

NATO: Revisiting American Commitment

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Abstract

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been in existence since 1949. Since its inception the alliance's value to the United States has been questioned. The United States has shouldered a disproportionate amount of the burden in cost and capability. There are serious challenges to the future of NATO. Level of ambition, national caveats, lost capabilities, the Turkey-Cyprus conflict, European Union Common Defense Security Policy and austerity may conspire to render NATO militarily irrelevant. The NATO alliance has failed to adapt and reform to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The strategic benefit to the United States may no longer be worth the commitment to the alliance. The U.S. should reevaluate its commitment and consider bilateral relationships as well as decreasing its troop levels and locations on the European continent.

NATO: Revisiting American Commitment

Tough choices lie ahead affecting every part of our government, and during such times, scrutiny inevitably falls on the cost of overseas commitments – from foreign assistance to military basing, support and guarantees.

—Robert M. Gates
U.S. Secretary of Defense

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The value of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the United States has been questioned repeatedly since it was founded by the Treaty of Washington in April of 1949. What has changed that makes the topic worth revisiting now is that the original threat is gone, membership has expanded, operations have been conducted away from Europe and a wave of austerity has swept through the member nations. The United States has shouldered a disproportionate amount of the burden of the other nations for many years. That percentage and cost has continued to rise.

During the Cold War, the U.S. covered fifty percent of NATO's overall defense expenditures. By 2011 that level had increased to seventy five percent.¹ At the same time that the U.S. was shouldering the increased burden of underwriting Europe's security, the Europeans have independently been executing military and civilian out of area missions, slashing their defense budgets and failing to reform the alliance to a changing environment. An organization that can not adapt in a twenty year period will not be relevant nor survive in the 21st century. The question to be addressed then becomes, is the cost of underwriting European security still worth the strategic benefit to the United States?

The First Article 5

Article 5

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 selfdefence 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..

Immediately following the terrorist attacks upon the United States on September 11, 2001 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was presented with an opportunity after fifty years to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, its founding document. Many at NATO headquarters felt 9/11 could showcase that the Alliance could actually come to the aid of its largest member and chief financier of the alliance, the United States. The first road block to a declaration was the Belgian government which was locked in a bitter internal debate and couldn't seem to make a decision to authorize or not. Lord Robertson, the NATO Secretary General, personally intervened effectively shaming the Belgians into going along with the Article 5 declaration. NATO operates using a consensus model and any single country can block action. Next, NATO lawyers intervened with an opinion that Article 5 only applied to aggression from outside NATO countries and it wasn't clear at that point if that was the case with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Instead of waiting, the Alliance boldly declared a provisional Article 5 pending determination that the attacks emanated from outside the U.S. Following the North Atlantic Council meeting of 12 September, the press release announcing the decision to invoke the provisional Article 5 declared "our message to the people of the United States is that we are with you."²

On October 9 NATO finally made good on its declaration by deploying airborne early warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft. Additionally, NATO countries cobbled together a naval squadron consisting of a ship from the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey. For the first time in the Alliance's history Article 5 was declared and operationalized. Perhaps a mere symbolic gesture by the Europeans but a milestone nonetheless.

The Europeans were pleased that they managed to invoke Article 5 to demonstrate unity with an ally that had been audaciously attacked. Unfortunately, their efforts were not necessarily appreciated on this side of the Atlantic. Assistant Secretary for Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, went to a meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) in September of 2001 where he reportedly told the Allies that the United States was going to go it alone in Afghanistan because it would be too difficult to integrate the Alliance's forces. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, attended a NAC meeting in December 2001. When he was asked to allow NATO to assist the United States in Afghanistan, Rumsfeld reportedly said that it wouldn't be necessary because the United States troops would be home the following March. He did however go on to say that there might be a role for NATO to clean up in Afghanistan.³ The message from the Americans was clear. They didn't want or need NATO's help. The rationale for refusal supposedly was that for this fight the United States would need to "rely on extraordinary capacities: special forces on horseback integrating seamlessly with satellite communications and precision guided bombs and missiles delivered from tens of thousands of vertical feet and many hundreds of horizontal miles away"⁴ Whether valid or not, the decision in retrospect appears to have been short sighted. Kurt Volker,

former U.S. ambassador to NATO, posits that it was this decision by the United States in 2001 to set aside the Article 5 declaration that has led to the decline in NATO level of ambition and capability that will be discussed in this paper.

Dollar Values

Figuring out the true costs of the U.S. contributions to NATO can be quite difficult. The NATO members contribute to the alliance in a number of ways. Foremost is their support for their national forces that conduct NATO missions. These forces are funded by the individual countries via their defense budgets. Another avenue for contributions is bilateral funding that countries provide to prospective new alliance members. Still another method of contribution is through what is called 'common funds.'

National contributions to NATO common funds are assessed to countries in the form of a percentage of the NATO budget. Those assessments are based upon a member nation's Gross National Income (GNI) and other factors like ability to pay, benefits derived from the project, benefits from building the project and other political and economic factors. These common funds support three different budget lines that are coordinated through NATO headquarters in Brussels; Civil Budget, Military Budget and Security Investment Program. The NATO civil budget supports the headquarters in Brussels and the civilian staff which is responsible for policy planning of operations and capabilities, liaison with non-alliance partner countries, and public diplomacy aimed at building support for the alliance. It covers costs associated with standard administrative tasks as well as program activities like public information, civil emergency planning and the science committee. The U.S. contribution to the civil budget for FY2012 was \$82.4 million which was based on an assessment of roughly 21.74 percent. The contribution is paid from the State Department's budget (Contributions to International Organizations).⁵

The NATO military budget supports the headquarters in Mons, Belgium and subordinate commands in different geographical areas including Allied Command Operations (ACO) in Casteau, Belgium and Allied Command Transformation (ACT) in Norfolk, VA. The funds pay for the military staff, international military headquarters, Airborne Early Warning and Control System (AWACS) fleet operations and the NATO pipeline. The military budget is reviewed each year and the U.S. Ambassador to NATO and the Secretary of Defense are responsible for negotiating the cost share. The U.S. contribution to the military budget for FY2012 was \$449.9 million based on an assessment of roughly 25.15 percent. The contribution is paid from the Department of the Army's Operations and Maintenance account (Support of Other Nations).⁶ The NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP) supports military construction projects as well as on-going operational requirements. Projects include Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence (C4I) hardware and software, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, storage facilities for ammunition, fuel and equipment. This budget line is more politically sensitive than the others as it frequently involves construction projects within member countries. Attempts have been made to formalize the assessment rate to member nations for the NSIP budget but have stalled because of the consensus requirement. The U.S. contribution to the security investment program budget for FY2012 was \$264.4 million based on an assessment of roughly 22.2 percent. The contribution is funded annually through military construction appropriations. The collective FY2012 contributions for the United States for the civil budget, military budget and NSIP amounted to approximately \$796.3 million.⁷

In the grand scheme of things, \$796.3 million doesn't seem like a lot of money. There is, however, much more. NATO employs approximately fourteen thousand military and civilians across dozens of European locations and two North American locations. Many of those employees' salaries are paid for by the individual NATO members. Therefore teasing out the true costs of U.S. support to NATO is a bit challenging.

The greatest cost to NATO members is the cost of a country's troops committed to a NATO operation. NATO members are responsible for paying those costs as there are no NATO standing forces. In personnel costs alone, the numbers can be staggering. The Government Accountability Office uses the figure of \$125,000 to approximate the cost of an active duty service member for a year.⁸ There are approximately eighty thousand Department of Defense personnel stationed in Europe which amounts to \$10 billion a year in manpower costs alone. Those numbers don't reflect training, equipping and infrastructure costs. Fiscal constraints are already having an impact on U.S. force posture. In January 2012 the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced plans to reduce U.S. Army forces in Europe. The announced reductions include the removal of two heavy brigade combat teams, a corps headquarters, and various combat support and service support units, and would affect about 10,000 soldiers saving more than \$1.25 billion in manpower costs.⁹ Given that the two brigades and other organizations will be eliminated from the Army's force structure, the savings from not equipping those soldiers is forecasted to save additional billions.

National Caveats

National caveats are another stressor that challenges the military effectiveness of the NATO alliance. National caveats are restrictions that a particular nation places upon

the use of its forces. Those restrictions can be official or unofficial. While restrictions on the use of troops can certainly be frustrating, at least official restrictions are written down and disseminated to leadership. The unofficial restrictions can be most damaging as they usually come to light at an operationally inopportune time. National caveats are certainly not new in multinational operations. At times even the U.S. has imposed them upon the use of their forces.

What is new is the pervasive use of these caveats to the point that they are excessive. A member country may be able to highlight its token presence in an operation but the commander is left with forces that are combat ineffective with “virtually no prospect that their soldiers would fire a shot in anger.”¹⁰ This situation in turn reduces the overall morale of the force. In Afghanistan, the restrictive caveats led to the coining of the phrase “rations consumer” for soldiers of certain countries that were not permitted to fight but were viewed as a drain on resources. It certainly leads to the requirement to have more personnel in the overall force because the commander will be prohibited from using all the troops in the command at his discretion.¹¹ This is an operational level concern with a strategic dimension.

When a country limits how its forces can be employed within the alliance, it increases the risk to the personnel of the countries that do not have restrictions. National caveats within the NATO alliance are a reflection of the political will of the member nations. They are also a measure of the willingness of those nations to share in the risk of a particular operation. An inequality in the level of risk that the member countries’ soldiers are exposed to leads to unequal burden sharing. Burden sharing after all is the reason for creating alliances and coalitions in the first place. This unequal

burden sharing of risk is yielding a two-tiered alliance. Those that are willing to accept risk and those that are not.

Expeditionary Europe

The European Union (EU) is now capable of and should be providing for its own collective security. In fact, the EU has put in place structures that mimic much of what exists in the NATO structure. In the wake of the failure of EU diplomacy to stop the atrocities in the Balkans, the EU established a security arm in 1999 called the European Security Defense Policy. In 2009, the organizations name was changed to the Common Security Defense Policy (CSDP). At the same time the EU added a diplomatic corps called the European External Action Service (EEAS). Both organizations were brought under the responsibility of a single EU official, the High Representative for Foreign Policy. The CSDP now conducts out of area missions. Those missions are conducted most often on the basis of a United Nations (UN) mandate or with the agreement of the host country. Some of the missions are military in nature with themes of peacekeeping, crisis management and humanitarian assistance. Others are more civilian in nature with themes of police training, judicial training and security sector reform.¹² There has been some criticism that the preponderance of these missions focus on the application of 'soft power' versus that of hard power. That being said, the CSDP has successfully completed many of the missions that it has undertaken. Those missions have exposed similar gaps in capabilities that NATO itself has experienced; strategic airlift, strategic sealift, command and control and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. That is not surprising given the CSDP is not a mutually exclusive pool of personnel or capabilities from which the twenty one common member countries can select.

The soft power proclivity of the CSDP and the hard power locus of NATO have led some to call for more cooperation between the two organizations. In fact, in 2003, the EU and NATO agreed to what has been called the “Berlin Plus” agreement which allows EU-led military missions access to NATO assets and planning capabilities.¹³ That cooperation has had mixed results. In 2003, the EU along with NATO successfully pressured rebel forces and the government of Macedonia to agree to a peace accord which prevented war. In Kosovo, at the military level, informal agreements allow EU and NATO personnel to cooperate to provide stability. However, the CSDP impact has been marginal at best in both Iraq (2005) and Afghanistan (2007). The missions there have been very modest police training efforts. The small efforts there may be a reflection of the unwillingness of EU member states to engage in more robust crisis management operations in non-permissive environments or reaction to the political friction from the United States decision to go to war in Iraq.¹⁴

Despite cooperation informally at the military level there remains serious friction preventing broader cooperation between CSDP and NATO. The manifestations of that friction are evidenced in the: inability to agree on logistical support to African Union peacekeepers in Darfur, inability to work together effectively in Afghanistan, competition related to leadership of international anti- piracy efforts, imbalance in defense spending by some high spending NATO countries and several low defense spending EU members and continued blockage of improved formal cooperation due to the Turkey-Cyprus conflict.¹⁵ This last friction point is arguably the most serious impediment to EU cooperation with NATO. The last time the EU and NATO cooperated via the “Berlin

Plus” agreement was at the start of Operation Althea in 2008, the peace enforcement mission to Bosnia –Herzegovina.

The Europeans have demonstrated through their creation and funding of the CSDP that they are indeed interested in expeditionary security independent of NATO. Their troop commitments further emphasize their sincerity. The CSDP is constructed utilizing the troops and assets that would otherwise be contributions to NATO missions. The CSDP and NATO both conduct out of area missions but are prohibited from officially collaborating. The CSDP forces and assets can’t be used by NATO when they are engaged with the CSDP. This by definition is inefficient. Why then is there a need for both organizations?

Turkey-Cyprus

The Turkey – Cyprus issue and the ancillary issue of Turkey’s admission to the European Union threaten future cooperation between the EU and NATO. This dispute has its roots in the 1974 Greek- backed coup and subsequent Turkish invasion that resulted in the division of the island into the Greek-Cypriot Republic in the south and the Turkish-Cypriot zone in the north. Turkey, a NATO member since 1952 with the second largest military in the alliance, was informally invited to apply for membership to the EU in 1999 and formalized that application in 2005. The Turkish application has not progressed. Cyprus (Greek-Cypriot Republic) however, was admitted to the EU in 2007. Cyprus is a member of the EU but not NATO. Turkey is a NATO member but not an EU member. The EU CSDP may use NATO assets under the “Berlin Plus” agreement with the consent of the NATO members.¹⁶ Turkey routinely withholds that consent. Turkey further objects to Cyprus’ participation in NATO-EU meetings on the grounds that Cyprus is not a member of NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) and therefore has no

security relationship with the alliance which precludes its receipt of classified information.¹⁷ In turn, Cyprus blocks Turkish participation in the European Defense Agency and limits Turkey's relationship with the CSDP as well as prohibits "new chapters for negotiation" regarding Turkey's accession to the EU.¹⁸ Cyprus may be the most public face associated with the blocking that Turkey receives from the Europeans but there are other countries that withhold support to Turkey namely France and Germany. Both of these countries withheld their consent in NATO for a request by Turkey to receive air defense missiles to protect itself from a retaliatory attack in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq.¹⁹ These larger countries, along with Cyprus, continue to block a critically important ally with seventy four million citizens, a GDP of \$794 billion, or 1.3 percent of the world's GDP and the second largest regional military force from admission to the EU.²⁰ The situation manifests even greater incredulity as CSDP and NATO with offices only miles from one another in Brussels are prohibited from officially speaking with each other.

Recently, there has been one step forward and one step back for the Turkey-Cyprus issue. The step forward is the deployment of Patriot missile batteries to Turkey following a request to NATO. The United States, Germany and Netherlands have agreed to send two batteries each. The batteries are emplaced to intercept any further rockets being launched into Turkey from Syria. The step backward is the collapse of the two year intense Cyprus reunification negotiations that included several meetings between the U.N. Secretary General, the President of the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot leader.²¹

Even though this seems to be an EU issue it has ramifications for NATO. Turkey is incredibly important to the NATO alliance. First, due to its stature as having the second largest military in the alliance and the second largest military in the Middle East. Since the United States has announced its 'rebalancing' to the Pacific Region, it is only logical that the next largest military in the alliance will be called upon to shoulder more of the burden. Second, Turkey provides a certain legitimacy to the NATO organization that is sometimes perceived to be under the control of the United States. Those perceptions also include the characterization that NATO is a Christian organization increasingly hostile to Muslims. When Turkey participates in NATO operations those criticisms are muted. With the proliferation of out of area operations that take place in locations with Muslim populations, it is to the benefit of NATO and the EU as well, to have among its membership a country where both Islam and democracy flourish. It is in the long term security interest of the Europeans to admit the Turks. The Turkish military is too big and provides necessary legitimacy for the Europeans. The current situation is another example of the unwillingness of the Europeans to resolve longstanding issues. The result is the disaffection of the largest military in Europe.

Expanded Membership-Decreased Contributions

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 essentially removed the main threat to European security and the central reason for the creation of the alliance. Since then our European allies have been 'free-riding' at the expense of the American taxpayer. Additionally, there was an infusion of membership by central and eastern European countries to get into the NATO alliance following the Soviet collapse. "By 2004, ten former members of the Warsaw Pact had been admitted and these were joined in 2009 by Albania and Croatia."²² These countries were astute and played the game just as

their Western European cousins had been playing for decades. They all temporarily boosted their defense expenditures to gain admission to the alliance by showing they reached the 2 percent of GDP spent on defense threshold. However, by 2010 none of them were spending the requisite 2 percent and half of them were closer to 1 percent.

The European states were cutting their defense budgets drastically following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Clearly the burden sharing message had not been received by the Europeans. The only way Europe will refocus its priorities is if the United States no longer pays the bill. The United States is currently invested in NATO, to a level that is beyond comfort and sustainability. This situation is a symptom of “American grand strategy being misaligned with the nation’s financial means.”²³

German Leadership

Germany is no longer down. East and West Germany were unified in 1990. The German economy is the fifth largest in the world and the largest in Europe. In fact, Germany has emerged to lead the reform efforts aimed at keeping the Euro zone solvent. The Germans are dictating the terms and reform measures to the floundering countries that hope to receive loans to keep themselves solvent.²⁴

While their economic rise has been impressive the German political-military leadership has been a disappointment. Germany’s abstention on the UN vote for operations in Libya raised questions about their reliability to the other members of the NATO alliance. That abstention was followed by an order from the German Defense Minister to remove aircrews from the NATO AWACS planes monitoring the Libyan no-fly zone, a project in which the Germans were the lead nation. In yet another retreat from stepping up to take on security issues, “the budget committee of the Bundestag, the lower house of the German parliament, refused to approve the German share of a joint

purchase of Global Hawk drones that were to become part of a new ground reconnaissance system.” Additionally, attendees to the 2012 NATO Defense Planning Symposium were concerned to learn that following the latest Bundeswehr reforms, only 10,000 of 185,000 German troops would be available for use on foreign missions. At the same time, there are no plans to cut German military capabilities. The other alliance members have serious doubts regarding Germany’s commitment to use its military to meet the security interests of NATO. The lack of will on the part of the largest European economy to use its military or to fund pooling and sharing projects is a major challenge to the continued viability of the alliance.²⁵ It is clear that Germany is not anywhere near to paying its fair share. They have backed away from a sound sharing opportunity. Additionally, their reliability has been called into question. This behavior is not demonstrative of the leadership expected from a country with the “size, geography and prosperity” of Germany.²⁶ Germany will need to increase its profile within the alliance if NATO is expected to survive.

What Constitutes an Attack?

On April 27, 2007, The Estonian government removed a controversial World War II memorial known as the ‘Bronze Soldier’ which commemorated Russian war dead, from the Tallinn city center. Three days later it was reinstalled in a nearby cemetery. The Russians had previously warned Estonians of “disastrous consequences” if the statue were removed. There were riots and violence by ethnic Russians, who make up a quarter of Estonia’s population, following the statue’s removal. Just as the clean-up in Tallinn concluded; the next wave of attacks began.²⁷ Around one million computers hijacked and commanded to bombard Estonian computer networks with requests for data so far beyond the normal levels that servers were brought to a standstill. The

Denial of Service attacks were complemented with pro Russian graffiti and messages on Estonian government websites. What followed was a twenty-two day siege against the websites of government, parliament, political parties, banks, internet service providers, newspapers and telecommunications companies. The small country, a NATO member, was effectively crippled. “Never before had an entire country been a digital target and the government forced to defend its population and commerce in a cyber war.”²⁸

The Estonian President, Foreign Minister and Defense Minister raised the issue with NATO seeking an Article 5 declaration. They had joined NATO for the alliance’s protection against Russia and now they needed it. NATO’s response “at present, NATO does not define cyber-attacks as a clear military action. This means that the provisions of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty ...will not automatically be extended to the attacked country.”²⁹ NATO was able to camouflage its lack of will to confront the Russians with nuance. First, the identity of the perpetrators was “ambiguous” and not attributable to a defined number of computers. Second, NATO did not consider attacks by cyber terrorists as armed attacks. Although, in the past when it was politically expedient, the alliance was able to view attacks by terrorists using commercial airliners as Article 5 worthy.³⁰ The failure to come to the aid of Estonia was yet another example of NATO not adapting to address a changing environment.

Adversary or Friend?

The lack of will by the NATO alliance to confront Russia may be best explained by a division in the alliance itself between “Old Europe” and “New Europe” first identified by U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. “Old Europe” or Western Europe no longer sees Russia as a threat. In fact several Western European countries are selling

arms to Russia. In June of 2011 France signed a contract with Russia to provide four of its Mistral-class amphibious assault vessels, which were described as “the first ever (sales) of a significant offensive military capability by a NATO member to Russia.” France is not the only NATO country to sell arms to Russia. Italy has agreed to sell Russia dozens of the Lynx Light Multirole Armored Vehicles (LMVs) manufactured by Iveco, a Fiat subsidiary. The German defense company Rheinmetall signed a deal with Russia in November 2011 to build a \$131 million army training center in Russia’s Volga region which Rheinmetall describes as “the most advanced system of its kind worldwide.”³¹ “New Europe” or Central and Eastern European countries like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, still see Russia as a threat and were openly critical of the sales to Russia. Other NATO countries would not go on record to express their concern.³²

The arms sales by “Old Europe” to Russia suggest a type of myopia in their view toward the former adversary. These countries have certainly been aware of recent events in the Balkans and the Baltics. Perhaps there is a more insidious explanation for their collective ignorance. If these countries are aware that Russia poses a challenge to the stability of the European continent and they continue to sell them weapons they must expect some other entity will insulate them from harm. This situation is astounding. Not only are the allies not paying their fair share, they are undermining European security by assisting a potential adversary. The Europeans must take for granted that the United States, through the NATO alliance, will protect them.

Unified Protector

Operation Unified Protector, NATO’s intervention in Libya exposed the shortcomings of our alliance partners. First, despite the consensus to engage in the

conflict, only half of the member nations contributed to the fight and only eight participated in bombing missions.³³ Some of the members did not have the means to participate while others like Germany did not have the will to participate. While the British and French flew most of the air missions, it was United States equipment and personnel on day one that destroyed the Libyan air defenses launching more than one hundred Tomahawk cruise missiles. The United States supplied eighty percent of the intelligence; contributed more than one hundred targeting specialists; and provided supplemental munitions when the other allies fell short.³⁴ Additionally, the United States supplied three quarters of the aerial refueling planes.³⁵ Furthermore “shortcomings in planning, staffing, and conducting the mission” as well as improvising to adjust during the fight were detailed in a confidential NATO report, with “more than 300 pages of supporting documents” compiled by the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Center in Portugal. The report found that targeting information came mostly from individual countries and could not be shared rapidly among the members due to classification and procedural reasons. This hindered the decision making process that validated targets. The NATO command at Aviano Air Base suffered from shortages of political and legal advisors, intelligence analysts, logistics planners, linguists and targeteers.³⁶ It might be understandable that there would be capability gaps in an operation that had 14 nations working cooperatively but these deficiencies are not new. “NATO has also neglected to cultivate essential tools for military campaigns, such as intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, precision targeting, and aerial refueling -- despite nearly two decades of experience that have demonstrated their value.”³⁷ This is another example of the alliance’s failure to address well known deficiencies.

The actual cost of Unified Protector to the U.S. depends upon who you ask. According to Vice President Biden, the cost was about \$2 billion³⁸ yet Admiral Stravidis, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe puts the cost at \$1.1 billion.³⁹ Despite the relatively low cost in dollars for the U.S., it is clear that without the Americans the alliance is short on capability and capacity. The deficiencies of our allies in an operation against a third rate adversary have not gone unnoticed in the U.S. Nicholas Burns, former U.S. ambassador to NATO said “it was a concern that Europe could not mount the operation without American ordnance and surveillance.”⁴⁰

Yet another Warning

On June 10, 2011 U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates spoke to the Security and Defense Agenda (Future of NATO) in Brussels Belgium. His remarks were extremely direct and critical of the non-U.S. NATO members. He pointed out that only five of the twenty eight allies; United States, United Kingdom, France, Greece and Albania were meeting the commitment to spend the agreed upon two percent of their country’s Gross Domestic Product on Defense. Gates continued that the group suffered from a “lack of will” and “shortcomings in capabilities” that might possibly result in a “collective military irrelevance.” Finally, Secretary Gates warned,

The blunt reality is that there will be a dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress - and in the American body politic writ large – to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense. Nations apparently willing and eager for American taxpayers to assume the growing security burden left by reductions in European defense budgets.⁴¹

Those were harsh comments on behalf of the Secretary but indicative of what many Americans had been feeling for years. Since his remarks, the situation has gotten

worse. France and Turkey no longer meet the two percent requirement as of 2011⁴² so the list is down to the United States, United Kingdom and Greece. Given Greece's current austerity outlook it won't be long before the list contains just the United States and United Kingdom.

What is in it for the United States?

Certainly, Europe and NATO by extension has a strategic value to the United States. First, a secure and prosperous Europe is a vital interest. The economic benefits of the transatlantic trading partnership are vast. The United States and EU account for 50 percent of world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as 40 percent of world trade.⁴³ Second, the Soviet Union is gone but Russia still acts adversarial at times. NATO ensures that Russia remains a nuisance instead of a "direct military threat". Russia has used its control of energy to Europe as leverage and disrupted Estonian government and commerce via cyber attack. Third, Europe is of "geo-strategic" value to the United States as a base for operations in the Middle East.⁴⁴ Finally, and most importantly NATO is the forum whereby the United States "confronts diverse and difficult threats" to its security "with like-minded states who share fundamental values of democracy, human rights and rule of law."⁴⁵ It is in this capacity that the United States is able to wield its influence, albeit a limited influence, on European politics and security matters. The question then is whether the value to the United States, for the seat at NATO, is worth the cost.

At this moment in time, U.S. budgetary constraints require a scaling back of national means. The NATO alliance is one place where the United States has been 'paying' too much for what it receives in return. There are better ways to leverage our resources to achieve stability in Europe while keeping Russia in check and at the same

time possibly getting Europe to be more responsible for its own security. Since previous U.S. led efforts at NATO burden sharing reform have failed to come to fruition, more concrete actions are required. The Department of State and Department of Defense should begin negotiating with Poland and Bulgaria on a bilateral basis for airfield and basing rights. When those rights are secured, the remaining European based U.S. forces should return to the continental United States with the exception of two Brigade Combat Teams which should be relocated to Poland and Bulgaria. The leases for remaining U.S. bases in Western Europe could then be terminated. Following the announced moves, the U.S. ambassador to NATO could inform the European nations that the United States would like to remain in the alliance but would in fact consider withdrawing if the organization failed to reform. The Russians would be pleased that NATO would be experiencing internal conflict and a reduction in U.S. forces but that would be tempered given the movement of U.S. forces closer to the Russian border.

NATO reform should not require significant new means from the U.S. The goal is to actually conserve increasingly scarce U.S. resources. The plan would be challenged by the European members of NATO as they have been the beneficiaries of U.S. generosity for decades and now all but Norway are experiencing economic stress. The United States could point to its own fiscal difficulties as justification. Furthermore, declining defense expenditures in Europe, the CSDP missions out of area and the arms sales to Russia could be highlighted as evidence that the member nations perceive no threat from Russia. The greater challenge would be the effort by any Administration to achieve Congressional agreement and support. The challenge to the plan's acceptability is of a serious political nature. The United States' past requests to get

Europeans to pay their fair share have not been successful. There is little risk therefore to trying a different approach. Clearly the current fiscal situation within the US and within the Department of Defense requires a rethinking of our NATO commitment.

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