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NATO to Trump: Here's Your Marching Orders

By Jason Ditz
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The election of President-elect Donald Trump in the United States has sent a shockwave through NATO, and fearful of losing US support for their latest costly attempt to return to a Cold War-era has set the alliance's leadership on a new campaign of hyping the need for an anti-Russia campaign, with Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg publishing a new article playing up the idea of NATO needing to be ready to mobilize against Russia in Eastern Europe, above and beyond the 300,000 troops already there.

Stoltenberg also addressed a news conference during which he pointedly warned against Trump's talk of making US military force in Europe conditional on European funding, insisting that all NATO members have to provide "absolute and unconditional" security support for one another.

Stoltenberg insisted that the only time Article 5 had been invoked by NATO was to support the United States after 9/11, which led to an alliance-wide invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. While true, alliance members have constantly raised the specter of doing so to suck the US into major wars, including Turkey raising the possibility of doing so against Syria.

During the campaign, Trump expressed major doubts about the relevance of NATO in a post-Cold War world, comments which fueled considerable anger from officials deeply invested in the recent military buildups in Eastern Europe in recent years, and a major backlash which saw the rest of NATO crossing their fingers for a Clinton victory that ultimately did not come.

Trump continued to emphasize the need for European nations to pay more of the cost for their defense, saying the United States could no longer do so. This was not well-received in Europe and is likely to continue to be a source of tension between NATO and the incoming Trump Administration, with NATO determined to maintain the status quo.

Trump is not likely to go along to get along with NATO, and the fact that so much of the campaign centered around Clinton et al calling him a Russian “puppet” is likely to add to his skepticism about the need to continue throwing troops at Latvia and Estonia nearly 30 years after the Soviet Union crumbled.

Exactly how much this NATO backlash amounts to remains to be seen, as historically the United States has heavily driven NATO policy, and it’s not at all clear how readily Stoltenberg can rally the rest of the alliance toward major pressure on a US government for not playing ball.