



The most boring whopper in Mitt Romney's big foreign policy speech

Posted By Blake Hounshell ■ Monday, October 8, 2012 - 4:25 PM ■

Plenty of folks have already pored over Republican nominee Mitt Romney's **major address on foreign policy** today, pointing out their disagreement and factual gripes, but here's one you probably won't hear too much about: his suggestion that he'd have better luck than his predecessors in persuading European countries to cough up more dough for their militaries. Here's what Romney said:

I will call on our NATO allies to keep the greatest military alliance in history strong by honoring their commitment to each devote 2 percent of their GDP to security spending. Today, only 3 of the 28 NATO nations meet this benchmark.

If you believe that, then I have a bridge in Bruges to sell you!

Of course, Romney's got a point here -- the Kantian Europeans have been **free-riding** on American military strength for decades. But the problem is getting urgent now, with contractors now warning that critical supply chains are **at risk of collapse**.

And as then Defense Secretary Bob Gates all but **screamed from the rooftops** in a much-discussed 2011 speech, the Libyan war exposed just how little European countries are able to contribute to the common defense these days. As Gates put it, "Frankly, many of those allies sitting on the sidelines do so not because they do not want to participate, but simply because they can't The military capabilities simply aren't there."

Ouch! But seriously: Does anyone think Romney can pull this off? American presidents have been begging Europe to bolster its defenses for years, going back to Dwight Eisenhower,

whose secretary of state threatened in 1953 to carry out an "agonizing reappraisal" of U.S. commitments if the Europeans didn't get their acts together.

In the middle of a never-ending economic crisis -- at a time when the likes of Britain, Greece, Italy, and Spain are implementing what you might call European-style austerity programs -- is Europe really going to cough up a few more percentage points of GDP on Mitt's say so?

Perhaps the best we can hope for in the short term is that European countries get smarter about **collaborating** and promoting "selective excellence" as each country specializes in what it does best. But until Europeans' economic situation turns around -- and their perception of threats changes -- no amount of American hectoring is going to make an impact.

Sorry, Mitt.