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## Washington Should Not Defend Ukraine Or Expand NATO: U.S. Should Shift Responsibility For Europe's Defense to Europe

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Russia's brazen annexation of Crimea has generated a flood of proposals to reinvigorate and expand NATO. Doing so would make America less secure.

Until World War II the U.S. avoided what George Washington termed "entangling alliances." America generally defended itself by avoiding old world conflicts. The U.S. changed course in World War II and the Cold War, fearing that hostile powers would dominate Eurasia. Protecting important embattled states preserved international space for America.

The collapse of communism eliminated the prospect of another country controlling large swaths of Europe and Asia. The threat to "Old Europe" dissipated and Washington's allies were capable of dealing with whatever dangers remained. The liberation of "New Europe" was welcome, but the former Soviet allies were not important to U.S. security.

However, American policymakers turned the nation's alliances into ends rather than means, seeking new purposes for old organizations. NATO joined the European Union in linking former communist states to the West. Militarily the alliance focused on "out-of-area" activities, entering conflicts which *did not* seriously threaten any members.

Admitting former Warsaw Pact states also dramatically transformed the alliance, expanding it into a region highly sensitive to Russia. During the Cold War the U.S. and Western Europeans sought to prevent Soviet expansion but made no attempt to roll back Moscow's control over Central and Eastern Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union made these nations even less important militarily. There was no security reason for the U.S. to risk war to protect countries long dominated by Moscow.

Worse, the seeds of future conflict germinated in many of these nations. With the end of the Cold War's ideological contest, Moscow had no obvious conflicts with its traditional western adversaries. In contrast, its former allies shared borders, hosted ethnic Russian minorities, interpreted historical experiences differently, and directly impacted Russian security.

When European nations demobilized after the disappearance of their one serious threat, the principal burden of integrating and defending the new members fell on America. Yet Washington waved a dozen new applicants through, treating alliance memberships as candies to be put on guest pillows by hotel staff at night.

NATO even committed to include Georgia and Ukraine. However, America's European partners proved wary of inducting these two countries, which had significant political problems at home and more serious potential conflicts with Moscow. Hence, NATO was saved from the legal obligation to intervene during Tbilisi's 2008 war with Russia.

Yet the invasion of Crimea has triggered a cascade of demands that the alliance, mostly meaning America, do something. In March the administration undertook what Secretary of State John Kerry termed "concrete steps to reassure our NATO allies." President Barack Obama detailed: "Today NATO planes patrol the skies over the Baltics, and we've reinforced our presence in Poland, and we're prepared to do more." The U.S. added six F-15Cs to Lithuania and a dozen F-16s and 300 troops to Poland, made plans to involve more forces in exercises and training in Poland and the Baltic States, and increased intelligence flights over Poland and Romania.

At its March meeting NATO ordered the study of measures to bolster the alliance's Eastern European members, including adding troops and equipment on station, holding additional military exercises, improving the rapid-deployment force, and reviewing military plans. Alliance commander Gen. Philip Breedlove said options for this "reassurance package" included augmenting airpower, increasing ships in the Baltic Sea, establishing a naval force in the Black Sea, and deploying a 4,500 member combat brigade from Texas to Europe. In early April the Pentagon said it would send an American warship to the Black Sea in "direct response to the circumstances in Ukraine."

The Eastern Europeans desire even more. Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak insisted: "The U.S. must increase its presence in [Central and Eastern] Europe, also in Poland." Romania's President Traian Basescu cited "the need to reposition NATO's military resources," meaning into Romania. Estonia's NATO ambassador, Lauri Lepik, said "What the Baltic States want is an allied presence in the form of boots on the ground." An unnamed former Latvian minister told the *Economist*: "We would like to see a few American squadrons here, boots on the round, maybe even an aircraft carrier."

A gaggle of American policy advocates joined this Greek Chorus. For instance, defense analyst Steven Metz wanted the U.S. to "reverse its withdrawal from Europe and redeploy some forces, particularly in NATO's eastern areas. An increased ground and air presence in the Baltic republics, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania could help steel the resolve of nations facing Russian intimidation. Greater naval activity in the Black and Baltic Seas would help as well." The

*Washington Post* urged “more forward deployments in front-line states such as Poland, Estonia and Latvia.”

Andrew Michta of Rhodes College argued that “The U.S. needs to expand its presence on the ground in Central Europe.” In particular, “The Obama administration should move ground assets to Poland—preferably a brigade-size force to strengthen near-term deterrence.” John Deni of the U.S. Army War College suggested refashioning temporary facilities in Bulgaria and Romania used for exercises and training “into a permanent one with U.S. forces deployed from Italy, Germany, or even the United States.” Kurt Volker of the McCain Institute would issue “an iron-clad statement articulating the absolute commitment of the alliance to defend the territory of all NATO member states,” update defense plans for all alliance members, and “strengthen air defense assets deployed to the Baltic States.”

At least the foregoing countries are all NATO members. Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the alliance would “intensify our military cooperation with Ukraine,” including assisting in modernizing its military. Washington announced that it would be heading annual military exercises in July in Ukraine, which would “promote regional stability and security, strengthen partnership capacity and foster trust while improving interoperability between the land forces of Ukraine, and NATO and partner nations.” Ukraine’s ambassador to NATO, Ihor Dolhov, said “Very active consultations are going on,” with an experts delegation due in Kiev to assess Ukraine’s military needs.

Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.) proposed providing Ukraine with small arms. Zbigniew Brzezinski advocated “immediate and direct aid so as to enhance” the Ukrainian military’s “defensive capabilities.” Ian Brzezinski of the Atlantic Council urged NATO or the U.S. alone to arm Kiev with “anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons.” Moreover, “the alliance or a U.S.-led coalition should back that assistance with the deployment of intelligence and surveillance capabilities and military trainers to Ukraine.”

Similarly, Volker suggested selling military equipment to Ukraine financed by loan guarantees, providing military advisors and trainers, and expanding intelligence sharing. Leslie Gelb proposed helping “prepare Ukraine for guerrilla war against an invading Russian force.” Steven Metz proposed doing the same for other non-NATO members as well.

A number of analysts would make Ukraine an ally in everything but name. For instance, Volker advocated conducting ground military exercises in “territory bordering Ukraine.” Moreover, he wrote, the alliance should “Determine that any further assaults on Ukraine’s territorial integrity beyond Crimea represent a direct threat to NATO security and, accordingly, issue a statement saying that any such efforts to break off more territory will be met with a NATO response.” Charles Krauthammer suggested creating “a thin tripwire of NATO trainer/advisers” to “establish a ring of protection at least around the core of western Ukraine.”

AEI’s Thomas Donnelly proposed “putting one brigade astride each of the two main roads—and there are only two—that connect Crimea to the Ukrainian mainland,” with the forces “backed by U.S. aircraft and partnered with NATO and Ukrainian units.” Robert Spalding of the Council on Foreign Relations advocated deploying F-22 fighters along “with an American promise to defend

Ukrainian skies from attack.” Leslie Gelb similarly urged sending “50 or 60 of the incredibly potent F-22s to Poland plus Patriot batteries and appropriate ground support and protection” which could be used to “smash the far inferior Russian air force and then punish Russian armies invading eastern Ukraine or elsewhere in the region.”

Finally, there were ubiquitous proposals to expand the alliance. Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham advocated increasing “cooperation with, and support for, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and other non-NATO partners.” Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates called for making association agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. John Bolton suggested putting “both Georgia and Ukraine on a clear path to NATO membership.” McCain and Graham urged expanding NATO to Georgia and Moldova. The Foreign Policy Initiative put together a neoconservative all-star list of 56 advocating a Membership Action Plan for Georgia and membership for Finland, Sweden, Ukraine, “and other European security partners.” A group of 40 congressmen called for admitting Macedonia and Montenegro, eventually including Kosovo, advancing “the membership prospects of Georgia and Bosnia-Herzegovina,” and continuing “close partnerships ... with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe which seek closer relations with the U.S. and NATO.”

Finally, more must be spent on the military. For example, Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves argued: “Maintaining 2 percent of GDP for defense must become a major benchmark of allies’ commitment. U.S. officials long have said the same. Last month President Obama declared: “every NATO member state must step up and carry its share of the burden.”

In practice, however, NATO always has stood for North America and The Others. The Europeans continue to enjoy a cheap if not quite free ride on the U.S., and have no reason to change so long as Washington showers them with reassurances while guaranteeing their security.

Although Ilan Berman of the American Foreign Policy Council complained that “The past half-decade has seen the U.S. defense budget fall victim to the budgetary axe,” America’s military spending is up 37 percent over the last two decades while collective expenditures by NATO’s other 27 members are down by 3.4 percent. Overall the Europeans spend 1.6 percent of GDP on the military and all but four of NATO’s 27 other members spend less than official guideline of two percent of GDP. None match America’s 4.4 percent.

Today even the bigger European states don’t spend much and most NATO members continue to cut outlays. Noted the *Wall Street Journal*: “European powers in recent years have shelved entire divisions and weapons systems. The British Royal Navy doesn’t operate a proper aircraft carrier. The Netherlands in 2012 disbanded its heavy-armor division, and France and the U.K. each now field a mere 200 main battle tanks. France has cut its order of Rafale combat jets to six a year from 11.”

The Eastern Europeans, with the exception of Poland, have been reducing their defense outlays as well. The only European nation which spends less on its military than Latvia and Lithuania is Luxembourg. After the annexation of Crimea, the former two, which respectively devote .9 and .8 percent of GDP to defense, announced plans to increase outlays. Latvia hopes to meet the two percent target by 2020. Lithuania’s plans would do so in 2025 or 2026.

Still, despite Europe's anemic military efforts, its capabilities far outrange Russia's reach. In 2012 the other 27 NATO members spent \$319 billion on their militaries, compared to \$91 billion by Moscow. With a collective GDP more than eight times that of Russia, the Europeans could do far more if they desired. Moscow can beat up on its weak neighbors, not conquer the continent.

The bizarre status quo persists because many Americans simply stopped viewing alliances as serious commitments. In expanding NATO, noted Stephen Walt, people didn't "ask whether they were really willing to send their sons and daughters to die to protect these new but distant partners. Instead, president after president simply assumed the pledges they were making would never have to be honored."

An American threat to go to war is supposed to deter. But history is replete with alliances that failed to prevent conflict. And when deterrence failed, the military pacts became transmission belts of war. In World War II Germany attacked Poland even though both France and Great Britain guaranteed the latter's security. The opposing Triple Entente and Triple Alliance failed to prevent World War I from occurring.

The Peloponnesian War featured contending Greek blocs. Various opposing confederations did not constrain Rome. The First Punic War between Rome and Carthage grew out of conflict among allies. The Thirty Years' War featured competing groups. Alliances did not prevent the Anglo-Dutch wars or curb French King Louis XIV's aggressive empire-building. A kaleidoscope of constantly changing coalitions fought during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the Napoleonic wars.

In fact, alliances can encourage confrontation by emboldening weaker, sometimes irresponsible partners. In 2008 Georgia appeared to believe that Washington would back it against Russia. Offering military support to Ukraine could have a similar effect. That would prove especially dangerous in a region that will always remain more important to Russia than to America.

In the end, the U.S. could find itself practically alone fighting a war with a nuclear power over minimal geopolitical stakes. Washington should bar further NATO expansion, whether de jure or de facto. Over the longer term America should turn responsibility for Europe's defense back to Europe. Irish journalist Constantin Gurdgiev complained that "Europeans can't afford" to take over NATO and their own defense: "Imagine the public debt levels [the] EU would have to run." But that spending is even less affordable for the U.S., which possesses a smaller GDP, is committed militarily around the globe, and has less at stake in Europe's freedom than does Europe.

Americans should sympathize with the Ukrainian people, who have been ill-served by their own government as well as victimized by Moscow. But that does not warrant extending military support or security guarantees to Kiev. Doing so would defeat the original purpose of NATO: enhancing U.S. security.

America went through the entire Cold War without the conflict with Moscow turning hot. Washington should not today court war with Russia—a defensive, paranoid nuclear power. Even a small risk of trading Washington for Kiev is too much. Today Washington can most effectively maintain the peace outside of the transatlantic alliance.

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