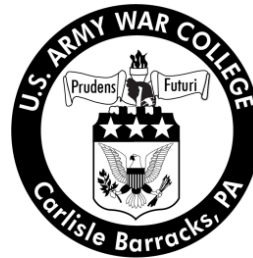


Civilian Research Project USAWC Fellow

Trans-Atlantic Implications of the Evolving U.S. Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific Region

by

Colonel Kenneth D. Chase
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2013

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by

Colonel Kenneth D. Chase
United States Army

Dr. Richard D. Hookern
NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy
Project Adviser

Mr. Philip M. Evans
U.S. Army War College Faculty Mentor

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

Abstract

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Sequestration triggered a review of the U.S. Defense Strategy's "Pivot to Asia", reviving concerns about impacts on the European security environment. The most likely alliance future: NATO remains a regionally oriented security organization unmatched within its European sphere of influence and will progressively return to its historical focus of limited operational ambition coupled with a more balanced trans-Atlantic relationship. Changes include: U.S. increases emphasis on other regions, but Europe remains essential to U.S. security strategy; U.S. reduces resources, but retains primacy within Alliance; U.S. reduces participation, but provides the key enablers; U.S. adjusts presence, but structure aligned to threats. Combined with diminished European budgets, these result in: European Allies increasingly take the lead in regional missions; As Alliance defense budgets are reduced, ambition contracts to a regional sphere of influence; Europeans won't keep pace technologically and the U.S. stays the primary source of enablers. To achieve alliance endstates, NATO must generate enough political will to implement recommendations to remain a capable fighting force operating cohesively as an Alliance to ensure the security of Europe.

Trans-Atlantic Implications of the Evolving U.S. Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific Region

The deep financial cuts triggered by the sequestration on March 1st, 2013, are forcing the United States to conduct a sweeping review of its strategic defense policy that was released over a year ago and commonly referred to as the “Pivot to Asia”.¹ As America seeks to pursue its strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region within this new era of substantial financial constraints, fresh concerns are being raised about the possible Trans-Atlantic implications any adjustments to this defense strategy will have on the European security environment.² Despite the ongoing fiscal uncertainty, long term security trends provide clarity on the most likely future for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):

NATO will remain a regionally oriented security organization unmatched within its European sphere of influence and will progressively return to its historical focus of limited operational ambition coupled with a more balanced Trans-Atlantic relationship.

As friends and foes alike pore over the evolving details of America’s rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, it is easy to become fixated on the trees, but lose sight of the larger forest. Despite the many changes expected, most of the fundamentals within NATO will either broadly remain the same or align more closely with the historical trends of the alliance. These changes, combined with diminished European defense budgets, are adding momentum to long term trends developing within NATO. Despite these challenges, NATO can achieve this objective if its member nations generate enough political will to: train and modernize the force it retains; ensure interoperability through standardization and multinational exercises; and leverage enhanced regional partnerships within a constrained operational ambition primarily limited to a European regional sphere of influence.

Historical Fundamentals of the Trans-Atlantic Link

Acknowledging the sweep of changes facing NATO, from the post-2014 mission change in Afghanistan, to the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific combined with the challenges of austerity gripping many allied nations, the historical fundamentals of the alliance remain constant. Specifically, the foundational truths of the Trans-Atlantic Link within NATO will either broadly remain the same or align more closely within the historical trends of the Alliance. These time enduring truths include the importance of Europe in the U.S. defense strategy, America's financial primacy within the alliance, innovative lead of U.S. technological, and U.S. force adjustments to align with current threats.

Increased Asia-Pacific Emphasis – But the U.S. Remains Committed to Europe

While most agree with the underlining reasons for the increased emphasis that the United States is placing on the Asia-Pacific, the DSG has understandably raised concerns within Europe. Anxiety about the original policy's terminology, specifically the term "pivot", created opportunities for misunderstanding from the start. In fact, it could be argued that one of the original sources of European concern was merely America's choice of words. Initially, when this new foreign policy was announced as a *pivot* to Asia-Pacific, many Europeans immediately pointed out that in order to *pivot* to something; you had to *pivot* away from something.³ Recognizing this concern, U.S. administration officials adjusted their wording to describe the new policy as an American *rebalance* to the Asia-Pacific. To further amplify the continued significance of their Trans-Atlantic relationship, senior U.S. officials have consistently and publically reinforced the level of importance which America places on its relationship with

European allies in NATO and the central role which Europe continues to retain in the security strategy of the United States.

From the global perspective, U.S. Vice-President Biden declared that “Europe remains America’s indispensable partner of first resort.”⁴ Focusing in on the security environment of Europe, former U.S. Secretary of State Clinton confirmed that, “The U.S. remains committed to the goal of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.”⁵ This commitment was reaffirmed at the start of President Obama’s second term when the new U.S. Secretary of State Kerry chose Europe as his first overseas destination, during which he went to some length in addressing these concerns,

Let me begin with the question of Asia and Europe, because I want to make this very clear to everybody. Last year and the year before, there were sort of questions in the minds of some people in Europe: Is the United States turning away from Europe, are we facing – more involved with Asia, etc. It used to, you know – people called it the pivot, right? What I want to make clear to you is this: We are paying attention to Asia, and so are you, and so should you. But we’re not doing it at the expense of Europe, not at all.⁶

From a security perspective, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Panetta was equally blunt in addressing the most basic security concerns of NATO Allies when he plainly affirmed, “we will maintain our commitments with Europe. We’ll maintain our Article 5 requirements. We’ll be able to deter aggression.”⁷ A few months later, NATO’s Deterrence and Defense Posture Review reconfirmed that nuclear deterrence remained an integral part of this assurance.⁸ Finally, President Obama directly addressed the importance of the alliance when he described NATO as “not simply the foundation of our Trans-Atlantic relationships, it is the cornerstone of American engagement with the world.”⁹ While these statements are both clear and consistent, budgets have

consequences and it is therefore important to look beyond the rhetoric and dig deeper into the details of expected execution.

Reduced U.S. Resources – But Retaining Financial Primacy

U.S. defense cuts imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011, and the subsequent deeper cuts of the sequestration in 2013, are clearly significant and will therefore have security consequences. However, it is worthwhile to put these cuts within the broader context of worldwide military expenditures and more specifically within the context of the NATO alliance. A quick glance at the relative size of the U.S. defense expenditure in the context of the other nations of the world shows the relative dominance of American military investments – even after sequestration (Figure 1):¹⁰

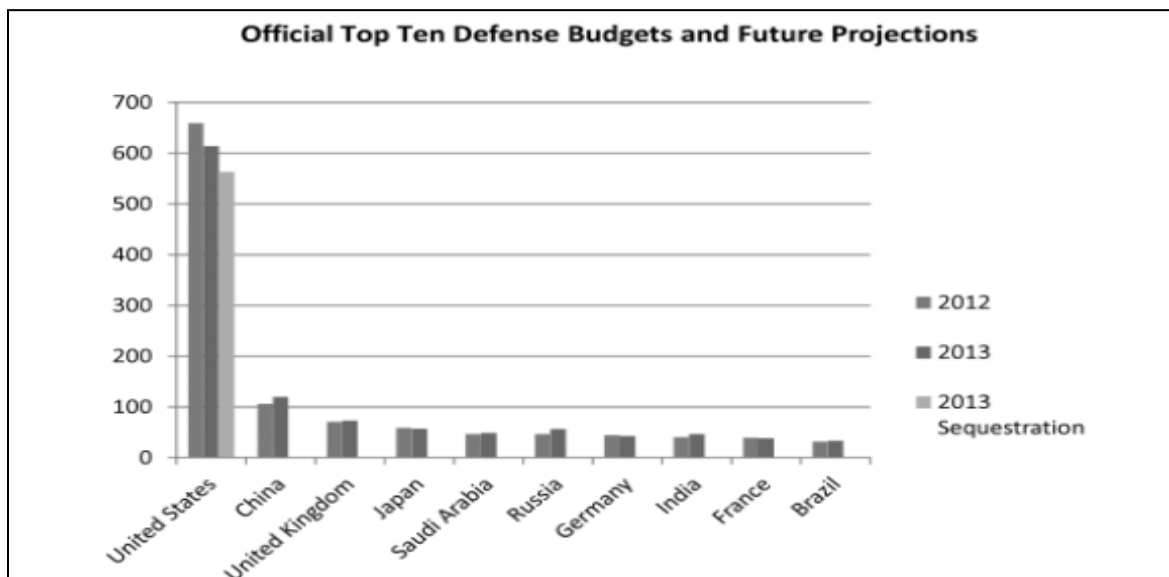


Figure 1: Top Ten Defense Budgets in U.S. Dollars (Billions)

This relative financial dominance holds true within the context of the Trans-Atlantic alliance as well. This growing trend of disparity becomes especially evident when looking beyond the fixed NATO common budget to a broader comparison of the total contributions each nation provides to all NATO operations. Considering this

broader comparison of total contributions over the 10-20 years reveals disproportionate trends that led former U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates to share with NATO leaders,

In the past, I've worried openly about NATO turning into a two-tiered alliance: Between members who specialize in "soft" humanitarian, development, peacekeeping, and talking tasks, and those conducting the "hard" combat missions. Between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership – be they security guarantees or headquarters billets – but don't want to share the risks and the costs. This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today. And it is unacceptable.¹¹

During an earlier era of more equal burden sharing, the U.S. shouldered approximately 50% of NATO contributions during the Cold War.¹² Although the wealth of Europe is higher than the United States,¹³ the American share of this burden increased to 63% of total NATO contributions by 2001.¹⁴ As recently as 2012, this one nation, in an alliance with 27 other nations, contributed a full 77% of the overall contributions within the North Atlantic alliance.¹⁵

The widening gap in burden sharing is a reflection of military expenditure trend lines from the two sides of the Atlantic. While the U.S. has reduced the size of its force by less than 1% in the decade following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, European militaries declined by over 28% during that same period (Figure 2):¹⁶

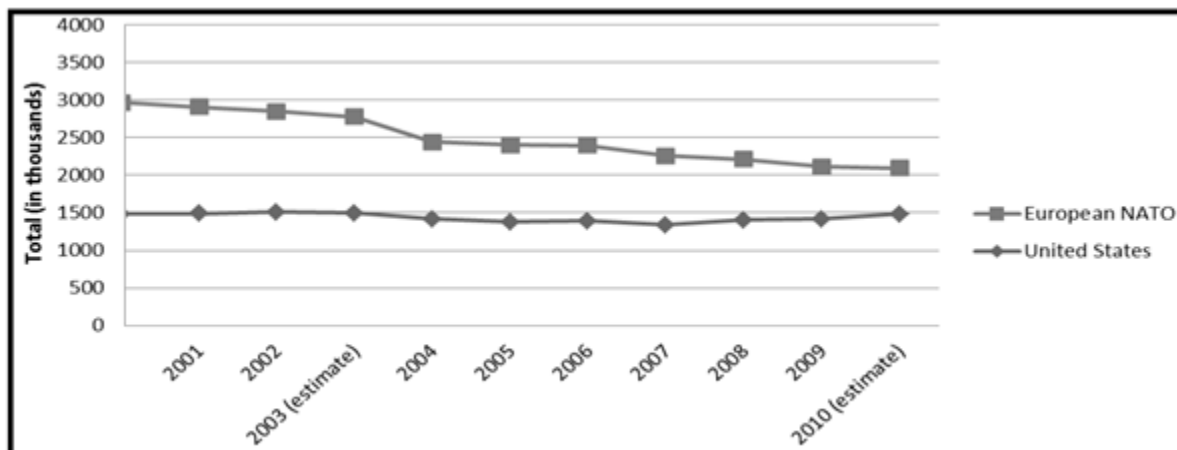


Figure 2: Relative Manpower Size of NATO Militaries

The United States' DSG acknowledges that this American trend line is expected to significantly decrease over the next 10 years as the size of its military becomes leaner through force reductions.¹⁷ The combined effects of the Budget Control Act of 2011 with the further cuts of Sequestration will slash the U.S. defense budget by approximately \$1 trillion dollars across the next decade.¹⁸ Although debate continues on how these cuts will be implemented, it is reasonable to understand the concerns that cuts of this magnitude will force reductions in the amount which the United States contributes to NATO. The potential size of forthcoming cuts to NATO funding is further increased as America continues to pursue its long term rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. Despite the continued decline in European defense spending, the progressively deeper cuts by the United States, coupled with its rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, will likely bring Trans-Atlantic burden sharing closer to the historical trends of 50% within the next decade. Levels of burden sharing within the alliance which ensures that no single nation contributes more than 50% is a stated goal which NATO's Secretary General Rasmussen emphasized again recently.¹⁹ One of the most prominent examples of these changes already unfolding in Europe is the reduced participation, both in size and role, of the United States within the broader European region.

Reduced U.S. Participation – But Proving the Key Enablers

While this shrinking pool of resources is manifesting itself in a reduction of the American level of participation in regional operations, the U.S. will continue to provide the key enablers needed for the success of alliance operations. This change in participation can most clearly be seen in the transfer of its traditional leadership role

during regional conflicts to European member states and the smaller number of U.S. forces postured forward in Europe.

The new U.S. security guidance envisions the United States maintaining global level leadership, but through a greater reliance on regional partners acting within their sphere of influence.²⁰ The intent is to progressively rebalance from unilateral U.S. action, through American dominated action supported by partners, to an increasing reliance on regional partners taking the lead in regional conflicts. Regional leaders would provide the bulk of the assets and take on the leadership role while the U.S. contribution would more heavily focus on providing key enablers such as air-to-air refueling, strategic airlift, precision munitions, unmanned systems, and especially intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets. While there are certainly security situations where the United States would take the lead, most likely because of the distance and intensity of combat operations, recent events provide indications that this emerging trend of more localized regional leadership is successfully taking shape.

NATO's operation in Libya, Operation Unified Protector (OUP), can be seen as an early example of this new DSG in action.²¹ In his cover letter to the DSG, President Obama highlighted this operation, stating "the growing capabilities of allies and partners, as demonstrated in the successful mission to protect the Libyan people, create new opportunities for burden sharing."²² Although OUP demonstrated many of the European gaps in capability and capacity that had emerged as result of uneven burden sharing in the preceding decades, it also serves as a wake-up call for the European members of NATO.²³ While many of these gaps remain, the new reality within NATO of an increased role for European nations continues to take shape and a number of

lessons learned in OUP have been successfully applied throughout follow-on operations.

Although recent security operations in Mali are not being conducted under a NATO command headquarters, the manner in which this military operation developed provides another example of these new trends in action. While France took the lead in the regional conflict, the U.S. provided key enablers essential to the success of the mission, to include unmanned reconnaissance aircraft, strategic airlift, air-to-air refuel tankers, and logistics.²⁴ Events and decisions are still developing with regards to future security assistance in Syria, to include if NATO would even have a role, but recent comments by Secretary of State Kerry provide yet another example of an increased willingness for allied nations in Europe to take the lead in security missions in this region.²⁵

Beyond the intangibles of leadership in regional operations, America's reduced participation can be more tangibly measured in the specifics of the smaller size of its forward deployed forces. The most obvious of these reductions are the announced plans to decrease U.S. presence in Europe by two Army combat brigades and three Air Force Squadrons.²⁶ However, merely considering these force reductions in isolation would be a misunderstanding about how the DSG aims to create the Joint Force of 2020.²⁷

Adjusted U.S. Presence – But Structured for Current Threats/Missions

The 2012 U.S. DSG cuts the overall size of the United States military, but also adjusts the nature and structure of the force to better align it with future threats and missions.²⁸ Beyond mere reductions in end-strength, the new guidance also emphasizes a shift from resolving current conflicts to preparing for future fights; power

projection; increased emphasis on “advanced capabilities including Special Operations Forces, new technologies such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and unmanned systems, and cyberspace capabilities.”²⁹

Viewing the U.S. modifications of their European force structure from this current threat perspective better clarifies their intent for those who originally considered these adjustments through a cold war lens. Furthermore, as other NATO nations adjust force structures to meet expected threats, it is important to note that security experts within the alliance do not currently foresee an invasion of European territory by a peer competitor in the near future.³⁰ Reflecting this current threat assessment, the announced altered force structures of American formations stationed in Europe intentionally reflect those with increased utility in contemporary conflicts and defense developments. Although the U.S. will decrease its footprint by two Army combat brigades and three Air Force squadrons, these reductions are off-set by increases in forces more aligned with DSG desired endstates for the future Joint Force.³¹ Announced alterations to the U.S. force structure in Europe include increased Special Operations Forces, a CV-22 Osprey formation, four added naval missile-defense destroyers, U.S. ground forces in support of the NATO Response Force (NRF), and the establishment of the first permanent United States Air Force presence in Poland.³²

As NATO transitions out of Afghanistan, the NRF will take on increasing importance as a means to retain lessons learned, ensure interoperability, and provide partner-building opportunities for European allies to train with low density U.S. enablers. For the first time, the United States will make a significant contribution to the NRF to include an Army combat brigade on a rotational basis and a battalion task force

scheduled to participate in forward deployed multinational training exercises.³³ U.S. presence and participation in training exercises are of particular interest to many of NATO's newest members from former Warsaw Pact countries. Beyond the growing number and scope of multinational training exercises, increased American presence includes Air Force assets based in Lask, Poland,³⁴ and ballistic missile defenses scheduled to be based in Romania and Poland in the next 2-5 years.³⁵

Three Emerging NATO Trends

These adjustments to the U.S. military presence in Europe will continue to evolve as America proceeds with its post-sequestration review of the DSG. Although the further cuts of sequestration will likely affect the scope and pace of the changes being implemented above, NATO should expect further reductions in U.S. funds, forces, and in the leadership role in its regional operations. The changes discussed above, when considered within the larger context of diminishing European defense budgets, are adding momentum to three developing NATO trends: Europeans taking the lead of NATO-led mission that are increasingly limited within the European region and facilitated by key U.S. enablers.

Trend 1 – Europeans Leading Regional Missions

The United States will increasingly rely on regional partners to take the lead within their respective regional spheres of influence – to include NATO allies taking the lead on European regional operations.³⁶ Recognizing this trend, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen outlined in his vision for NATO in year 2020, “we need a rebalanced transatlantic relationship. European Allies must be ready and able to assume a greater leadership role.”³⁷ As U.S. resources shrink, both in defense dollars and in the overall size of available military forces, it intends to extend its global

leadership through increased reliance on regional partners. When discussing the impact of the fiscal crisis on the U.S. defense strategy, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey put it plainly, “our partners will have to work with us and collaborate with us on accepting a greater share of the risk.”³⁸ While he was talking more broadly about U.S. security partners worldwide, the DSG specifically recognizes the enhanced abilities achieved by European NATO militaries since the original founding of the alliance; “European countries are now producers of security rather than consumers of it.”³⁹ This is not to predict that the U.S. will leave European allies to fend for themselves, but future American assistance will likely consist of fewer dedicated assets. Increasingly, those assets that the United States does contribute will be focused more on the key enablers that are required for success of the operation, but that are lacking within available allied forces.

Trend 2 – Operational Ambition Limited within the European Region

As defense budgets across the alliance continue to be cut, NATO’s operational ambition will contract to the European regional sphere of influence of its immediate neighborhood and the Mediterranean rim nations of MENA. Although this seems an obvious link of capacity driving levels of ambition, some have argued for a much broader global ambition for the alliance. However, a more global NATO would be a clear departure from the alliance’s historical trend of remaining much closer to the heartland of Europe. While it is important to acknowledge NATO’s success in Afghanistan, this operation represents the alliance’s first out of area mission.⁴⁰ Understanding the challenges required, senior defense officials from both sides of the Atlantic⁴¹ have challenged alliance members to take on more of a global security role to address emerging global security concerns. In a world of unconstrained resources, this

challenge rightfully deserves serious consideration. Unfortunately, current financial constraints preclude this level of ambition.

General Dempsey succinctly put it in these terms, “We'll need to relook at our assumptions and we'll need to adjust our ambitions to match our abilities. That means doing less, but not doing less well.”⁴² It is important to emphasize that a European focused NATO fulfills an American need. Just as diminished capacity within Europe necessitates a limited operational ambition, reduced global capacity of the United States necessitates limiting ambitions for more unilateral action and a stronger reliance on allies and partners. By focusing NATO's limited assets within a geographically limited sphere of influence, European allies enable the U.S. to strike a better balance of its advanced assets and key enablers across global demands.

Trend 3 – The U.S. Provides Key Technology and Enablers

No other nation possesses the breadth and depth of the advanced suite of U.S. military enablers.⁴³ This includes America's dominance in strategic airlift, air to air refueling, unmanned systems, ISR, precision munitions, and the ability to deploy and sustain large formations over great distances. However, gaps in many of these areas became evident throughout the militaries of its European allies during NATO's Libya operation OUP⁴⁴ and more recently during security operations in Mali.⁴⁵ Although some allied nations are implementing initiatives to address these gaps, current trends in declining European defense budgets indicate that the United States will retain primacy of advanced enablers within the alliance.⁴⁶ NATO's Secretary General Rasmussen articulated his concern with European research and development at the 2012 Prague Parliamentary Assembly by observing, “Given that science and technology are the foundation for all our defense capabilities, our investment in Research and

Development is incredibly small. Here in Europe, Britain and France are the biggest spenders on Research and Development. Yet put together, their share is no more than 12 per cent of what the U.S. spends.”⁴⁷

One of the clearest indications of this growing gap is the failure of the vast majority of European allies to meet alliance expectations that at least 2% of their national gross domestic product (%GDP) is invested in military expenditures. Although this metric is not always the best measure of a nation’s overall contribution to ongoing operations, it is an agreed upon standard within the alliance as a means of ensuring member nations sustain the military capabilities needed to operate cohesively as a multinational alliance. NATO Secretary General Rasmussen expressed his concerns recently that, “deep cuts in some European defense budgets will create a gap within Europe itself. Many Allies here will find it increasingly difficult to acquire the necessary defense capabilities. This will lead to an inability to act collectively in international crisis management.”⁴⁸

At the end of the Cold War, both sides of the Atlantic maintained military budgets above the 2% GDP standard.⁴⁹ After the Berlin Wall fell, Europe’s military budgets began a long steady decline which continues today. While the U.S. military budget saw reductions as well, the amount it spends as a percentage of GDP has only dropped by 13% since the end of the Cold War. During this same period, European military budgets have plunged 50%.⁵⁰ In 2012, the United States spent 4.8% of its GDP on military spending as compared to collective European spending of less than 1.6% GDP.⁵¹ To make matters worse, 19 of these 26 European nations spent 1.5% or less.⁵² A trend that compounds this growing gap of advanced military enablers is how these limited defense

budgets are being spent. Further analysis reveals that many European budgets spend an increasing percentage of their budgets on strictly personnel costs and meager amounts on the non-personnel expenditures required to purchase and sustain advanced enablers (Figure 3).⁵³

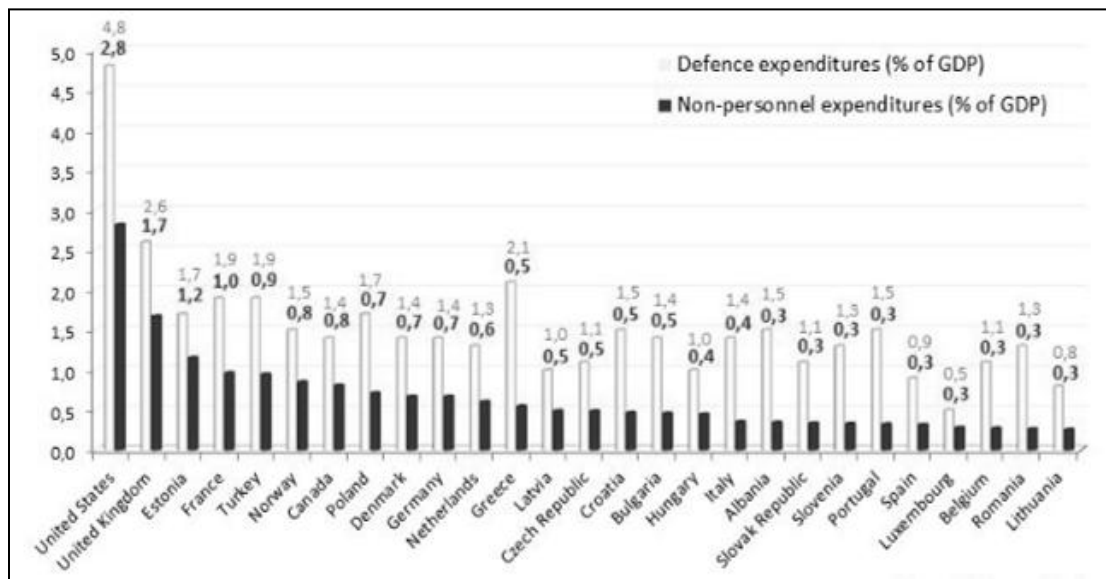


Figure 3: 2012 NATO Military Expenditures

These long term trends provide the context within which NATO will operate, train, and fight on tomorrow's battlefields. Left unchecked, these trends run the risk of undermining the strength of the alliance. However, there are specific strategic aim points which NATO can pursue as a means of ensuring the strength and resiliency of both alliance and the Trans-Atlantic Link which binds the member nations together.

Three Strategic Aim Points for NATO

It is within this future Trans-Atlantic relationship that NATO seeks to remain a capable fighting force which operates cohesively together as an alliance in order to ensure the security of Europe. Despite the many challenges, NATO can achieve this

desired endstate if its member nations can generate enough political will to implement the following three recommendations.

Recommendation 1 – Retain a Capable Fighting Force

NATO is a military alliance and militaries exist for the security of their nations. In order to remain relevant, it is essential that forces within NATO retain the ability to fight and win on the modern battlefield. Two of the primary ways which member nations can safeguard this essential requirement is to resist the urge to retain large, but hollow forces, and to work together as allies to collectively ensure the continued modernization of forces from both sides of the Atlantic.

Nations must resist the desire to sustain large, yet ultimately incapable, militaries which lack the core equipment and training levels required to remain relevant and ready. This dangerous temptation can be found on both sides of the Trans-Atlantic relationship. During the unveiling of the U.S. DSG, Secretary of Defense Panetta emphasized the importance of this recommendation for the American military by cautioning, “we must avoid hollowing out the force; a smaller, ready, and well-equipped military is much more preferable to a larger, ill-prepared force that has been arbitrarily cut across the board.”⁵⁴ Whatever size each nation retains, it needs to be adequately equipped and trained to fight and win tomorrow’s engagements.

An essential aspect of each nation’s ability to fight as part of the larger alliance on the modern battlefield is the continued modernization of its forces. Although fiscal constraints limit each nation’s ability to fully field all elements of an advanced warfighting capability, alliance cohesion risks being undermined if the growing Trans-Atlantic capabilities gap is not addressed.⁵⁵ During these challenging times of austerity, niche specialization of advancements and modern enablers provides the opportunity for

both sides of the Atlantic to adequately modernize. NATO's Smart Defense initiatives,⁵⁶ designed to set priorities and share resources, provide the opportunity for European forces to coordinate capabilities amongst nations, but this requires deliberate orchestration and the political will to trust others within the alliance.⁵⁷ Clearly delineating national responsibilities for military functions rather than focusing on specific hardware systems should provide the best framework for future modernization as new technologies emerge. Examples of these functional categories include air policing, unmanned systems, and C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance). Regardless of how it is accomplished, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen warns that it is essential for Europe to address their capability shortfalls in key enablers or "Europe will not be able to lead or even participate in international crisis management."⁵⁸ As global security developments effect worldwide demands on limited U.S. enablers, the quantity and quality of advanced warfare systems within European formations will significantly increase the level of cohesion and interoperability required for NATO to sustain though its operations and the essential multinational exercises needed to remain trained and ready.

Recommendation 2 – Retain a Cohesive and Interoperable Force

One of NATO's greatest strengths over its history has been its ability to field forces from so many different nations that can collectively train and fight together as a cohesive and interoperable team of teams. This can be difficult within a single national force and becomes tremendously more difficult in a multinational alliance. The past decade of alliance operations enabled NATO to establish levels of proficiency that will prove difficult to sustain without intentional emphasis on adherence to alliance standards and adequately resourced multinational exercises.

NATO's standardization agreements (STANAG's) form a vital network of common requirements and expectations within this complex multinational organization. Adherence to these standards provides the foundation of functional interoperability on the modern battlefield. These essential alliance standards set the conditions for functional interoperability between systems, services, weapons, and national forces.

The validation of interoperability is tested and proven through adequately resourced multinational exercises. The skills required by the profession of arms must be learned by each subsequent generation of warriors. Unlike a piece of equipment that can be handed down as an intact item, each new generation of warriors must undergo its own training iterations to properly learn its warcraft. This is especially true in multinational alliances where some national forces do not have the luxury of access to the full complement of enablers within their own formations. In these times when limited budgets are creating limits within some national militaries, NATO Secretary General sagely reminds alliance leaders that, "Multinational cooperation is also key to keeping our costs down, and our capabilities strong."⁵⁹ These multinational training exercises will gain in importance as the alliance relies more heavily on niche specialization. However, through rigorous and resourced training exercises, NATO will ensure it remains adequately prepared to act decisively when the alliance calls on it to ensure the regional security of Europe.

Recommendation 3 – Ensure European Security through Regional Focus and Enhanced Partnerships

In these times of reduced resources, NATO will significantly enhance its ability to ensure the security of Europe by limiting its operational ambition within the European sphere of influence and by strengthening its partnerships in this region, especially along

the rim of the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the calls of many to expand its operational ambition to assume a more global reach, the reality of European defense cuts are undermining NATO's ability to forward project and sustain major military operations.⁶⁰ But concentrating its limited resources within its own region does not mean that NATO will not be making a significant contribution to promoting international security. Focusing its limited resources on efforts to stabilize and develop its own regional area through enhanced regional partnerships will not only enhance security along Europe's periphery, but also reduce the destabilizing effects this region has on the broader global security environment.

Strengthening regional partnerships with the Mediterranean rim nations of MENA has the potential to significantly increase regional security. Many of these Mediterranean rim nations are undergoing transformational changes to their internal and regional geopolitical relationships that will have ripple effects for years to come.⁶¹ It is in NATO's security interests to proactively seek out, develop, and support emerging governments and military relationships with like-minded nations. NATO initiatives among these Mediterranean rim countries which promote increased exchange programs, more frequent multinational military exercises, shared intelligence, and pan-Mediterranean Smart Defense initiatives will bear fruit over time as these enhanced security relationships enable NATO to be a positive influence through these enhanced regional partnerships. NATO's partnership programs have been essential to the successful building and employment of capable coalitions that continue to make significant contributions in NATO-led operations, to include the coalition of 50 nations contributing forces to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in

Afghanistan⁶² and the 18 NATO and partner nations which successfully conducted Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya.⁶³ Implementing the recommendations discussed above will help ensure these accomplishments of NATO's past will serve as a preview to its triumphs of tomorrow.

An Alliance of Strength – Prepared to Secure the Future

The ongoing review of the United States Defense Strategic Guidance provides an opportunity for NATO to conduct an internal assessment as well. Despite America's increased emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region, the United States remains committed to its European allies and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which guarantees the security of Europe. General Dempsey highlighted this point during the unveiling of the 2012 DSG by declaring, "Our strategic challenges are shifting, and we have to pay attention to those shifts. But what we do will always be built on the strong foundation of our traditional strategic partnerships, and NATO is chief among them."⁶⁴

The fiscal constraints during these times of austerity however, are real and are driving changes to America's role within the alliance, to include decreasing resources, reduced participation, and adjusted force structures. At the same time, European allies continue to wrestle with the challenges of austerity as well. The combined effects are transforming the Trans-Atlantic relationship in ways that are furthering long term trends within NATO which will see European allies increasingly taking the lead in operations which will likely be limited to the European sphere of influence and that are enabled by key U.S. systems and technology.

Throughout its history, NATO has been tested and has proven itself equal to the challenges of its times. As NATO embarks on its journey through these times of tight fiscal austerity, it must rely on its time-tested hallmarks of a strong Trans-Atlantic link,

blunt self-examination, and a shared interest in the preservation of a secure Europe, whole and free in order to avoid former U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates' warning that the alliance risks, "the very real possibility of collective military irrelevance."⁶⁵ Seizing this transformational opportunity to implement the recommendations discussed above will ensure the North Atlantic Treaty Organization remains a capable fighting force that can fight cohesively together as an alliance to ensure the security of Europe. When considering the sweep of history which NATO has secured and remains committed to protecting, former U.S. Secretary of State Clinton declared, "Today's Trans-Atlantic community is not just a defining achievement of the century behind us. It is indispensable to the world we hope to build together in the century ahead."⁶⁶

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