mattis and Mike Pompeo and Ambassador Kay Bailey Hutcheson are all respected for their professionalism and dedication to NATO.

These positive developments have been obscured, unfortunately, by President Trump's persistent criticism of allied leaders, his lack of criticism of Putin and his publicly expressed doubts about his adherence to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. If the President is unwilling to change course and to be a more positive and effective leader of NATO, Congress will have the responsibility to take the kind of measures I highlighted in the first part of my testimony.

Conclusion

I saw the true value of allies first-hand on 9/11 as a new American Ambassador to NATO. After the U.S. was attacked in New York and at the Pentagon, the Canadian and European Ambassadors to NATO let me know within hours that their governments were willing to come to our defense. On the following morning, NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in history. The allies stood up to defend us. They decided that Osama Bin Laden's attack on the U.S. was an attack on them as well. All of them deployed forces to Afghanistan with us. They remain with us there today seventeen years later. This is the true meaning of NATO for America.

That experience convinced me that, despite our extraordinary power, the U.S. is far stronger and better able to protect our own country by working in alliance with Canada and the European countries. For this reason and others, the U.S. needs to act quickly and resolutely to revive, repair and restore American leadership at NATO. Congress can help to achieve that worthy aim on behalf of the American people.

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