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Congress Plays Hardball to Keep American Troops Overseas

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The Europeans collectively have 11 times the GDP and three times the population of Russia. Germany has the world's fourth largest economy, alone two and a half times the size of Russia's.

Yet the Europeans affect to be helpless, vulnerable to attack by a revived Red Army. No European government spends much more than two percent of GDP on the military, not even the Baltic States and Poland, which squeal the most frequently and loudly about evil hordes massing just over the border. At least France and Great Britain have competent forces, though not directed at Moscow. Germany devotes just 1.38 percent of its GDP to a military far from battle-ready. Italy and Spain barely bother to maintain armed forces. And then there are nations like Luxembourg.

So why is it America's responsibility to protect countries well able to defend themselves but not interested in doing so? Worse, why are U.S. policymakers constantly reassuring the Europeans that no matter how little they do Washington will always be there, ready to save them? Why have lawmakers, elected to represent the American people, turned NATO into a defense dole for what Ronald Reagan today might call foreign welfare queens?

To his credit, President Donald Trump has sharply criticized allies which prefer to leave the heavy lifting to Washington. Alas, his methods are dubious and have had little effect. Their small increases in military spending began before he was elected. His officials have thwarted his policies by increasing U.S. support for NATO, even expanding the alliance to such military behemoths as Montenegro and North Macedonia.

Most bizarre is Congress's determination to always stand with European officials, who, in sharp contrast, put their own nations first. Legislators constantly ignore the plight of American taxpayers, who are expected to keep funding prosperous, populous allies which believe they have better things to do than enlarging and improving their militaries. Like preserving largescale social welfare programs at U.S. expense.

For instance, the president's determination to pull 9500 U.S. personnel out of Germany caused congressmen, Republicans and Democrats alike, to go, well, completely nuts. In their view the president was inviting Vladimir Putin to invade Europe and conquer most of the known world. They imagined that a new Dark Ages was descending, the world was about to end, and the lion was poised to eat the lamb.



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So, naturally, leading lawmakers are scheming to block the move, in order to ensure that the Europeans need never be bothered to take care of themselves. Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) and Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Tex.) have proposed barring the use of funds to remove any troops. That is, at a time of budget crisis they want to keep more U.S. money *flowing into Germany*, rewarding a government dedicated to focus on its economy and society while expecting Americans to do the military defending.

Who do Romney and Thornberry believe they are representing? Why do they care more about German than American taxpayers?

Republicans also are taking the lead in the Democratic-controlled House to sacrifice American interests for foreign governments. For instance, Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyoming), daughter of “I had other priorities” Dick Cheney, who avoided serving in Vietnam before plotting numerous wars for today’s young, backed a Democratic proposal to limit further withdrawals from Afghanistan, where Americans have been engaged in a nearly 20-year nation-building mission. The measure passed by a 45 to 11 vote: members of both countries seem determined to keep Americans forever fighting in Central Asia. They care more for the corrupt, incompetent regime in Kabul than America service members and taxpayers. In contrast, the president, despite his halting, inconsistent policy, better represents this nation’s interests.

The opposition to the president’s plan for getting out of Afghanistan was modest compared to the hysteria that consumed Washington when he ordered U.S. forces home from Syria. Unsurprisingly, though unfortunately, legislators took the lead in opposing his plan to focus on the interests of Americans.

For instance, Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill) complained that Trump’s refusal to keep the U.S. forever entangled in another nation’s civil war, tragic but irrelevant to American security, was “weak.” Sen. Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) pushed a resolution criticizing the president. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell issued the standard yet mindless response to every proposal to disengage from anywhere: the president should “exercise American leadership.” House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot Engel, apparently (and thankfully) defeated in the recent primary by a young progressive, similarly complained that “At President Trump’s hands, American leadership has been laid low.” For all of them, “American leadership” apparently requires engaging in perpetual war on behalf of foreign governments and interests, irrespective of the human and financial cost to this nation.

It is hard to imagine a deployment more antithetical to U.S. security. In Syria Americans are occupying a foreign nation, expected to oust the incumbent government, fight jihadists created by Washington’s invasion of the country next door, force out personnel from Iran and Russia invited in by the legitimate government to battle insurgents supported by the U.S., and forever protect ethnic fighters considered to be an existential threat by the neighboring state, a NATO ally. All this is to be done through an illegal intervention, lacking both domestic and international legal authority. Yet the congressmen so determined to block the president are unwilling to commit themselves and vote to authorize the deployment. Apparently they fear having to justify their bizarre behavior to their constituents who are paying the price of their perverted priorities. A cynic might think U.S. legislators to be both policy morons and political cowards.

Congress has similarly sought to inhibit any effort by the president to withdraw troops from South Korea. Last year’s National Defense Authorization Act set a floor for U.S. troop deployments in the Republic of Korea. The 2020 NDAA raised the number, essentially prohibiting any reduction in current deployments. According to Congress, the Pentagon must forever provide a specific level of military welfare for one of the world’s most prosperous and industrialized states.

Americans should ask when legislators will be as solicitous of American military personnel and taxpayers as of the ROK government. The South enjoys roughly 53 times the economic strength and twice the population of North Korea. If Seoul needs more troops for its defense, *why doesn't it raise them?* Why are Americans expected to pay for what South Koreans should be doing?

Of course, the president is not innocent of the temptation to do the bidding of foreign leaders instead of the American people. He appears to be in essentially full thrall of several foreign dictators and other master manipulators, including Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, and Saudi Arabia's Mohamed bin Salman.

In the last case Congress has taken the unusual stance of challenging the president for his unnatural obeisance to a foreign ruler. The U.S. continues to arm and assist the Saudi royals in their murderous campaign of aggression against their neighbor, Yemen, in order to reinstall a pliant regime prepared to carry out Saudi policy. The war has resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe in what already was one of the world's poorest nations. The Saudi intervention also triggered a sectarian war, giving Iran an excellent opportunity to bleed the ineffective Saudi military, which has proved to be competent at little more than bombing weddings and funerals, destroying apartments and markets, and slaughtering civilians. It is difficult to imagine an intervention more antithetical to American interests. Here, unusually, Congress is on the right side.

Candidate George W. Bush advocated a "humble foreign policy," a position he forgot after 9/11. Instead, he decided to try to reorder the world, determined to create a liberal, modern state in Central Asia and turn Iraq into the sort of de facto colony that Neoconservatives imagined a proper Arab nation should be. The result was little short of a catastrophe.

The next president should turn genuine humility into policy. And challenge Congress to abandon its pretensions of global social engineering, ignoring differences in history, interest, geography, religion, ethnicity, culture, and more. Instead of playacting as 535 secretaries of state, legislators should focus on protecting America, its territory, population, prosperity, and liberties.

A good starting point would be to stop treating the Defense Department as another welfare agency, only for foreign governments. America's wealthy friends should do what serious nations have done throughout history: defend themselves.

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