



**Statement before the House Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy and the Environment**

***“The Importance of Transatlantic Cooperation  
During the COVID-19 Pandemic.”***

A Testimony by:

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Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Kinzinger, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. These are difficult times for our country, but I have no doubt that we are stronger when we work together as a nation and with our Allies and partners.

Our European Allies and partners are vital to the United States' economic welfare and national security. In 2018, U.S. goods and services trade with the European Union (EU) totaled approximately \$1.3 trillion.<sup>1</sup> Europe is host to some 68,000 U.S. troops.<sup>2</sup> Whether safeguarding an open and fair-trade system, deterring our adversaries, or assisting one another in counterterrorism and law enforcement operations, our European Allies and partners magnify U.S. reach, power, and legitimacy around the globe.

The importance of this cooperation is even more critical when it comes to transnational threats such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Much like climate change, the virus does not respect national borders. Equally, it cannot be managed by any one country or organization alone. A coordinated, sustained response is essential both to combatting the virus and managing the economic recovery.

In the early days of the crisis, the immediate – and perhaps natural – instinct was for every nation to act for itself. In Europe as in the United States, individual countries, states, regions, and cities instituted their own quarantine rules and travel restrictions, and worked aggressively to procure the essential Personal Protective Equipment and medical supplies.

Yet the imperative of a coordinated approach quickly materialized. NATO sprung to action, utilizing its Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EARDDC) to coordinate requests for, and offers of, assistance from Allies and partners, matching donors with providers.<sup>3</sup> The Alliance then leveraged its impressive logistics network to draw on countries' national and pooled airlift capabilities to transport the materials.<sup>4</sup>

The EU, which has no mandate for public health, nevertheless found ways to assist its member states with coordination and funding in the pandemic. The European Commission, for example, is pooling information from all EU member states regarding each country's reopening status,<sup>5</sup> Covid-19 levels of risk, health requirements, and numbers of cases and deaths.<sup>6</sup> The EU has also played an important funding role, from the highly publicized global fundraising event for vaccines and treatments (€15.9 billion raised),<sup>7</sup> to a pilot program of €150 million to support the development of game-changing innovations to tackle Covid-19.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, what was and remains lacking is U.S. leadership.

The current Administration has not assumed the global leadership role that the United States has traditionally played in responding to pandemics. Both President George W. Bush during the AIDS and SARS crises, and President Barack Obama during the H1N1, Zika, and Ebola epidemics, rallied countries to mount an international collaborative response.

In contrast, this Administration has adopted a competitive, go-it-alone approach to handling the pandemic. This includes attempts in April to intercept shipments of masks and medical supplies

meant for other countries.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the President's unilateral announcement in March of a travel ban against 26 European countries (but not, initially, the United Kingdom) occurred without prior consultation with the European Union.<sup>10</sup> More recently, the United States declined to participate in the various international coalitions that are pooling resources and risk in the global race to develop a vaccine, many of them under European leadership. The administration has also shown little interest in assisting developing countries, having thus far failed to spend more than 75% of the \$1.6 billion in emergency assistance that Congress allocated in March.<sup>11</sup>

Equally troubling, the U.S. approach to the pandemic has become part of the broader geopolitical competition with China. This tension has caused paralysis in the UN Security Council as when the U.S. blocked a resolution calling for a global ceasefire over a reference to the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>12</sup> Rather than work with Allies and partners to hold the WHO accountable and demand a more effective response, the Administration in April precipitously halted funding to the WHO and announced the U.S. intent to withdraw from the organization at this critical time. This is yet another blow to U.S.-European cooperation. Shocked yet not surprised, our European Allies and partners see this as a continuation of the U.S. Administration's penchant for unilaterally withdrawing from its international commitments, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Paris Climate Accords, and Treaty on Open Skies.

This lack of U.S. leadership and failure to cooperate with our European Allies and partners is problematic on several accounts. First, it creates a gap for our adversaries to exploit. China and Russia have eagerly stepped forward to ship supplies to those in need and project an image as responsible global leaders. Second, it undermines trust in the United States as a reliable partner. This will have consequences the next time we ask our Allies and partners to join us in an operation or support us on a policy initiative. Finally, it hampers the global recovery from the pandemic. Insofar as the United States accounts for a quarter of global GDP, the pace and extent of the recovery of European Allies and partners is linked to our own. And as long as the virus is circulating anywhere in the world, U.S. interests will remain insecure.

Meanwhile, other security and defense challenges have not subsided. In fact, many are accelerating as Allies and adversaries alike try to exploit perceived attention gaps to advance their aims.

Among Allies, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban used the pandemic to push through a bill giving him broad emergency powers for an indefinite period of time.<sup>13</sup> And in Poland, the ruling Law and Justice party exploited the crisis to create an uneven playing field for the upcoming Presidential election by banning public events, in effect making campaigning impossible for all except the incumbent.<sup>14</sup>

Turning to adversaries, NATO has seen an uptick in cyberattacks and disinformation during Covid-19.<sup>15</sup> Early in the pandemic, Russian media suggested (falsely) that a British facility created the coronavirus and deliberately planted it in China. Subsequent Russian disinformation attempts blamed the source of the outbreak on U.S. and European elites and its spread on the United States' military, in some cases amplifying lies from Beijing. Seeking to undermine support for NATO, Russia's Twitter army suggested that DEFENDER 2020, a planned NATO exercise that has been scaled back significantly in light of the pandemic, would spread the virus

throughout Europe. Since January, the EU's European External Action Service has logged more than 110 cases of Russian disinformation.<sup>16</sup> The stories aim to exacerbate the crisis by sowing distrust in Western countries' health care systems, leaders, and scientific experts.

Russia is also pushing boundaries on the conventional front. Three times in the week of March 7, Russia flew its T-160 strategic bombers over the Barents, Norwegian, and North Seas and its Tu-142 anti-submarine warfare aircraft from north of the Kola peninsula to south of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap.<sup>17</sup> While the Russian jets were met promptly by Norwegian F-16 and F-35 aircraft or British Typhoons assigned to NATO's Quick Reaction Alert, it is clear Russia hoped to take advantage of less-contested airspace in order to probe farther south than in the past. Such maneuvers are an irresponsible and unwelcome distraction at a time when national governments, including Russia's, should be focused on managing the pandemic.

In light of such provocations, it is vital that the United States maintain its presence in Europe, and that NATO continue to reinforce its deterrence and defense posture. The investments enabled by the U.S. European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) – and I would like to thank Congress for its consistent support of this initiative – coupled with complementary investments by NATO and individual Allies, ensure that NATO is ready to deter and defend against the full range of threats.

Equally important is the NATO resilience agenda. NATO's Civil Emergency Protection Cell has conducted resilience assessments on NATO members' civil preparedness to withstand the Covid-19 and similar events. The next step is an update of NATO's baseline requirements for resilience, covering critical sectors such as energy, telecommunications, and supply chain security.<sup>18</sup>

Sustaining this progress will not be easy. Prior to the pandemic, 2020 was on track to be the sixth consecutive year of growth in NATO defense spending. Currently, nine Allies meet the Wales Defense Investment Pledge commitment to “aim to move toward” spending 2 percent of GDP on defense by 2024, and 16 meet goal of spending 20 percent of GDP on procurement.<sup>19</sup>

While NATO members' defense budgets are likely to remain stable in the near term, the economic damage created by Covid-19 will likely create downward pressure on defense spending in the medium-term. Modernization is likely to suffer as well as large procurements, which may face delays or reduced buys. In time, this could encourage more joint procurements or pooling of research and development funds with and among our European Allies and partners.

Finally, a note on China. To some extent, the pandemic has moved Europe closer to the U.S. view on China. While Europeans still do not share the U.S. perception of China as a military threat, they are waking up to the dangers of China's unfair trade practices and anti-democratic policies. More overt disinformation efforts by China to cover up, and then deflect blame for the pandemic, have exposed its authoritarian tactics and raised questions about its motives and trustworthiness. This may have been a consideration in the United Kingdom's recent decision to reduce Huawei's access to the UK market to zero by 2023.<sup>20</sup> In addition to NATO's ongoing discussion on standards for communications and critical infrastructure, the United States and EU

should work together on a transatlantic approach to align standards and rules, for example foreign acquisitions.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I want to leave you with three recommendations:

1. First, I would encourage the United States to join many of its European Allies and partners in a global Covid-19 vaccine effort that would ensure equitable access to a safe and effective vaccine as soon as it becomes available. Participating in this global effort would complement – not replace or compete with – Operation Warp Speed’s aim to immunize and protect the American people. Supporting the joint efforts of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI,) and the World Health Organization is in the interest of the American people, who remain at risk as long as coronavirus is circulating anywhere in the world. The door remains open for the United States to join these international efforts, and it is in our national interest to do so.
2. Second, I would urge you to continue your support for the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) and for a robust U.S. force presence in Europe. EDI has demonstrated that when the United States leads, NATO follows., NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States and Poland, its Tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea, and improvements to its command structure and readiness targets are testament to this. And U.S. forces forward in Europe are not only for the defense of Europe, but for U.S. power projection globally.
3. Finally, I would recommend the resumption of annual U.S.-EU Summits to set a broad transatlantic agenda as well as regular working group meetings focused on relevant issues. On the latter, U.S.-EU dialogues on health, economic recovery, and China would be particularly timely just now. In fact, Secretary Pompeo recently accepted EU High Representative Borrell’s proposal for a U.S.-EU Dialogue on China.<sup>21</sup> Among other things, this could explore possibilities for greater coordination on foreign ownership and vetting laws; building supply chain resilience; and setting security standards for emerging technologies, communications, and infrastructure.

Thank you for your time and for the honor of joining you today.

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