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REVIEW

ON THE NEED FOR BURDEN SHARING IN NATO

In 2022, Palgrave Macmillan published a monograph by two Finnish researchers (Tommi Koivula and Heljä Ossa) from the Finnish National Defence University, entitled “NATO’s Burden-Sharing Disputes: Past, Present and Future Prospects”.

The authors begin the first chapter by highlighting the importance of Article 3 of the 1949 Washington (North Atlantic) Treaty: “In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.” It is the different interpretations of the phrases “continuous and effective self-help” and “mutual aid” which create problems in understanding the burden-sharing needs within the North Atlantic Alliance (p 2).

The second chapter states that the members of the Alliance agreed in 2006 (and again in 2014) on the need to allocate at least 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defence, with 20% of the defence budget to be allocated to major equipment or armaments purchases. In this respect, however, different approaches have been taken within the Alliance, ranging from the rationalist and the post-positivist to a combination of positivist and post-positivist approaches. The authors note that public (political) debates about the financial input for NATO purposes are cyclical in nature, usually referring to four factors: the geopolitical changes with regard to Russia; US foreign policy (interventionism or isolationism); European activity (activism or passivity); and major NATO operations outside its member states (p 28).

The third chapter deals with the historical issue of burden-sharing within the Alliance, starting with its creation during the Cold War. Immediately after its establishment, the member states agreed that “each member state should specialise in the forces and weapons that served them best and could also be included in the integrated defence patterns” (p 37). During the Korean War, the US increased its defence budget, and

some European member states followed suit. But it soon became clear that the Soviet Union could mobilize a larger conventional force than the entire NATO Alliance, leading to a decision to adopt a strategy of flexible response, as seen in particular in the development of nuclear weapons. In the 1960s, the European member states reached a stage of development which marked a definitive improvement in their economic situation since the end of the Second World War, which meant that they could increase their own defence budgets. Nevertheless, European member states proved unable to establish a real counterweight to the importance and role of the American hegemon; one of the contentious issues was the (re)armament of Germany.

The end of the Cold War opened a new chapter in the history of the Alliance, as the primary military as well as ideological opponents – the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union – ceased to exist. This led to calls for the abolition of NATO (as an unnecessary relic of the end of the Cold War) or a refocusing of attention, which indeed happened, as NATO became the world's crisis manager. As a consequence, operations began to be carried out outside member states' territories, as was particularly evident after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, when NATO forces began to operate in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. At the same time as the Russian Federation was going through periods of cuts and increases in its defence budget, the possibility of rapprochement of the former Warsaw Pact member states with their former adversary, NATO, became an important foreign policy issue. This actually happened in 1999, when the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became new members. It had already become clear – during the wars in the former Yugoslavia – that European NATO member states would have to improve their own military capabilities to intervene in their own neighbourhood. The new security environment in Europe in the 1990s was among the most dangerous in the world at the time. Nevertheless, European countries began to cut their defence budgets, leading to the Riga Declaration of 2006, which was supposed to narrow the capabilities gap between Europe and the US.

Chapter 5 deals with the watershed year of 2014, which saw the end of the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and Russia's occupation of Crimea and the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine: "The annexation has been viewed widely as a tipping point in European security, creating a deep rift between Russia and the West and upending the security order that had been built for more than 20 years" (p 115). As a result, the NATO summit in Wales reopened the issue of the need to secure a 2% share of GDP for defence budgets. All the European member states committed to this at the time, as well as to investing 20% of their defence budgets in research and development. While the larger states (e.g. Germany) were opposed to such commitments (claiming that the quality of the forces was more important than the quantity or size of the defence budget), the Eastern and Central European member states, in particular, began to increase investment in their own defence. In addition to the Ukraine crisis (and the rise of Russia on their borders), the increase in defence budgets was also a consequence of the improvement in the general economic climate following the global economic crisis. At the same time, the need to improve military (and non-military) capabilities in non-kinetic areas of action – particularly in the face of hybrid

threats (e.g. cyber-attacks) – also emerged. Three different approaches developed simultaneously within Europe: the strengthening of own forces (the Eastern bloc), the pursuit of a common security policy (France), and an isolationist approach (UK, Denmark).

The next chapter provides an overview of the historical dynamics of burden-sharing within NATO. During the Cold War, European countries primarily integrated in the economic sphere, while they did not make much progress in the field of defence. France's departure from the NATO military structure in 1967 was a further setback to such efforts. In addition, different perceptions of security provision emerged: while the US took a global view, European countries considered security policy a national issue. The US continuously increased its defence budget in the face of the global conflict against communism, while European countries did so only in the event of a crisis in Europe (e.g. after the Prague Spring of 1968). At the same time, the US wanted to leave the European continent, abandoning its defence to the European allies, while still maintaining its (military and political) influence. After the end of the Cold War, relations between NATO and Russia initially improved, only to be cooled again as former Warsaw Pact members began to move closer to NATO. Relations improved again after the September 2001 attacks, when the US turned its attention away from Europe to the Middle East and Asia. The rise of China also changed the geopolitical orientations of US foreign policy. However, Russia also took advantage of this, deciding to occupy eastern Ukraine in 2014 while counting on a lukewarm response from the West (mainly in the form of economic sanctions), which indeed came about. Nevertheless, this Russian aggression brought Eastern European countries, in particular, to increase their defence investments, while NATO strengthened its (international) presence in the East through the international operation Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP). The authors conclude by pointing out that NATO is constantly confronted with a complex problem in interpreting the approach to national and international security commitments.

The final, seventh chapter is forward-looking. In it, the authors conclude that the following elements will influence the future of burden-sharing within NATO: Russia's activities in the international environment (especially with regard to (in) indirectly threatening Eastern European NATO members, which it considers its own area of interest); the geopolitical behaviour of the US (whether the reduction of the US presence on the European continent will continue or reverse); the European response to US behaviour (a withdrawal would undoubtedly cause an increase in investment in its own capabilities); and NATO's collective action in other countries. With regard to the latter, it has already become clear that some countries have provided a disproportionately larger force for EFP operations than others, which have offered little or nothing to reinforce NATO's presence in Eastern Europe. Technological advances, both military and civilian, will undoubtedly also have an important impact. The authors go on to offer four possible scenarios: a disempowered NATO (countries will refuse to increase funding for NATO and to meet common commitments, ultimately leading to a reduction in the military strength

of the Alliance); a transatlantic negotiation (countries will provide a certain level of funding, but there will be no significant progress towards increasing capabilities); self-interested member states (countries will increase their defence budgets but will primarily focus on improving their own capabilities); and transatlantic solidarity (countries will focus on improving the capabilities of their own armed forces as well as those of the Alliance as a whole). The authors also respond to the possibility of NATO's disintegration due to burden-sharing issues: "The debate is closely linked to other problems, such as trust issues among allies and diverse threat perceptions, which can severely damage NATO's ability to survive future crisis." (p 190)

In this work, the authors illustrate the evolution of the issue of financial investment by NATO member states in building their own capabilities, as well as the capabilities of the Alliance as a whole, by presenting historical, political and security developments. In doing so, they illustrate the divide between the US and the European members, in particular, which is the result of a number of factors ranging from domestic policy and the economy to the activities of third countries or non-state actors. This book is recommended reading for all scholars of NATO, international relations and (international) security.

Dr. Klemen Kocjančič je po izobrazbi univerzitetni diplomirani teolog, magister obramboslovja in doktor zgodovine. Zaposlen je kot podsekretar za vojaško tehnologijo, raziskave in razvoj na Ministrstvu za obrambo RS in je habilitiran kot znanstveni sodelavec na Obramboslovnem raziskovalnem centru (Fakulteta za družbene vede, Univerza v Ljubljani). Njegovi raziskovalni interesi so s področij vojaške zgodovine, ekstremizma in terorizma, vojaške sociologije in kritične infrastrukture.

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