

# 1945

## Europe is Rich. So Why Does it Need America's Help Against Russia?

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If there is one positive to come out of Russia's terrible attack on Ukraine, it is Europe's recognition that it should do more than play-act when it comes to defense. Yet despite plenty of promising rhetoric from political leaders across the continent, the European public shows little interest in ending their cheap ride on the U.S. And the Biden administration seems determined to increase the burden on American taxpayers and military personnel.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's dramatic announcement – called a Zeitenwende, or “watershed moment” – that his government would up military outlays was supposed to represent a continental shift toward defense maturity and seriousness. However, since then Berlin has shown less than full enthusiasm in fulfilling its commitment.

*The Wall Street Journal* worried: “Hitting the 2% goal would mean annual defense spending of some €75 billion in the next fiscal year, but Mr. Scholz's government has submitted a budget accounting for only €50 billion, roughly the same amount as before the ‘turning point.’ The plan seems to be to top up annual spending by including one-quarter of the special procurement budget.” Yet the latter will run out naturally, could be cut if the political winds change, and might leave the Bundeswehr short on manpower and maintenance funding.

The Scholz government also has resisted provisioning Kyiv with heavy weapons. Even more significant, plans to station German troops in Lithuania, which would demonstrate a willingness to defend the latter, have gone by the wayside. Reported the Financial Times: “Germany has proposed basing most of the 3,500 extra troops it plans to contribute to NATO forces on its own soil rather than in Lithuania, significantly softening its initial backing for more foreign forces to be stationed in the Baltics to deter any potential Russian aggression.”

### **The Will To Defend Europe**

A new assessment from the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies noted a “sluggish start,” “complicated internal dynamics,” poor communication, complex party politics, “fragile” public support, and institutional barriers to the government's plans. The political arrangement reached might prove only temporary: “The final compromise reflected most CDU/CSU demands but left open whether the 2% target will in fact outlast the current government. The respective law states that the 2% is to be attained ‘on a multi-year average of a maximum of five years.’ Once the special fund is exhausted, the means to ensure that the

Bundeswehr meets NATO capability goals will have to come from the regular budget. The next government would thus have to substantially raise the regular defense budget, which could conflict with the debt brake and competing policy priorities.”

### **Whether to Follow Through With Aid and Support**

Perhaps even more striking is how the United Kingdom, which joined the U.S. at the hawkish edge of NATO’s response to Moscow’s invasion, is failing to live up to its promises. Prime Minister Boris Johnson responded to the Ukraine crisis by playing Winston Churchill reincarnated in an attempt to bluster his way through multiple scandals. His efforts ultimately failed, and he resigned last week, but before he did, at the recent NATO summit he promised that the UK would raise military outlays to 2.5 percent of GDP. Yet, reported BBC, “the government is going to break the promise on defense spending that it made in its manifesto in 2019,” to raise annual outlays .5 percent above inflation.

Indeed, even as he promised to do more, Johnson “refused to increase defense spending this year, as ministers and the head of the army plead for more money to deal with the Russian threat.”

This rejection came after the government was warned by defense secretary Ben Wallace “that the armed forces were surviving on a ‘diet of smoke and mirrors’.” Although Johnson’s successor is likely to continue London’s hardline against Moscow, he or she will have to focus on domestic concerns to stabilize Conservative Party rule. Promises of increased military outlays might not survive the next election.

The continuing reluctance of European governments to take defense seriously reflects on an even bigger problem: public support for doing so remains anemic. Last month the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) released a study on public attitudes toward the war in Ukraine, which found that a plurality of Europeans essentially favored peace over justice, and ending the war sooner rather than later.

Buried within the analysis of this split was a disturbing look at public attitudes toward military outlays. When asked whether their government should spend more on defense because of Ukraine, the overall response in the ten countries polled was 38 percent-to-32 percent *against*. Only in Poland did a bare majority say yes.

Pluralities backed more military outlays in Sweden, Germany, and Finland. But pluralities were against in France, Romania, the United Kingdom, and Portugal. *Majorities were against* in Spain and Italy. These numbers were recorded two months after the invasion, while the conflict still dominated the news and Europeans, in particular, were still in shock over Russia’s aggression. This persistent reliance on America should come as no surprise. A 2020 Pew Research Center poll found little enthusiasm among Europeans to assist one another. The overall median result was 50-to-38 percent *against*. Of the 13 European nations polled, majorities in only three – Lithuania, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom – favored fighting for fellow NATO members. That number hit 40 percent in only three other nations – France, Poland, and Spain. Only 34 percent in Germany did so. *In every case* more people believed that America would defend them. Of course.

Of course, the Europeans are entitled to put as many or as few people in uniform and tanks on the ground as they wish. Despite Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has shown no similar interest in any other state, including the Baltics, the conquest of which would gain little while ensuring enduring hostility. However in taking this perspective, the Europeans should not expect continued coddling, subsidizing, and protecting from the U.S. Surely nearly eight decades after the end of World War II Washington should end the continent's cheap ride on Americans.

### **How Much Aid and Protection Can the U.S. Provide?**

Uncle Sam is functionally bankrupt as the national debt as a percentage of GDP surges, nearing the record set at the conclusion of World War II. The numbers only get worse as Baby Boomers retire, the population ages, and entitlement outlays burgeon. At the same time, the armed forces are finding recruiting to be an increasing problem. This is "arguably the most challenging recruiting year" since the draft ended a half century ago. U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville complained that he had to cut 12,000 soldiers this year instead of adding 70,000 as he wished.

Nevertheless, at the alliance summit, Washington proved that NATO continues to stand for North America and The Others. Extravagant promises were made—to expand the rapid reaction force to 300,000, a wildly unrealistic number, given European behavior. And the U.S., which had already added to its troop levels in Europe after February 24, when Russia launched its "special military operation," announced plans to send even more.

According to the Pentagon, it was "dispersing forces already in Europe to bolster NATO's Eastern Flank, to include the deployment of attack aviation from Germany to Lithuania; an airborne infantry battalion from Italy to Latvia; elements of a Stryker Brigade Combat Team from Germany dispersed to Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary; Patriot batteries from Germany to Slovakia and Poland; and F-15s from the UK to Poland."

Anything else? Of course! Explained the Defense Department:

"Since February 2022, DoD deployed or extended over 20,000 additional forces to Europe in response to the Ukraine crisis, adding additional air, land, maritime, cyber, and space capabilities, bringing our current total to more than 100,000 service members across Europe. This included extending a Carrier Strike Group, deploying additional fighter squadrons and lift/tanker aircraft, and deploying an Amphibious Readiness Group and Marine Expeditionary Force. DoD added a Corps Headquarters, Division Headquarters, Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) battalion, and multiple enablers to the existing Corps Forward Command Post, Division Headquarters, and three BCTs already stationed in or deployed to Europe."

That's only the people. There's also a lot of money. Explained the Biden administration: "All of these combat-credible forces and enablers are supported by significant investments in the long-term U.S. presence in Europe. In Fiscal Year 2022, DoD continues to execute \$3.8 billion in European Deterrence Initiative funding (with another \$4.2 billion requested in FY23) for rotational forces, exercises, infrastructure (construction of storage facilities, airfield upgrades, and training complexes) and prepositioned equipment. Our robust exercise program also complements our forces that are forward-stationed or rotating through the theater, and serves to increase our presence while building interoperability with NATO allies."

**Who is defending Europe? America, as always!**

A succession of presidents, secretaries of defense, and secretaries of state have asked, pleaded, insisted, whined, begged, and abased themselves in pressing the Europeans to do at least as much for themselves as the U.S. did. But continental governments took America's measure, recognized that its foreign policy elite was determined to run the world irrespective of the cost to the American people, and would continue protecting Europe even if the Europeans disarmed completely. If so, Biden and company would express their disappointment ... and then send more troops to cover the European shortfall! So the U.S. continues to provide defense welfare to its populous, prosperous "allies."

Instead of adding forces to Europe, Washington should be bringing American personnel home. Europe needs to decide if it believes Russia poses an existential threat and if so, take effective action accordingly. The only way that will happen is if Uncle Sam does less. Starting now.

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