

# Why Is Montenegro Joining NATO A Big Deal?

**WASHINGTON** – With the US Senate approving by a huge margin Montenegro entering NATO, the US-led security pact, (only 2 senators opposed), soon enough this small country, once a region of the former Yugoslavia, will join the western military alliance created on April 4, 1949 with the Treaty of Washington. In “normal” times, this tiny NATO enlargement should not be an event that would move the needle one way or the other.

## **Montenegro is small**

Indeed, on the face of it, Montenegro NATO membership should be a “non issue”. Hard to believe how a very small Balkan nation, with a population of 650,000, an army with only 2,000 soldiers, and a country GDP that is about the same size as the budget of the New York City police force, will alter the balance of forces in Europe.

## **A symbol**

And yet, it is a sign of the times we live in that this issue of Montenegro and its accession into NATO somehow has become a big deal. Russia sees this step of Montenegro joining NATO as further evidence of a relentless eastward NATO expansion, most likely with the intent of encircling the Russian Federation, therefore creating a national security threat for Moscow.

## **Sending a message to Moscow**

The US and other western countries instead want to portray the extension of NATO’s protection to this small Balkan nation as a manifestation of western political resolve. Russia is accused of trying to alter unilaterally the post war borders of Europe. Washington extending a helping hand to Montenegro,

this way guaranteeing its security from possible external threats, supposedly would send a signal to Estonia, Poland and other NATO members bordering Russia: *“America is here to stay in Europe. No intention to leave. Abiding by the letter of the NATO Treaty, Washington pledges that it will stand by its allies, large and small, no matter what”*.

Adding more complexity to the Montenegro accession issue, it is clear that the country was and is divided on this matter. Pro NATO political forces have accused Russia of meddling.

### **Moscow and Washington should address distrust issues**

Be that as it may, instead of using tiny Montenegro as a political symbol, it would be better for both Washington and Moscow to get together and seriously try to find common ground regarding legitimate security concerns. No, NATO is not about to attack Russia. By the same token, NATO should recognize Russian concerns regarding ethnic Russians outside of the borders of the Russian Federation, and Moscow's historic connections with Slavic nations in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The way forward should include ways which will enable Russia to feel more secure, while NATO countries can be convinced that Russia will use diplomacy, and not military force, (or subversion), to further its political interests in Eastern Europe and other border areas.

### **Find a way to improve East-West relations**

Montenegro's accession to NATO will change nothing when it comes to the balance of forces in Europe. However, the very fact that we are even talking about this enlargement of the western alliance as a real problem, contributing to the further deterioration of East-West political relations, is indicative of the under currents of deep distrust between the US and Russia.

It should be in the interest of both Washington and Moscow to address this distrust.

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# The Obama Foreign Policy Record

**WASHINGTON** – The almost universally accepted narrative dished out daily by the serious, high brow U.S. media is that come January 20, 2017, with Donald Trump as President, we shall have 4 years of “*Amateur Hour*” in U.S. foreign policy. This dismal prospect is of course a far cry from the thoughtful, insightful and properly balanced foreign policy agenda expertly crafted and implemented by President Barack Obama and his top-notch foreign and national security policy team.

## **The incompetents are taking over**

We are told by savvy analysts that, all of sudden, from reliable, steady competence that –as we all should know– raised American prestige worldwide, we shall plunge into an abyss of policy mayhem stirred by dangerous ignorance mixed with laughable (or dangerous) braggadocio, with a stupendously unqualified Commander in Chief at the helm.

## **Condescension**

This narrative is another expression of the Olympian condescension of the perennially entitled leaders of the Washington foreign affairs establishment. They simply cannot get used to the reality of a complete outsider, with no real hands-on experience in this field until now reserved to few insiders, now in charge.

## **Trump is inexperienced**

True, Trump is inexperienced. He may indeed fail in foreign policy, and we should not take this prospect lightly, as there

are bound to be consequences. On the other hand, he may not fail, after all. Trump will have a team working for him. Most of the people he picked thus far have considerable international and national security experience.

### **Right mix?**

That said, has he chosen the right mix of people? Even more important, when confronted with difficult decisions, in murky situations when there is no obvious right policy choice, will Trump have the right instincts? Will he manage to safeguard –better yet, advance– the American National Interest? Quite frankly, we do not know yet. Time will tell.

### **Obama's record**

However, while we can only speculate about the future, we do know a great deal about the Obama Team foreign policy record. And, no, it is not stellar. Contrary to the official narrative, the supposedly expert hands that have been in charge until now are not shining stars. And Obama is no great leader when it comes to directing U.S. foreign affairs. Hesitation, mixed messages and retreat have defined American foreign policy under his stewardship.

Now, after George W. Bush's profoundly ill-advised pro-democracy enthusiasm which led America into two horrendously costly and mostly unsuccessful wars –Afghanistan and then Iraq– a new foreign policy guided by restraint was indeed a welcome change after the 2008 elections. But there is a huge distinction between careful, calculated withdrawal behind defensible lines, while spelling out U.S. continuing strategic priorities, and policy confusion leading to retreat.

### **Allowing chaos in Iraq**

In Iraq, President Barack Obama used Baghdad's intransigence regarding the legal status of U.S. troops which would stay on after December 2011 as a good excuse for ending the

negotiation with then Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. With no deal with Baghdad in place, the U.S. pulled completely out of Iraq at the end of 2011.

At that time Iraq was a relatively stable but still fragile and politically split country (Sunni in the North, Shia in the South) in which America had invested an enormous amount of resources. Pulling out completely while the wounds had not healed was an ill-advised and in the end horribly wrong decision.

To this day, President Obama claims he had no choice, given the uncooperative stance of the Baghdad government. But this is nonsense. If the Obama administration really wanted a deal with Prime Minister al-Maliki that would have allowed a substantial U.S. military presence after 2011 it would have found a way to get one.

### **Get out**

The fact is that Obama wanted out of Iraq, entirely for domestic political reasons. He wanted out of Iraq in order to show to the American people that he had made good on a major campaign promise: he had brought all the troops home. And, in fact, later on he repeatedly bragged about this “accomplishment” represented by the closing of the Iraq War chapter. Which is to say that concerns about Obama’s popularity at home caused America to essentially abandon a country in which it had invested years, hundreds of billions, and so many lives of killed U.S. soldiers.

Could sizable American troops stationed in Iraq have prevented the steady descent into chaos that followed their departure? We do not know for sure. But it is not far-fetched to believe that they could have helped keep things together.

### **Belated U-turn in 2014**

That said, Obama was forced to make a complete U-Turn on Iraq

when this deeply divided country was confronted with an invasion masterminded in 2014 by the Islamic State, or ISIL from its bases in Eastern Syria. A massive invasion, by the way, that the sophisticated Obama intelligence leaders never saw coming.

With no U.S. troops on the ground, (thanks to Obama's complete troops withdrawal decided back in December 2011), ISIL breezed, mostly unopposed, into Northern Iraq. In a matter of days it took over Mosul –the second largest city in the country– and the entire North West of Iraq. An eyewitness quoted by *The Guardian* said that:

*“The city [Mosul] fell like a plane without an engine. They [ISIL] were firing their weapons into the air, but no one was shooting at them.”*

Beyond taking over Mosul, ISIL captured vast amounts of cash and a huge arsenal of U.S. supplied weapons and material, simply because the Iraqi troops had run away.

So, here is the upshot regarding Obama's record on Iraq: U.S. troops out; ISIL in. The Caliphate takes over 1/3 of the country within days. America forced to move back in. But slowly and with hesitation. Meanwhile, militias funded by Iran spread through the country. This is complete policy failure.

### **Surge in Afghanistan?**

In Afghanistan, President Obama started with an almost comical public debate in the Fall of 2009 (first year of his mandate) about what U.S. policy should be regarding the continuing Taliban insurgency. Obama finally ended the deliberations in November 2009 with a commitment to a “Iraq-like” surge in Afghanistan. But it was a surge accompanied by a publicly announced withdrawal timetable.

Yes it was just like that. Washington would send additional troops aimed at stabilizing this perennially chaotic country;

but only for a short while. How ill-advised. You go to war not to shoot around a little bit, and then go home. You go to war to win. Or you do not go at all. Result? 20016 is over and the war in Afghanistan is still going on. This is another failure due to Washington's indecisiveness and half measures.

### **Get rid of Ghaddafi**

Then there was Libya, and the ill-conceived idea of toppling dictator Ghaddafi, without even a thought of a game plan about what to do afterwards. Result? Ghaddafi was toppled and he is certainly dead. But so is Libya, now a failed state torn apart by various warring militias. This is failure number three.

### **Hesitation about Syria**

And what about Syria? in 2011, at the beginning of the Arab Spring, President Obama declared that President Assad heavy-handed repression of initially peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations was intolerable. Assad, Obama declared, "had to go".

Strong words. However, this clear statement of a U.S. policy objective –nothing but regime change would do for Syria–lacked even the semblance of a policy aimed at obtaining the outcome: make Assad go.

This incoherence between grandiose objectives and no policy to implement them was only the beginning of a half-hearted U.S. policy in support of some factions within the Syrian opposition.

***Military planners should know that a little bit of support is not enough. In war, either you are in or you are out. Even if your method is to support the opposition, as opposed to sending your own troops, you have to be with them all the way. Support to your side in the conflict has to be decisive. The objective must be victory.***

## **Media criticism**

Well, even the serious usually pro-Obama media, after years of U.S. half measures, recognized that Syria is a huge policy failure for Obama. this is a BBC analysis dated October 2015:

*"[Regarding Syria] the philosophical discussion at the White House was heated and fierce, leading to stalemate, not resolution.*

*For years Obama and his deputies refused to say categorically: we're not doing this. Instead a decision was postponed.*

*Four years later, the result is a splintered Syrian opposition, the growth of the Islamic State group and a humanitarian disaster stretching across Europe.*

*Last year, in a move that was more symbolic than serious, Obama asked Congress for money to fund a programme allowing US personnel to teach rebels marksmanship, navigation and other skills.*

*The goal was to train about 15,000 rebels in Jordan and other countries so they could return to Syria and fight. However, US defence officials admitted last month [September 2015] that only four or five of the recruits in the programme had actually returned to the battle."*

## **It ended badly**

And this was the BBC, a fairly sympathetic voice. A year later, things got only worse. The result of years of U.S. policy confusion and half measures is a semi-destroyed Syria, Russian massive intervention in support of Assad, the Iranians and Hezbollah firmly planted there, a defeated opposition just driven out of Aleppo, not to mention untold numbers of dead people and millions of refugees. And now, a new ceasefire was arranged by Russia in partnership with Turkey and Iran. The U.S. is not even at the table. Talk about American retreat.



This is a colossal policy failure.

## **ISIL in Iraq**

And then there is ISIL in Iraq, the worst consequence of the U.S. total military withdrawal from the country it had invaded back in March of 2003. In a speech to the Nation, on September 10, 2014, President Obama sounded really tough about ISIL and the threat that it represented for the region and indeed the world.

He declared that: *“Our objective is clear: we will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy”*.

It sounded that America really meant business. To begin with, Obama told the world that Washington had assembled a powerful coalition of 66 countries. Impressive? Not so much. If you care to dig just a little bit, you discover that this unbeatable anti-ISIL Armada includes heavyweights like Luxembourg, Somalia, Iceland, Bosnia, Bahrain, Romania, Cyprus, Estonia, Panama, Montenegro, Latvia and Albania. Are you still impressed?

## **Painfully slow progress**

And the American military effort has also been modest. Two years later, while there have been significant successes against ISIL, we are still not done. Coalition supported Iraqi forces, (by the way this would also include support from Iran) are getting closer to Mosul; but they are still far from retaking it and eventually driving ISIL out of Iraq, let alone “destroying” it, as Obama pledged.

This is almost inconceivable. ISIL is a bunch of nasty thugs who use barbaric methods. But ISIL is not the German Wehrmacht smashing France, or the Japanese Imperial Army conquering Manchuria or the Philippines. It is a rag-tag, third-rate military force. It is unbelievable that America, with the

largest and most technologically advanced military force in the world, could not destroy the self-proclaimed Islamic Caliphate in a matter of weeks.

To the contrary, a recent *Washington Post* story indicated that this battle against ISIL is going to be long slug:

*"[...] But a full offensive to retake the city [of Raqqa, de facto capital of ISIL] could still be months or more away, despite hopes in Washington that an operation to take the Islamic State's most symbolically significant stronghold would be well underway before President Obama left office."*

This slow and uneven progress is the military outcome of policy confusion and partial military engagement. Despite Obama's clear commitment a couple of year ago, the mighty U.S. still has not managed to *"degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL"*.

### **Pivot to Asia?**

And there are many more examples of grand plans that yielded little. Consider the pivot to Asia. Nice idea; but little to show in terms of results. Suffice to say that China, just as America publicly committed to shift its policy focus on Asia, has managed to increase its sphere of influence throughout most of the South China Sea –essentially unchallenged.

True, the Obama administration made all the right noises when confronted with the evidence that China is busy building up and militarizing small islands scattered across the South China Sea that it occupied with the bogus justification that these rocks (some of which do not even qualify as "land" according to international law) have always been under Chinese sovereignty.

The Obama administration has not been able to challenge this creeping Chinese expansion, nor has it been capable or willing to persuade the Chinese to retreat and get out.

## **Iran**

I am purposely leaving out of this analysis the Iran nuclear deal, because it is a lot more complicated than these other issues, and because in Iran's case the Obama administration acted with purpose towards a fairly clear policy objective: freeze the Iranian nuclear program. And this objective has been reached. While there are many vocal critics of the deal, none of them seem to have a better plan. Just getting out of a "bad deal" without having anything to replace it will not yield better outcomes.

## **Obama's retreat**

Anyway, you get the picture. Clearly, it is always easy to point out foreign policy failures with the benefit of hindsight. Of course, it would be completely unfair to blame Obama for an Arab World in chaos, and other major troubles.

Still, the net result of Obama's 8 years in office is not stellar.

All in all, U.S. policies regarding Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and ISIL reveal a pattern of hesitation, in fact genuine confusion, and the inability to define, articulate and pursue what in Obama's mind is the U.S. national interest.

## **What U.S. retreat signals to the world**

*It would be disingenuous to conclude that all these failures, mixed messages and retreats from the world stage do not matter, because America after all is still the most powerful country on earth.*

*It is obvious that other political leaders around the world look at both American military capabilities and American political will. If they conclude that America lost its will, its powerful military forces will not deter as much as they used to.*

## **Will Trump be better?**

In the end, it is perfectly alright to express doubts about President-elect Trump ability to articulate a mature U.S. foreign policy. Still, the idea that come January 20 2017 the rowdy, clueless children are taking over, while the thoughtful grown ups have been driven out of the room is nonsense.

Quite frankly, if the poor Obama foreign policy record is the best the mature and experienced adults are capable of, then we may as well give the untested Trump and his team a chance.

Who knows, they may surprise us.

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## **Donald Trump And Nuclear Weapons**

**WASHINGTON** – Casual talk about nuclear weapons and their possible use is not recommended. Likewise, tough remarks about not being outspent by opponents on nuclear weapons procurement and deployments may create anxiety and fears about “arms races” and a path to war within the general public; but they do not amount to a clearly delineated new nuclear strategy.

### **Modernize U.S. nuclear weapons**

I would not try to over interpret general statements made by President-elect Donald Trump on matters pertaining to the U.S. nuclear arsenal and possible policy changes, as for the moment they are not accompanied by a specific new policy agenda.

That said, here is what President-elect Donald Trump could say and do about the American nuclear arsenal, if his purpose

were, as I hope, to reaffirm the long-standing U.S. policy whereby peace is ensured by a robust and always credible American nuclear arsenal that can and will be used in case of an attack.

In a word, nuclear deterrence works only if America demonstrates that it has both the tools, (state of the art nuclear weapons, ready to be launched), and the determination to retaliate, (this is about the ability to convey to all potential enemies that America has and will have the political will to retaliate, under all circumstances, no exceptions).

because of all of the above, President-elect trump could declare that America will continue to invest in the modernization of its nuclear triad (strategic bombers, land based intercontinental ballistic missiles, and ballistic missiles based on submarines). He could justify this policy by arguing that a modern, up to date nuclear arsenal is also a reliable arsenal. (Hence the recent decision made by the Obama administration to finally procure a new generation of strategic bombers in order to replace dangerously old B-52s).

### **The importance of Command and Control**

Furthermore, he could add that, in order to ensure continued reliability of its nuclear forces under any scenarios, the U.S. will continue to invest in all aspects of Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence regarding U.S. nuclear weapons.

This is all about the goal of conveying to our adversaries that America's nuclear deterrent will always be a viable option in any and all situations. Even under the most catastrophic scenarios, there will always be a surviving, legitimate Commander in Chief in full control of all U.S. nuclear weapons. Even if the President and Vice President and other national security leaders down the chain of command

were killed by terror attacks, a legitimate U.S. National Command Authority will always survive, fully prepared to retaliate massively against any aggressor.

### **Always prepared**

So, here is the simple message to any hostile power: Never count on America to be caught unprepared by a surprise attack. Never count on any scenario in which America would surrender without retaliating. Massive retaliation will always be U.S. policy. Therefore, count on the certainty that disastrous losses will be inflicted on any attacker. Swift and devastating “massive retaliation” will always follow any attack against America. Therefore: *“Do not even think about it”*.

### **Invest in ballistic missile defense**

Moreover, a Trump administration should focus on the creation of credible ballistic missile defenses. The U.S. standing policy based on a credible nuclear deterrent and the determination to use it should work against major nuclear powers (think Russia or China) that (supposedly) will always act rationally. But it may not work vis-a-vis an unpredictable nuclear armed North Korea or Iran (should Iran eventually get its own nuclear weapons).

Hence the need to protect America with robust missile defenses capable of intercepting and destroying incoming North Korean nuclear armed missiles before they reach U.S. soil. As odd as this may sound, America at this time has a very limited number of interceptors. They are woefully inadequate to guarantee our security against rogue nuclear powers that cannot be deterred by the threat of massive retaliation.

### **Reliable nuclear weapons reinforce stability**

Should president Trump announce such policy objectives, they should be interpreted by all observers –domestic and foreign–

as reassuring. America will continue to rely on its nuclear deterrent. However, for such a deterrent to be credible, and therefore for nuclear weapons to act as a stabilizing force, it has to be modernized, in order to guarantee its reliability, resilience and survival under any scenarios.

### **Obsolete weapons create instability**

Indeed, although this may not be immediately apparent to the lay person, a neglected, semi-obsolete nuclear arsenal, accompanied by a weak Command and Control system that may break down under severe stress is dangerous and destabilizing. Whereas a state of the art force that is always ready and reliable and always controllable by a legitimate National Command Authority creates stability.

### **Keep the peace**

A robust Command, Control and Communications system, capable of withstanding the shock of a massive surprise attack will guarantee that under any scenarios a competent and fully empowered authority in Washington will always be in total control over America's nuclear forces.

### **There will be no surprises**

The sum total of all these policies regarding the continuous modernization of U.S. nuclear weapons would be to convince any and all adversaries that they should rule out any scenarios under which America may be caught by surprise and therefore not follow through on its promise to retaliate. The U.S. main policy objective here is to convince all enemies that there is no "war winning scenario" against America.

Therefore, when it comes to dealings with an America always armed and ready to retaliate, peace is the best option.

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# US Public Education In Crisis

**WASHINGTON** – The international student proficiency scores gathered under the auspices of the Program for International Student Assessment, (also known as PISA), tell us a sad story about the state of U.S. public education. Simply stated, compared to the rest of the developed world, US kids do poorly in math and barely within average in other key subjects. How can America remain the world economic leader in this hyper competitive global knowledge economy, when U.S. school children do not know basic math?

## **Debates but no action**

And please note that this new (and rather depressing) PISA international ranking is not news. Previous PISA scores were very similar. And these mediocre to bad comparative test results come after decades of sometimes heated debates in America focused on the need to drastically improve U.S. public education standards. Which is to say that endless deliberations yielded almost nothing of value.

Indeed the first loud warning about the state of U.S. public education came all the way back in 1983, with the publication of ***“A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform”***. This was a landmark report produced by then President Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education.

## **We are not out of the woods**

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* was supposed to be the wake-up call, the strong alarm bell that would force policy makers and civil society organizations to rethink and reorganize public education by improving standards and most of all the quality and preparedness of teachers.



Well, it did not work out that way. More than 30 years later, and notwithstanding good experimentation and some improvements, (think charter schools, for instance), we have yet to see major reforms implemented nationwide.

Hence the depressing performance of US kids in these international PISA scores, year after year.

### **How bad?**

Well, how bad is bad? Here is an account of the PISA results as published in US News and World Report:

*“The 2015 Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, study is the latest to document that American students are underperforming their peers in several Asian nations. The U.S. was below the international average in math and about average in science and reading. Singapore was the top performer in all three subjects on the PISA test.*

*More than half a million 15-year-old students in about 70 nations and educational systems took part in the 2015 exam. The test is coordinated by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD.*

*Here are the main things to know about the PISA exams:*

*Not so encouraging.*

*The test is based on a 1,000-point scale. Among the findings:*

*-In math, the U.S. average score was 470, below the international average of 490. Average scores ranged from 564 in Singapore to 328 in the Dominican Republic.*

*-In science, the U.S. average score was 496, about the same as the international average of 493. Average scores ranged from 556 in Singapore to 332 in the Dominican Republic”.*

**U.S. students: bad in math, mediocre in other subjects**

So, here is the picture, the U.S. placed number 25 (out of 70) in science; 24 (out of 70) in reading proficiency; and 40 (out of 70) in mathematics.

***Here is the conclusion: America is still very much a "Nation at Risk". It is just amazing and indeed inexcusable that decades of talking about education reform produced at best minimal results. If America were a poor under developed country with no resources, we could understand this under performance. But this is still the richest country on Earth. Given this country's resources -financial and intellectual- the protracted inability to fix U.S. public education is inexplicable.***

**Here is the real story**

Or may be this anomaly can be explained, after all. U.S. mediocre to bad scores averages hide the fact that in America we have what amounts to a two tier education system. One good and the other bad, or very bad.

Indeed, state of the art schools (mostly private) are available for the children of the elites who, for good money, can buy the best education available. The poor and the minorities (often one of the same) can access only mediocre or failing public schools. Not surprisingly, these under served students do poorly or very poorly in school. Indeed, some of them graduate from high school being functionally semi-illiterate. Some never graduate. If you combine good and very bad schools, the result is low average scores.

**The elites are well served**

The only conclusion here is that this surprising lack of interest in public education reform and improvements sadly stems from the fact that the children of the elites (the people who in the end make policy) are doing just fine, thank you.

As for all the others who are struggling, their learning conditions and dismal career and life prospects are not a national priority, it seems.

What a shame.

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## Trump's Remarks On NATO

**WASHINGTON** – Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump made headlines in Europe when he declared that America would intervene to assist a European NATO under attack only if this ally has paid its full share of the bill for the common defense. This is unprecedented. No U.S. leader or aspiring leader has ever publicly questioned U.S. determination to intervene on behalf of a NATO member in case of hostile actions against it.

### **NATO's credibility at stake**

NATO's credibility rests mostly on the U.S. unconditional commitment to defend Europe. If future U.S. policy indicates that this blanket commitment is subject to conditions, this may encourage aggression, or at least unfriendly actions on the part of Russia, always keen to exploit divisions between the U.S. and its European allies.

Here is what Article 5 of the NATO Treaty says: *The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51*

*of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. [Emphasis added].*

### **Unconditional pledge**

It is clear that the NATO Treaty makes no mention of added conditionalities. It clearly stipulates that an attack against one NATO member shall be considered by all the others as an attack against all. Therefore, technically speaking, Trump's remarks are wrong, and frankly ill-advised. Indeed, Trump's glib remarks about circumstances that he would look at as president before deciding whether or not to come to the help of a European NATO country in peril are most inappropriate. The U.S. is bound to help a fellow NATO member because of a Treaty obligation. There is no gray area.

That said, Trump, while wrong on his interpretation of the Treaty, diplomacy and more, is actually right on substance. Let me explain.

### **Not paying for the common defense**

In his usual inelegant but (sometimes) effective style, Trump pointed out what every U.S. defense official knows but will not say so bluntly, especially in public. It is a well-known fact that Europe is not paying its fair share of the common defense.

Ever since the end of the Cold War, European defense budgets have been (with very few exceptions) in free fall. The official pledge taken by all NATO countries to invest at least 2% of their GDP on defense has been broken by most of the Alliance members. There is no sign that all or at least most Europeans will soon be in compliance. Again, these are undisputed facts.

U.S. and NATO officials have repeatedly noted (albeit using muffled language) this huge gap between promises and actual defense spending. President Obama himself expressed his distress while contemplating European allies who do not spend even the bare minimum for the common security.

### **Trump said what most defense officials believe**

Given all that, what Trump said is very much in line with what most members of the U.S. national security establishment know and say –but mostly in private meetings. The huge difference is that Trump publicly and bluntly said that America will not come to the rescue of delinquent members. And this is news.

Of course this unprecedented statement by someone who may be the next U.S. Commander in Chief come January 2017 made headlines, especially in the front line NATO countries in Eastern Europe that are directly facing Russia. (Think Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland). By saying to the Europeans something that amounts to *“First pay up, and then we shall see what I can do for you”*, Trump created nervousness and potentially contributed to enhancing instability in Eastern Europe. Given what he said, will Trump’s America come to the rescue of Estonia in case of an attack? May be not. His statement allowed all sorts of bad conjectures. This is why it was most ill-advised.

### **Pledges should be honored**

That said, on the broader issue of lack of a European serious commitment to the common security, Trump is basically right. Throughout its long history that goes back to 1949, NATO has always been an unequal arrangement, with the U.S. doing the heavy lifting when it comes to defense spending.

But now we are at the point in which many European members of this old security pact contribute little to the common defense, some almost nothing; with the hope that they can get away with routinely unfulfilled pledges. This has to stop.

Otherwise this old alliance turns into a joke.

Trump pointed out this huge gap between promises and actions. Again, really wrong on form; but right on substance.

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## Terrorism Is Not An Existential Threat

**WASHINGTON** – Sadly, there has been another terror attack. This time it took place in Munich, one of Germany's most important cities. Here is my take on this tragedy. It is alright for the news media to report the facts. What is not alright, in fact down right insane, is for every news channel to provide endless coverage of the event that quickly turns into wild speculation in the absence of hard facts.

### **Obsessive coverage**

Indeed, all the networks kept the topic on the air by creating an endless loop in which there was no real news. The same skimpy facts were repeated again and again, in an obsessive fashion. In an equally obsessive fashion, viewers were treated with endless reruns of the same footage that showed scared people in Munich running away.

### **Uninformed commentary now part of the news**

And it got a lot worse. In order to keep viewers interested, the news editors laced these non-reports from Munich with interviews with "experts" who knew absolutely nothing about the evolving situation in Germany. But supposedly they are "terrorism experts" who can opine on what is going on, even

though they are totally in the dark regarding the key facts. As this “coverage” unfolded, nobody knew anything about the Munich shooter. Was he a German? Was he Middle Eastern? Is this about ISIL and jihad? Is this the work of extreme right militants? Or is it about a mentally disturbed person with no political agenda?

### **Ignorance is OK**

*But none of this matters. And so you could see on various TV channels a parade of retired U.S. Generals who were asked to offer their (supposedly insightful) opinion about an ongoing police action aimed at capturing a shooter in a German shopping mall about which they knew absolutely nothing. As if their military background would allow them to know what was happening and why.*

And then add to the experts mix retired CIA and FBI agents, think tank people, and assorted others. One thing is clear. None of these people knew anything whatsoever about what happened in Munich. But this does not matter. Speculation, sometimes totally irresponsible, by experts is now considered an integral part of news coverage.

And it got really crazy. “Let’s assume that these are ISIL inspired terrorists”, said one. “Well, in this case, this means that...blah, blah, blah”. This is how the news media transformed a sad event whose causes were unknown (and that is very limited in scope) into yet another chapter of an unfolding global war waged by Terror against us that does not exist.

### **A global war that does not exist**

Yes, the media want you to believe that this Munich attack must be part of a general war waged by Islamic fanatics against the West. Another terror attack signals that we are dealing with a ferocious enemy, determined to totally destroy us. And then the really stupid questions follow: “In your

*opinion, what should governments do to keep us totally safe?"*  
As if there were an intelligent, cogent answer to such a broad question.

### **Terrorism is real**

Terrorism is unfortunately real. Yes, innocent people across the world are being killed, and many more are potentially vulnerable. This is true. But by amplifying the news coverage of all these attacks the news media creates the false impression that there are thousands and thousands of terrorists ready to jump on us. They describe all this as an existential, truly overwhelming threat; when it is not.

A total of a few hundred people killed over a few months period across many countries is serious business. But these killings do not amount to an ongoing massive slaughter. By comparison, during WWI thousands of soldiers were killed in just a few hours in one of the many battles that were fought almost daily, over a number of years. Again, thousands of people get killed every year in America by criminals. But, somehow these deaths are not as important.

### **No perspective**

I am not saying that terror-related killings should be ignored because they are not large enough to deserve attention. I am saying however that they should be looked at in perspective. Unless we see a real change in the momentum of these terror operations showing us that there is both willingness and operational ability to attack all Western (and other) countries from all angles on a regular basis, these terror attacks are not about to destroy our civilization. Of course we should deploy all our intelligence and police resources to deal with this threat. This is serious business. But we should leave its handling to law enforcement agencies and not panic.

### **World not coming to an end**



However, this is not what the media tell us. Indeed, by providing truly over the top, excessive coverage and by allowing the wildest speculations about "*what other terrible things will happen next*" to be mixed with incessant news coverage the media give the public the impression that, on account of "Global Terrorism", the world may be coming to an end.

This is just not true. Allowing this perception to be created by exaggerated coverage the media are creating fear, if not panic when we need perspective and calm. This is truly irresponsible. This distortion amounts to a huge disservice to Western societies which rely on the news media for balanced accounts in order to gain a reasonably accurate understanding about what is going on in the world.

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## [How To Handle Terrorism: Stop Media Coverage](#)

**WASHINGTON** – A 31 year old French citizen of Tunisian origin, using a truck as his weapon, run over and killed scores of people who had gathered on a sea side promenade to celebrate the French National Day in the southern city of Nice. Confronted with another episode of mass murder perpetrated by another psychopath inspired, it seems, by radical Islamist ideology, the French Government and the world react in the same way. We mourn, we cry, we express solidarity and sympathy to the French people, and we swear to continue our fight against terrorism.

### **A better counter terror strategy?**

Is there a better strategy? When it comes to intelligence and

police work, probably not. This ongoing international counter terrorism effort is enormously complicated because we are talking about finding the proverbial needles hidden in many haystacks.

Indeed, given limited resources and potentially hundreds of thousands of militants who may turn into terrorists, it is next to impossible to make sure that all credible suspects are known and tracked by various law enforcement agencies, so that they can be stopped before they act. Case in point, based on early reports, the young man who slaughtered so many people in Nice was not on any terror list.

### **One person can create a slaughter**

Furthermore, we know very well that just one determined terrorist can inflict enormous damage when targeting large numbers of unarmed civilians who are gathered in one place. Indeed, in order to perpetrate this horrendous slaughter in Nice, the young man who planned it needed a driver license and a truck. We are not talking about expensive, sophisticated weapons that require intensive training before they can be properly used. Sadly, committing mass murder is easy.

That said, intelligence agencies and law enforcement simply must persevere in this thankless investigative effort. They must try their best, hoping to catch more bad guys before they can act.

### **Stop endless media coverage**

But there is something else that we should do. World media should stop behaving as the unwitting propaganda arm of international terrorism. By this I mean that the biggest victory for terrorists is that we treat their acts as something that precipitates a national crisis, while scaring all of us to death.

After these events, there is non-stop coverage, laced with

testimonials from eye witnesses, sad stories of orphaned children, and more. All this creates an atmosphere of helplessness, fear and confusion. *"We are all targets". "This will never end". "I can be dead tomorrow".*

### **Report the facts, and then stop**

Of course it is the job of all media to report facts. But, after having done so, they should stop, simply because endless 24/7 coverage proves to other would-be terrorist watching all this that terrorism scares everybody. Therefore "it works".

If we could think of a different scenario in which terror attacks are treated just like accidents, that is unfortunate events (think two trains colliding) with no political or ideological angle, societies would register the sad news about loss of life, and then move on; without the endless and frankly counterproductive debates on how can governments provide perfect protection to all of us from this calamity.

### **Attackers are narcissists**

The fact is that most of these attackers, and would-be attackers deep down are publicity seeking narcissists. Sure enough, in some fashion they see themselves as noble warriors engaged in jihad. But they also want to be famous, even in death. Imagine being an obscure young man of Arab origin living in France. You see yourself as a nobody. Most likely, you feel that you are treated unfairly. You believe that the French people around you harbor racist feelings against you.

### **Become famous**

***But from the vantage point of the paradise you earned after your noble deed of martyrdom (the slaughter of all those civilians) you rejoice seeing that the whole world talks about you. You are famous, and for all the right reasons. You are a hero, a martyr in the just war against the infidels.***

Given all of the above, by toning down media coverage and the endless commentary and speculations, we would take much of the oxygen out of the terrorism breeding grounds.

### **No rational goals**

From a rational perspective, it is obvious that these acts of terrorism achieve nothing. Killing 80 people here and 50 there is not a strategy that leads to anything. But these perpetrators are not thinking rationally.

That said they certainly want the world to know that they are heroes in this global battle for the establishment of the true faith. Becoming famous after having accomplished a great deed is seen as part of the just reward for martyrdom. And this by itself becomes a strong motivation for others to engage in similar acts.

### **Stop the coverage**

However, if in the future these tragedies were not incessantly covered by the media, then there is no free publicity, and therefore no aura of fame for the actors. If nobody talks about them after their glorious martyrdom, then part of the incentive to follow on the footsteps of other famous jihadists vanishes.

So, please, report the facts, by all means. But stop “promoting” terrorism by giving so much free publicity to the perpetrators. Endless media coverage simply encourages others.

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## **Can U.S. Fight Insurgencies?**

**WASHINGTON** – Under pressure, the Obama administration released the estimated number of civilians killed (unintentionally) in

the course of U.S. drone strikes that have taken place in various theaters. Along with the figures came new guidance aimed at further reducing "collateral damage", i.e. the killing of civilians in the course of U.S. air attacks via drones. (These attacks are always aimed at military targets).

Indeed, sometimes, civilians get killed accidentally due to their proximity to military targets. (There have also been a few cases in which civilians have been mistakenly targeted, because it was wrongly assumed, based on the information available at the time, that they were in fact enemy fighters).

### **Civilians killed by drone attacks**

US Intelligence sources stated that 116 civilians were killed in the course of drone strikes aimed at hitting legitimate military targets in different theaters. This usually happens because enemy positions are located in the midst of populated areas.

President Obama stated that America, from now on, will do its very best to further reduce these numbers. Of course, several critics immediately argued that the real number of civilians killed is a lot higher. Besides, this total just announced excludes the death toll from operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

This U.S. announcement could be just public relations; or it could be an oblique way to tell the world that from now on the U.S., while fighting elusive enemies on different fronts, will be more restrained. It will bomb less, with drones or conventional aircraft. Indeed, if this new guidance will take effect as stated, hard to bomb more enemy positions most often located in populated urban areas, when your goal is to further reduce the chance of killing civilians.

### **Restrictive Rules of Engagement**

Still, whatever the real numbers of civilians accidentally

killed, the truth is that America's current "Rules of Engagement" are already extremely restrictive on when and where U.S. bombs can be legitimately used.

Drones strikes are usually planned on the basis of carefully sifted intelligence. "Dynamic" strikes that occur in the context of ongoing military operations however are also subject to complex procedures. Tactical Operations Centers need to authorize them, often only after having received the input of military lawyers who are standing by 24/7 and who are called upon to assess the legality of strikes, on the basis of the available intelligence regarding the situation on the ground.

### **Is the way to fight a war?**

This way of fighting a war looks crazy. But these are the standard rules. Given all these restrictions on what targets can be bombed aimed at avoiding or at least reducing possible civilian casualties, quite often requested strikes are simply not authorized by the U.S. military authorities.

Well, then why do we have non combatants killed by U.S. bombs? Very simple. Al Qaeda, the Taliban and now ISIL do not follow the established laws of warfare. They routinely place their own assets (troops, ammunition, logistics) in the middle of densely populated areas. They deliberately use civilians as human shields. And the purpose of all this is obvious: to deter American attacks.

### **Civilian deaths become propaganda tools**

And when some ISIL positions are indeed attacked and civilians are killed, then there is a huge publicity gain for the insurgents. *"The blood thirsty Americans bomb indiscriminately, deliberately targeting women and children"*.

Needless to say, ISIL and others have a vested interest in inflating the numbers of civilians killed through drone or

other U.S. air strikes. This is their own way of fighting the propaganda war, using the argument of American barbarity in order to recruit more people willing to fight and die for the cause.

### **Impossible to avoid civilian casualties**

The fact is that, even with heroic efforts, it is impossible to avoid civilian casualties while fighting irregular forces that hide within populated areas. It is just impossible. Even with highly sophisticated satellites and other sensors that gather detailed images and provide real time data to those who operate drones, or to pilots of manned aircraft, it is just impossible for the U.S. military to neatly separate combatants who usually wear no uniforms from innocent civilians in populated areas.

### **No way to win**

So, here is the bottom line. If Obama is serious about cutting the number of casualties going forward, then this means that America cannot realistically fight aggressively and win against insurgents who routinely hide in urban areas. Even today, without new restrictions in place on the use of air power, the effort to minimize collateral damage means relatively few air strikes, because many targets are deemed to be unlawful by the military lawyers, and therefore excluded.

### **More targets will be declared off-limits**

If America wants to further diminish the likelihood of future civilian casualties while fighting insurgents, this means that an even larger number of possible military targets will be declared off-limits by the military lawyers, due to their close proximity to civilian areas.

And here is the absurdity. This is no way to fight any war. As troubling as this is to our civilized conscience, it is just impossible to fight an insurgency that operates in cities and

towns without causing some unwanted suffering.

***If America wants to win against ISIL and other insurgents, it has to accept this fact: if you want to destroy enemy forces that hide in populated areas, you have to accept that civilians will also be killed.***

### **Long, inconclusive conflicts**

Otherwise, if avoiding civilian casualties is more important than destroying at least some enemy targets, let's prepare for an endless and inconclusive conflict with adversaries who do not play by the accepted rules of war.

With all the restrictions outlined above, and possibly more to come, the U.S. cannot fight properly; because Washington feels the pressure of a world public opinion that requires America to behave according to an impossible standard.

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## **Dealing With The Terror Threat in America**

**WASHINGTON** – As we are entering the heated phase of the US presidential campaign, the Orlando massacre perpetrated by Omar Mateen, a self-radicalized second generation US born Muslim, has immediately become a major political issue.

### **Terror and politics**

Both Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump felt the pressure to articulate a (supposedly) credible anti-terror strategy aimed at preventing more terror attacks in the US. But the expectation that either of them can come up with a winning strategy that will destroy terrorism while providing



total protection to all Americans is patently absurd.

### **The terror threat**

The "Terror Threat" is not a monolith led by an organized command. It is composed of multiple, mostly independent factions spread around at least a dozen countries, with support from a myriad of diverse foot soldiers. They can be citizens of Arab countries. But they can also be European or US national citizens of Arab or other Muslim descent. They can be from Bosnia, Chechnya or Kosovo. Some of them may have received training in Syria. Others may have been convinced to join the global jihad through Islamic propaganda delivered via the internet.

### **ISIL in Syria and Iraq**

Sure enough, America and the West have a tangible target in the self-declared Caliphate, chunks of Syria and Iraq now occupied by ISIL. It can be plausibly argued that the existence of a somewhat functioning "Islamic State" provides encouragement to assorted young dreamers around the world who now are convinced that this new religious-political entity, supposedly founded on total adherence to the True Faith, is the clear sign of an unfolding global revolution of which they are the vanguard.

### **People believe in crazy things**

Yes, this is absolutely crazy. But, as history amply demonstrates, some people at times believe in crazy things. Therefore, redoubling our efforts to destroy the Islamic State is probably a good thing.

But let's not harbor any illusions. The genie of Islamic Fundamentalism is out of the bottle. Even assuming ISIL's quick defeat, (not a sure thing), this millenarian ideology now embraced by ISIL will find another vehicle. It will probably find a new home and new followers in other parts of

the world.

### **Is there are a plan?**

Given all of the above, what should a new US President do to protect all Americans? Nothing new, really. America is not confronted with a frontal assault orchestrated by Islamic radicals. ISIL and its associates did not land here as an organized army attacking us. We have a few (certainly not tens of thousands) ISIL followers, spread around, here and there, within America.

Some of them harbor jihadist beliefs and intentions. A small number of them are willing to plot and execute terror attacks –just like Omar Mateen did in Orlando. And the sad reality is that small numbers can do great damage.

### **Asymmetric warfare**

Omar Mateen, the young man of Afghan descent who plotted and executed the Orlando massacre was all by himself. He was not acting (as far as we know) under direct orders of some kind of ISIL supreme leader in the U.S. or the Middle East.

In other words, this horrible Orlando massacre did not require any master plan, structure or chain of command. Again, Mateen did it by all by himself. And look at what he did. Just one man –acting alone– killed 50 people and injured more than 50 others. A real carnage. This is what is known as “asymmetric warfare”. You do not need an army, or even a platoon to kill a large number of unarmed civilians gathered in one place.

### **Better police work**

Is this is so, what is to be done? Realistically, the only thing that a responsible new US President can promise to America is to do his/her best to have and possibly beef up a robust intelligence and police apparatus that hopefully will catch the bad guys before they can act.

But nobody in his right mind can promise 100% success. The home-grown terrorists are likely to be just like the young man responsible for the Orlando massacre. Most likely they are psychopaths acting on their own who have adopted this ideological veneer –Islamic fundamentalism– in order to justify their violent intentions. Indeed, no sane individual would seriously believe that firing into a crowd of unarmed people will bring about a major, constructive political transformation.

### **Unrealistic expectations**

In a more sober political environment in which voters would avoid harboring unrealistic expectations, both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would say precisely this. *“We shall do our best. But it is impossible to monitor millions of people 24/7. Some of the bad guys will slip through. More attacks are unfortunately possible.”*

But saying this sounds like hopelessness. The candidates for the highest office in the land “must” offer a “perfect plan”. And so they do, even though they know (and we should know) that this is mostly hot air.

Again, better intelligence and coordinated police work can do something, probably a lot, to mitigate the risk of more attacks. But we cannot expect perfection.

### **Living with the threat**

***So, are we going to live with this latent terror threat indefinitely? The answer is yes.*** Until at least some individuals scattered here and there in the United States (and elsewhere) will be inspired by crazy ideologies that order violence as the best tool to bring about a new order finally based on the True Faith, we should expect more terror plots.

Even if we managed to destroy the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria very quickly, this would not kill –for good– the crazy

ideology that breeds terrorists and new terror threats.

*A different version of this article was published in [www.globalpi.org](http://www.globalpi.org), the website of the Global Policy Institute, a Washington DC think tank.*

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## **Orlando Shooting Strengthens Trump's Position On Muslims**

**WASHINGTON** – In a U.S. presidential campaign that is and will be dominated by emotional slogans and over simplified narratives, the horrible Orlando shooting (50 people killed, 53 injured) by the son of Afghan immigrants will be used by Donald Trump as clear evidence that his tough anti-Muslim and anti-immigrants positions are the only way to protect American lives from the supreme existential threat of Islamic terrorism.

### **Muslim killer?**

This killing rampage (the worst in U.S. history) planned and executed by Omar Mateen, 29, will be used as a powerful argument to severely restrict immigration, ban refugees from the Middle East, place a hold on all would be visitors/immigrants of Muslim faith, and redouble U.S. military efforts against ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

This sounds absurd. However horrible, this is only one episode, orchestrated it seems by just one person. No, America is not facing armies of domestic Islamic terrorists. But in this political climate, for almost half of America, this is not over reaction. This sounds logical and rational. And you can bet that this is the argument that will be made. And you

can also bet that Donald Trump will lead this charge, with the clear expectation that his anti-Muslim policies will help him get to the White House.

### **We are at war**

Here is the “truth” according to the Trump/anti-immigrant camp. As we all know, a large part of the Muslim world is at war with us. We are the innocent targets and victims. The violent acts perpetrated on U.S. soil against Americans by Muslims, including Muslims born in the U.S. who became radicals as young adults, is evidence that we are facing a mortal danger and that the U.S. Government (led as we know by weak and incompetent Democrats who simply do not want to acknowledge that Islamic Terrorism declared war on us) is not doing enough to protect the American people against a mounting terror threat.

To those who argue that these scattered violent episodes –however gruesome– do not constitute evidence of a massive, ongoing campaign to kill Americans, the anti-immigrants reply forcefully that this is just the beginning. They “know” that there are hundreds, possibly thousands of would-be terrorists warming up and getting ready to unleash their vicious attacks against innocent Americans.

### **We need to protect ourselves**

As I said, this is a presidential campaign that is and will be dominated by over simplifications and raw emotions. Forget about balanced and nuanced positions. If most Americans buy the idea that “the terrorists are already among us and are ready to kill us all” and that for this very reason we need drastic measures to protect our lives, then Donald Trump gains a powerful edge in this unfolding race for the White House.

He is the Tough Guy who will have the courage to take the drastic steps that will finally get us protection from this looming terror threat. He will do his very best to paint

Hillary Clinton and the entire Democratic establishment as weak on terrorism and national defense and therefore unfit to govern America.

### **We need a determined leader**

And the Tough Guy will propose tough responses. If this includes undertaking measures that may infringe on the civil rights of law-abiding, innocent Muslims who have nothing to do with terror plots, so be it. Better safe than sorry. They are Muslims, and therefore by definition suspects. The priority here is to protect Americans.

### **Voice of reason?**

Hillary Clinton will try to be the balanced voice of reason. But this presidential campaign has nothing to do with reason. And fear of terrorism is the quintessential emotional issue. It is mostly about fear of unknown dangers that are easily magnified by those who want you to believe that this is the number one existential threat confronting all of us.

Those who support Donald Trump believe that in this hour of supreme danger only a New Leader, not tainted by the corrupt ways of Washington, DC, will create a new era of security, self-confidence, prosperity and eventually regained national prestige.

Are these the feelings of the majority of Americans? In a few months we shall find out.