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The Position of Burden Sharing in Current US Security Policy Vis-à-vis European Allies

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Abstract: *The article discusses the position of burden sharing in the US security policy vis-à-vis its European allies. It argues that this issue has always been important for the US administration, but never to the extent it is today. This is due to several factors, including: (a) current White House America First policy, which embraces a critical position against international institutions and emphasizes the importance of economic elements of US multi- and bilateral relationships; (b) reluctance of some of European allies—with Germany as the biggest concern for the US—to keep defense expenditures on the level of 2% of GDP, including 20% for major equipment, as it is required by NATO financial guidelines; and (c) a scale of US overpayment, which is lesser than presented by US officials. I suggest that burden sharing will remain a priority for the current US government and would cause certain economic and political-military (new posture of US troops in Europe) consequences.*

Keywords: *burden sharing, defense expenditures, European Allies, NATO, Trump, USA*

1. Introduction

The debate on ‘burden sharing’ has been vivid since the beginning of NATO (Kozłowski, 2019, pp. 7374). There has always been a broad American consensus that the Allies should spend more for defense; this view has reflected considerable thought, research and experience, even with different motivations.

Nonetheless, Donald Trump seems to be the first US President who has not only repeatedly taken the issue of unfair fiscal burden carried by the United States compared with its European allies, but has also questioned the foundation of the Transatlantic alliance as being obsolete and not doing enough to fight against terrorism (Poithier & Vershbow, 2017, p. 1). His criticism over unfair burden sharing started even before his latest presidential campaign as he had written in an open letter in 1987 that "America should stop paying to defend countries that can afford to defend themselves" (Shanahan, 1987).

This opinion was reflected in further political activities of Donald Trump, including during the presidential campaign. One of his first major statements on the Alliance was made in March 2016 when Trump suggested that the United States was taking all the burden of responding to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, while other Allies' security was more affected; this led him to the conclusion that NATO "cost US a fortune" and that the "distribution of costs has to be changed" (Sloan, 2017). Furthermore, in the campaigning foreign policy speech, Trump emphasized that the allies "are not paying enough their share […] and they must contribute toward their financial, political, and human costs". He warned that "the countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defense, and if not, the US must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves. We have no choice". (*The New York Times*, 2016)

The position of the US President should be understood in the broader meaning of America First policy, as it is clearly described in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America (The White House, 2017).

First, Trump has a critical position vis-à-vis international institutions. The White House policy in the first term of his presidency questioned post-World War II international order implying: withdrawal from the organization (e.g., the United Nations Education and Scientific Organization), renegotiate of the agreements (e.g., the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement), not completing agreements (e.g., the Transpacific Partnership), not continuing negotiations on agreements (e.g., the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) or simply denying the validity of organizations (e.g., the World Trade Organization). There is no surprise that NATO appears to be among contested bodies; President Trump admitted during one of G7 meetings in Canada that NATO is just another bad deal America has struck to take care of the needs of others rather than its own ("NATO is as bad as NAFTA") (Goldgeier, 2018).

Second, business and economic element plays an important or sometimes even predominant role in Trump's policy in shaping US bilateral and multilateral relationships; it is especially exposed in the free trade type of agreements (e.g., The White House, 2018a).

The position of the White House on burden sharing is well reflected in the main political documents. The National Security Strategy of the United States underlines the necessity of taking by the Allies a fair burden sharing. President Trump emphasizes it in the introduction to the document: "unfair burden-sharing with our allies […] who wish us harm" (The White House, 2017, p. 1). One of the four fundamental interests of the US[1] is to "preserve peace through strength", which is described not only as building US capabilities but also expectations vis-à-vis Allies and partners that they "shoulder a fair share of the burden of responsibility to protect against common threats" (The White House, 2017, p. 4). The necessity to remove inequalities in burden sharing have been repeated in the text (e.g., "cooperation means sharing responsibilities and burdens" (The White House, 2017, p. 4) with explicit expectations from the US to European Allies "to increase defense spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024, with 20 percent of this spending devoted to increasing military capabilities" (The White House, 2017, p. 48).

The National Defense Strategy of the United States in specific terms (in agreement with the National Security Strategy) describes the role of Department of Defense and the defense policy. US military advantage is being created also through strong alliances and partnerships. As it is stated, "mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our (US) strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match" (DoD, 2018, p. 8). It is understood that pooling resources and sharing responsibilities for a common defense makes US "security burdens lighter" (DoD, 2018, p. 8). And there are clear expectations from European Allies that they "fulfill their commitments to increase defense and modernization spending to bolster the alliance in the face of our (US) shared security concerns" (DoD, 2018, p. 9).

The burden sharing was also a key element of US security policy activities vis-à-vis European Allies within the last three years. President Trump constantly raised this issue during high-level meetings (e.g., in France[2]), by presenting official or unofficial statements or in different ways (e.g., by sending letters to several NATO Allies requesting them to spend more for a defense; Hirschfeld-

1 The other three are "protecting American people, the homeland, and the American way of life", "promoting American prosperity" and "advancing American influence".

2 During Trump's visit to France (on November 10, 2018) President of France Emmanuel Macron said that "I do share President Trump's views that we need a much better sharing within NATO" (The White House, 2018b).

Davis, 2019). But the special criticism from the US came at the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels where President Trump stated that "United States was paying for anywhere from 70 to 90% of it, depending on the way you calculate" and expecting that NATO Allies should be paying even up to 4% (*RAO Bulletin*, 2018, pp. 6–7).

2. Definition of burden sharing in the Alliance

A cornerstone of NATO is that the burden of defending the North Atlantic Treaty area should be shared fairly among its members.[3] But beyond agreeing to this general principle, acceptance of what ought to be included in quantifying the burden, and therefore the degree of equity involved, has been a source of considerable debate and disagreement within the Alliance. Thus, although the term 'burden sharing' is a frequently used term, its definition and measurement is a subject of discrepancies (US GAO, 1990, p. 56).

Former US Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger wrote (under the definition "what is burden sharing") that alliances have to respond to shared national interests and remain acceptable as long as risks and responsibilities "are equitably shared" (Weinberger, 1987, p. 1). Eiko Thielemann inscribed that international burden sharing is "the question how the costs of common initiatives or the provision of the international public goods should be shared between states" (Thielemann, 2003, p. 1). But the burden-sharing debate has been dominated in literature in the context of economic theory of alliances, which used to interpret 'security' (output) as a pure public good (Olson & Zeckhauser, 1966, pp. 266–279) or impure public good (Ringsmose, 2009). The former interpretation has two characteristics: first, a nation's consumption of defense does not affect the amount available for consumption by other nations (non-rivalry) and second, once these goods are provided, they are available for everyone (non-excludability). That could have the consequences for provision and incentive for a nation to "free ride" when it knows that other nation will provide sufficient alliance defense for its needs

3 It stems directly from Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and the idea of collective defense: "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 self-defense 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" (NATO, 1949).

(Hartley & Sandler, 1999, p. 666)[4]. The latter analysis claims that larger powers are only rarely deprived of their bargaining weapon when they sign an alliance treaty; and a NATO member that failed to deliver the contributions to the common efforts demanded by its larger alliance partners could run the risk of abandonment, diplomatic and economic sanctions or even exclusion. In that sense, an argument of non-excludability of goods could hardly be maintained.[5] As it was stated by former US official Charles Kupchan, "small powers tend to contribute less than their proportionate share of the defense burden to avoid entrapment, but they will increase their contribution when the dominant power applies enough pressure […] small powers cooperate when they are forced to do so" (Rinsgmose, 2009, pp. 10–11).

The current perception of burden sharing could lead us to at least two observations. First, NATO is an international organization which specializes on providing collective defense. Nations would join it and remain members so long as "membership is expected to be worthwhile (benefits exceed costs)" (Hartley & Sandler, 1999, p. 666). Second, full and fair analysis of burden sharing would be very difficult to implement. As the NATO Defense Planning Committee noted in 1988 that

> *sharing of roles, risks and responsibilities embrace a wide range of contributions by member countries: financial and human resources, land and facilities, services and sacrifices, cooperation and solidarity* […]. *Some of these contributions are quantifiable but many are not* […]. *Precise comparisons of one type of contribution with another are not possible. Perceptions vary of the value and the cost of individual contributions and are also affected by what is considered a reasonable balance between burdens and benefits.* (DoD, 1990, p. 167)

It was captured in the same way by former NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop-Scheffer, who stated that a burden-sharing mechanism

> *was developed to assess the manning commitments of nations for critical operational activities in relation to their GNI. This sort of arithmetic has the merit of giving some indications on burden-sharing, but* [it] […] *cannot be fully captured in graphs and spreadsheets.* (de Hoop-Scheffer, 2008)

4 This interpretation was mainly justified under the Mutual Assured Destruction strategy of NATO (in the 1960s), where any attack of Soviet forces would imply a counterattack from the US (as the US as the only ally had nuclear capabilities).

5 Especially after the MAD strategy concept.

Current political debate on burden sharing could be interpreted rather as an "appropriate level of defense funding" than 'burden sharing' since it concentrates on inputs. The key measure in this regard is GDP devoted to defense, sometimes described as 'the defense burden'. It is understood as the most important indicator of how the burden was shared and explained by NATO Defense Planning Committee as

> *the best known, most easily understood, most widely used and perhaps the most telling input measure. It broadly depicts defense input in relation to a country's ability to contribute. It takes rich and poor members' status into consideration* […] *and is not subject to distortion by exchange rate fluctuation.* (de Hoop-Scheffer, 2008, p. 174)

NATO member states are obliged to maintain their defense capabilities. Article III of the North Atlantic Treaty stipulates that "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" (NATO, 1949). The scope of these obligations are defined in the NATO Strategic Concept by the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat to the safety and security of NATO members' populations. Simultaneously, Article 19 (in the last tiret) of the Concept states that the member states will sustain "the necessary levels of defense spending, so that our armed forces are sufficiently resourced" (NATO, 2010). The "necessary level of defense spending in NATO" is described in Article 14 of the Wales Summit Declaration, which stipulates that the Allies will spend at least 2% of their GDP for defense and will allocate "more than 20% of their defense budgets on major equipment, including related Research & Development" (NATO, 2014b). Warsaw and Brussels NATO Summits confirmed these requirements (NATO, 2016).

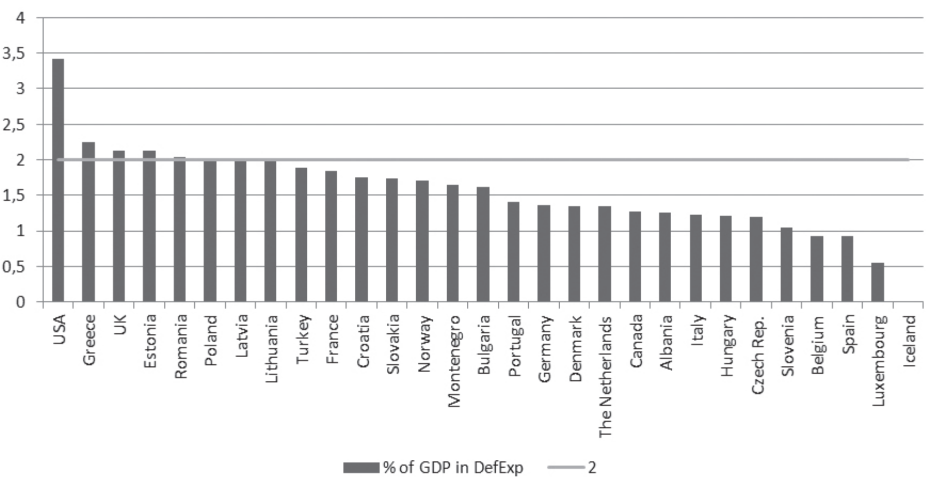
It has to be underlined that NATO attempted to set the targets for defense expenditures earlier in their history. In 1978, defense ministers of the Alliance made a decision that (in order to implement major defense improvements) each country should seek an annual increase of at least 3% in defense spending; but by 1986 only US was able to achieve that target (US GAO, 1990, p. 28). The second example would be US's proposal at the 2006 NATO Summit in Riga, where the Allies agreed to aim for 2% of GDP for defense in the years that followed but struggled to reach that number, particularly after the world economic crisis at the end of the decade (Youseff & Gordon, 2018).

3. NATO members and their level of defense expenditures

NATO's financial guidelines do not constitute any mandatory obligations towards the member states, thus the member states are formally invited (not obliged) to meet the respective requirements. However (as it is underlined in para. 2), these regulations have a strong mandate being an element of the Alliance Summit communique and have stayed under the growing pressure from the US administration.

An analysis of the level of defense funding proves that only eight countries (US, Greece, UK, Estonia, Romania, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania) spend at least 2% of GDP on defense. Seven other countries are close to demanded threshold (Turkey, France, Croatia, Slovakia, Norway, Montenegro and Bulgaria) and the rest of the member states are allocating for defense less than 1.5% of GDP.

Figure 1. NATO member states' level of defense expenditures in 2019, % of GDP



Source: NATO, 2019

The biggest concern for the US are the politics of the G7 member states (Canada, Germany and Italy), which spend on defense less than 1.3% of their GDP. Should they keep the level of 2% of GDP, the increase of their defense budgets would be significant (see Table 1 below). It would mean for the Alliance an extra almost 54 billion US dollars which exceeds the yearly defense budget of France.

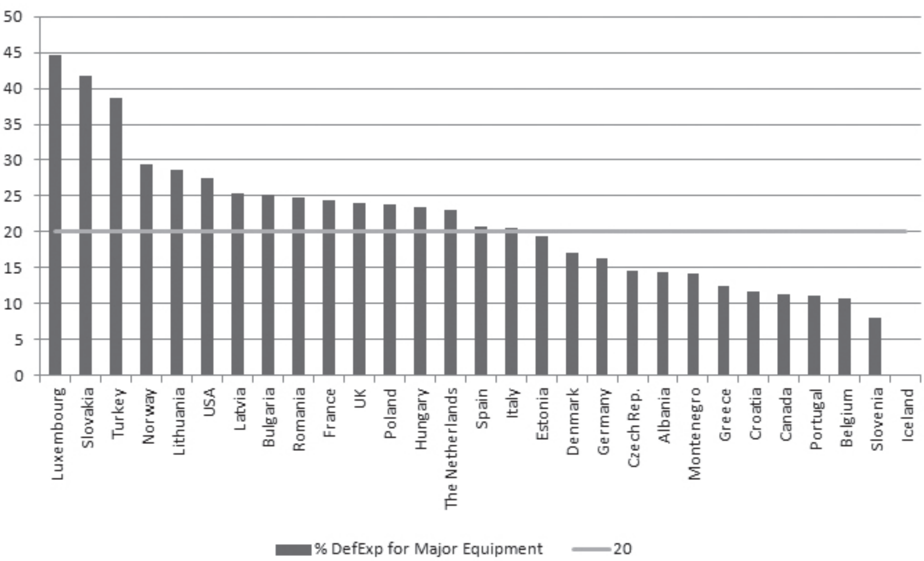
Table 1. Real and expected level of defense expenditures of Canada, Italy and Germany in 2019, current prices

Country	Current level of DefExp, % of GDP	Million USD	2%	Difference
Canada	1.27	21,885	34,465	12,580
Italy	1.22	24,482	40,134	15,652
Germany	1.36	54,113	79,578	25,465
Total	x	100,480	154,177	53,697

Source: NATO, 2019

The different approach of NATO Allies can be noticed against a share of defense expenditures dedicated to major equipment; only 11 Allies are spending less than 20% of their budget for that purpose.

Figure 2. NATO member states' DefExp on major equipment in 2019, %



Source: NATO, 2019

The analysis of both measures (2% of GDP for defense, including 20% for major equipment) proves that only six countries (US, UK, Romania, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania) are meeting both of them.

The biggest challenge for the US administration is the position of Germany due to several reasons. First, it has to be seen in the context of a wider economic dispute between Washington and Berlin, stemming from a huge US trade deficit vis-à-vis Germany and implying *de facto* American trade sanctions against the whole EU. Second, one can agree that the pressure of the US on European Allies is becoming effective since the level of their expenditures grew between 2016 (Trump's election) and 2019 from 1.46% to 1.58% of GDP (in 2015 constant prices—by 14%). However, Germany already indicated that due to the domestic political and security issues (e.g., relatively low perception of threat) it would be unrealistic to expect from them to spend 2% of GDP on defense.

The current challenges are not new. The differences in the level of defense expenditures between the US and the other members have been uninterrupted since the establishment of NATO in 1949. During the 1950s, the European members of NATO spent 6.8% of their combined GNP on defense; in the next three decades they spent: 5.3% (in the 1960s), 3.7% (in the 1970s) and 3.4% (in the 1980s). The corresponding figures for the United States were 11.2%, 9.5%, 6.1 % and 6.0% (Thies, 2015, p. 3). The same differences occurred in the recent decades (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Level of defense expenditures allocated by NATO (Europe, Canada and USA)

Country/ies	1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2009	2012–2017
Total Europe	2.5	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.49
Canada	1.8	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.15
USA	4.5	3.2	3.3	4.4	3.75
Total	3.4	2.6	2.6	2.9	2.61

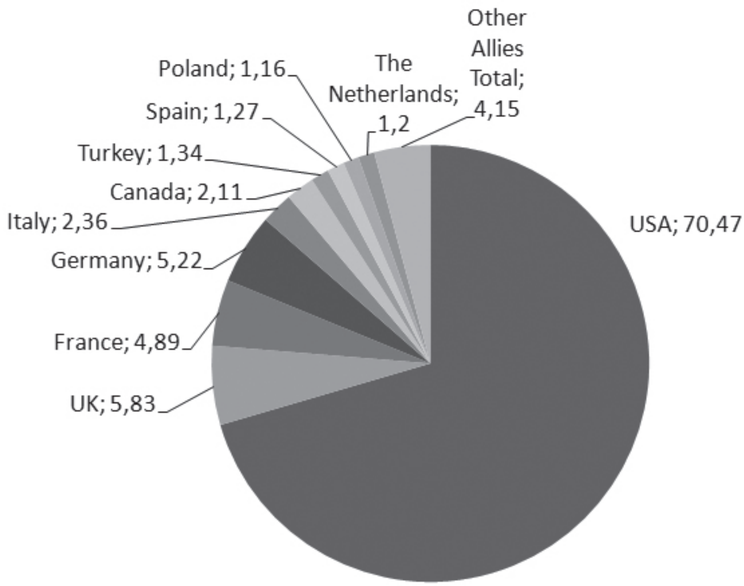
Sources: NATO, 2014a; 2019

Data in Table 2 prove that during 1990–2017 the average difference between the level of defense expenditures in the US and in Europe amounted from 1.1 percentage points (1995–1999) to 2.6 percentage points (2005–2009).

4. The scale of US' overpayment

The White House claims that the US is paying a vast majority of costs for the security of European Allies. That argument is based on the level of expenditures on defense of all the Allies. The current analysis of defense expenditures of all NATO member states shows that the US' share of defense spending is approximately 70% of all NATO member states.

Figure 3. NATO member states' share of defense spending in 2019, %



Source: NATO, 2019

However, one cannot agree with the current US narrative that all this money is allocated for the security of the Transatlantic area and that this measure is an appropriate one for comparative calculations.

First**,** we need to take into account the allocation of defense funds. The US, as the only member of NATO, operates globally. Thus, their defense spending is dedicated not only for the purposes of the security of the Transatlantic area like the vast majority of costs of European allies. According to Steinberg and O'Hanlon, a precise division of costs in terms of geography "is challenging analytically, because it is not possible to divide the US military into neat and tidy regional pieces" (Steinberg & O'Hanlon, 2014, p. 95). Most of the American forces are based in the US and are deployable to whatever region national command authorities might choose them to send. According to Kaufmann, America's military missions can be subdivided into Europe (36%), Atlantic Sea Lanes (7%), Pacific Sea Lanes (5%), Middle East and Persian Gulf (20%), South Korea (6%), Panama and Caribbean (1%) and United States (3%); the remaining resources were divided among nuclear forces (16%) and national intelligence and communications (6%) (Kaufmann, 1992, p. 3 cited in O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 7). O'Hanlon suggested that the US defense budget could be divided into four different categories: central defense needs (research and development, homeland security, global intelligence assets and operations), forces for Europe, forces for Asia and Pacific and forces for the broader Middle East. In that case, one could apportion roughly 100 to 200 billion US dollars for each of these areas (O'Hanlon, 2016).

Second, the costs of running NATO are funded through the member states' indirect and direct contributions. The former are the largest and come in the form of Allies' participation in NATO-led operations and missions (NATO, 2017, p. 96). The latter are made to finance the requirements of the Alliance as a whole and come generally in two different forms: common funding and joint funding.[6] The common funding arrangements include the civil budget (operating and maintenance of NATO Headquarters in Brussels), the military budget (operating and maintenance of NATO command structure), and the NATO Security Investment Programme (NSIP, covering major construction and command and control system investments, which are beyond the national defense requirements of individual member countries) (NATO, 2018). The contributions of the member states are established on the agreed cost-sharing formulae, which stems from "fair, equitable, stable and objectively based […] automatic mechanism for regular updates" (Ek, 2012, p. 7). The formula is based on gross national income (GNI) data representing an average of two figures (current prices and purchasing power parity data) used from the World Bank's sources (*World Development Indicators*). The level of contributions is being changed every two years in accordance with changes in GNI (Ek, 2012, p. 7). There is, however, one important exception to this rule; the United States have a cap of contribution on the level of about 22% of the total costs and it stems from the long term US policy "not to take an excessive burden in the forms of shares to the international organizations". These limitations were already introduced at the beginning of US membership to NATO, but also to other organizations like OECD or UN (Kozłowski, 2019, p. 80). If we do not have this cap, the contributions of the US would have amounted to close to 48% (see Table 3 below).

[6] Other possibilities are: trust funds, contributions in kind, ad hoc sharing arrangements and donations. See, e.g., Mathijs, 2015.

Table 3. GNI 2017 (current and PPP – million euros), share of an average GNI and current cost share

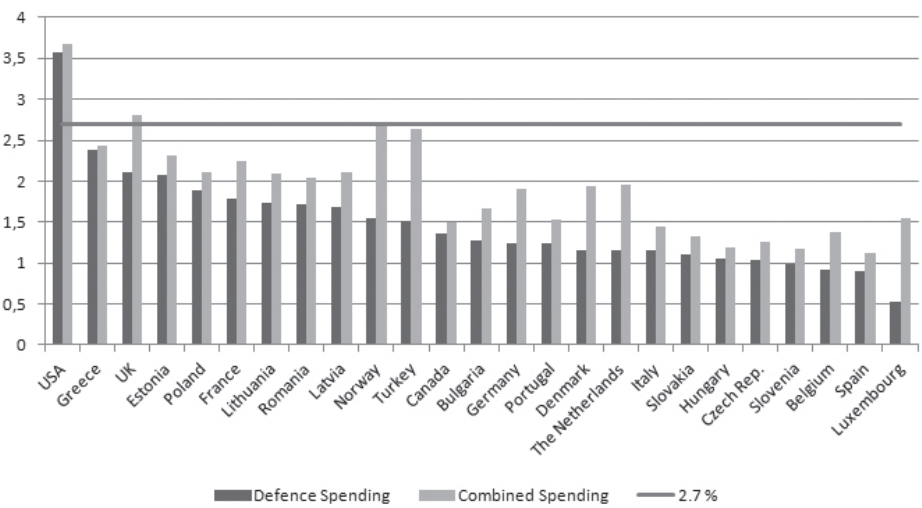
Country	GNI Current	GNI PPP	Share of an average GNI	Cost Share
Albania	13,142.12	37,487.90	0.0610	0.0841
Belgium	500,732.47	568,689.90	1.2900	1.9506
Bulgaria	58,984.84	150,172.39	0.2523	0.3390
Canada	1,629,304.54	1,688,816.19	4.0027	6.3763
Croatia	54,213.07	106,492.28	0.1938	0.2776
Czech Rep.	202,566.71	377,896.99	0.7002	0.9788
Denmark	332,331.43	315,706.37	0.7817	1.2157
Estonia	26,085.61	43,192.61	0.0835	0.1157
France	2,646,481.05	3,028,054.65	6.8453	10.4986
Germany	3,770,894.44	4,437,045.28	9.9014	14.7638
Greece	203,480.31	307,963.98	0.6169	0.9801
Hungary	134,180.64	270,625.00	0.4883	0.7041
Iceland	23,964.94	18,591.46	0.0513	0.0597
Italy	1,954,789.99	2,491,347.73	5.3634	8.1400
Latvia	30,252.55	54,704.96	0.1024	0.1478
Lithuania	38,139.59	58,465.47	0.1165	0.2379
Luxembourg	44,173.44	45,501.55	0.1081	0.1569
Montenegro	4,943.50	12,291.91	0.0207	0.0270
Netherlands	833,978.08	936,142.17	2.1353	3.1985
Norway	416,065.85	341,753.04	0.9141	1.6472
Poland	505,612.41	1,091,336.68	1.9264	2.7683
Portugal	214,518.92	327,996.40	0.6544	0.9725
Romania	206,210.57	508,113.08	0.8617	1.1384
Slovakia	93,716.41	172,573.53	0.3212	0.4784
Slovenia	47,579.29	73,355.37	0.1458	0.2109
Spain	1,312,879.63	1,816,892.53	3.7755	5.5534
Turkey	840,414.13	2,231,442.37	3.7056	4.3819
United Kingdom	2,589,018.37	2,910,875.44	6.6346	10.4581
USA	**19,872,232.00**	**19,872,232.00**	**47.9445**	**22.1387**
Total	**38,600,886.90**	**44,295,779.00**	**100**	**100**

Source: NATO, 2018

It has to be underlined that NATO common funded budgets are on the level of 2.4 billion euros, which is less than 0.25% of defense expenditures of all Allies.

Third, we have to agree that the '2% doctrine' does not necessary address broader challenges to today's security. They embrace political, economic and social disruptions caused by different factors starting from hybrid warfare to (e.g.) terrorism, to migrations. Actions to bolster whole-of-government resilience are not fully covered within the current definition of defense expenditures (Mesterhazy, 2018, p. 5).

Figure 4. Level of defense and combined (defense plus development) spending of NATO member states in 2018, % of GDP



Source: NATO, 2019

As the counter-argument that the defense spending category is too narrowed down, an alternative category of security budget is being introduced, especially usable by these European allies—like Germany—who are not meeting the NATO defense guidelines. Director of Munich Security Conference Wolfgang Ischinger suggested that the new foreign policy guideline, such as a three percent criterion of GDP for more international commitment, should be used. That would include crisis prevention, development assistance and defense (with unmet 0.7% goal for development assistance) (Ischinger, 2017). A similar approach was taken by some experts and politicians who pointed out less quantifiable factors such as "a framework nation in the enhanced forward presence battlegroup in Lithuania" (Lawrence & White, 2018). This argument is recurring in the ongoing debate between the US and some of the European Allies, especially when the current American administration aims at increasing defense spending, whilst limiting the role of development aid (see Fig. 4).[7]

The US spend on development less than 0.2% of their GDP, while some western European countries (e.g., UK or Norway) allocate for this target even two or three times more. Despite this fact, only three NATO countries allocate at least 2.7% of their GDP for defense and development.

5. Potential consequences of the US position on burden sharing

There are at least three potential consequences of the US policy on burden sharing. First, the US security policy in terms of burden sharing will be continued under the current administration. President Trump already confirmed that he would be willing to raise the necessary level of defense expenditures to 4%; those who already spend 2% will be pressed to spend even more. This policy can change if the current US president will not be reelected. Democratic presidents were much less prone to allocate higher amount of money for defense.[8]

Second, some European Allies will continue their policies of lower level of defense expenditures, including big economies like Germany. This will deepen the critiques of President Trump, who already blamed this country by saying that "Germany honestly is not paying their fair share […] They're not paying what they should be paying. They're paying close to 1 percent." (EURACTIV, 2019) That would also imply growing divisions between Central and Eastern European members of NATO (like Poland and Baltic States), who meet their financial requirements and expect permanent and persistent presence of US troops on their territories, and Western European members of the Alliance, who are not meeting their financial requirements and want to keep a status quo solutions (like the current posture of US troops in Europe). That can also have consequences for different perception between these blocs of development of defense and security projects in the European Union (e.g., PESCO-Permanent Structured Cooperation), of whom France and Germany are the biggest supporters.

7 The dilemma on the "too limited" defense budget is under consideration also in the US (see, e.g., Murphy, 1986).

8 Examples from the policies of the four latest presidents: Bill Clinton (in 1993—4.3% of GDP for defense; in 2000—2.9%), George W. Bush (2001—2.9%; 2008—4.2%), Barack Obama (2009—4.6%; 2016—3.2%) and Donald Trump (2017—3.1%; 2020—4.2%). (DoD, 2015)

Third, financial arguments would have direct consequences in military decisions. The US government does not disregard the willingness of the Allies to economically support redeployment of US troops. One of the latest example is the proposal of the Polish government to have a permanent stationing of US troops, where direct commitments was included ("Poland is committed to contributing 1.5–2 billion USD to cover the cost of facilitating the stationing of one U.S. armored division or equivalent force in Poland" (Ministry of National Defense of Poland, 2018, p. 15)). This offer was accepted under the Joint Polish-American Declaration on Advancing Defense Cooperation (President of Poland, 2019), guaranteeing that at least 5,500 US military personnel will be stationing in Poland. President Trump has already suggested that additional soldiers to be sent to Poland could be pulled from Germany (*DW*, 2019).

6. Conclusion

Burden sharing or the appropriate level of defense expenditures (as it better describes the content of the debate) has been one of the priorities of the current US government vis-à-vis its European Allies. President Trump constantly argues for more contributions from NATO member states, being dissatisfied mostly with the biggest economies (Canada, Italy and Germany) since their underpayment to the Alliance is on the level of a yearly defense budget of France. However, despite the political pressure from Washington and the gradual growth of defense spending among some of the NATO member states (especially from the Central, Eastern and Northern flank of the Alliance), most of them are not meeting current requirements (at least 2% of their GDP for defense, including 20% for major equipment). That will lead to the continuation of the current US policy, while making it more selective and divisive, leaving on the one hand Germany, as the biggest undercontributor, and on the other hand the UK, Central and Eastern Europe, and potentially other countries who would be able to meet the NATO financial guidelines.

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