

## Gary Schmitt Tries to Reinvent the Wheel

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October 6, 2010

Gary Schmitt's *Wall Street Journal* op-ed titled "[The Demilitarization of Europe](#)" strangely ignores the fact that what he poses as a puzzle was solved in the academic literature over 40 years ago. Schmitt worries about atrophying defense spending among America's European and Asian allies, arguing that our allies' defense expenditures indicate "what burden the country and its leaders are willing to accept in order to help keep the peace, deter aggression and, if necessary, engage in conflict."

In their 1966 article "[Economic Theory of Alliances](#)," Mancur Olson Jr. and Richard Zeckhauser solved this puzzle. Olson and Zeckhauser explained the disproportionate contributions of NATO members with a model that showed that in the provision of collective goods (like security) in organizations (like the NATO alliance), the larger nations will tend to bear a "*disproportionately* large share of the common burden." Due in part to these dynamics, [Kenneth Waltz concluded by 1979](#) that "in fact if not in form, NATO consists of guarantees given by the United States to its European allies and to Canada." As Waltz pointed out, France's withdrawal in 1966 from NATO's integrated military command failed to "noticeably change the bipolar balance" between NATO and the Soviet-sponsored WTO.

The implication of the Olson-Zeckhauser model, which has [held up remarkably well over time](#), is that the only way to force Europe to spend more would be to make clear that the United States views European security as a private, not a collective, good, and that consequently its provision was rightly Europe's responsibility. Given [U.S. policymakers' extreme reticence to adopt this conclusion](#), likely because a more independent Europe would be more independent, we should expect European defense spending to stay low and U.S. defense intellectuals to keep complaining about European free-riding, all to no avail. (I have previously written about this subject [here](#) and [here](#).)

As an aside, the extent to which [Beltway defense intellectuals continue to ignore academic study of the topics about which they write](#) continues to disappoint.

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