

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVEThe Cold War Is History

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NATO contributions to Afghanistan will end up being less than they appear. European military outlays will continue falling. Why is the U.S. defending this populous and prosperous continent?

Afghanistan has become increasingly important to NATO. Special envoy Richard Holbrooke says Afghanistan is "the ultimate test" for the alliance.

Secretary Hillary Clinton would have us believe NATO has passed the test. She announced in December that she had won NATO commitments for another 7,000 troops for Afghanistan. She said, "I am just extremely heartened by the level of positive response we've received," and explained: "This is a significant commitment by our" alliance partners.

Yet 1,500 of the supposed extra personnel are already on station and simply won't be withdrawn while 900 (from non-NATO member Georgia) were promised before the Obama administration decided to increase troop levels. Many of the new troops detachments are small (80 from Macedonia, 85 from Albania) and are from nations that refuse to let their soldiers fight; thousands of the new personnel will be deployed to train Afghan forces rather than battle Taliban insurgents.

After the international conference held in London in late January, Paris announced that it would add no more combat troops. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner explained: "We don't want to send more troops to fight."

Germany offered only 850 -- 500 directly and another 350 as part of a "flexible reserve" for periodic deployment -- about a third of what Washington hoped for. Romania promised 600.

Unfortunately, Canada and the Netherlands plan to withdraw their roughly 5,000 troops over the next two years, effectively wiping out most of the European "surge." The British government is likely to rethink its participation in the Afghan mission after the coming election. The Royal United Services Institute has proposed "a radical scaling back" of Britain's contribution.

Observes Daniel Korski of the European Council on Foreign Relations, "Every nation fibs a little, and when you aggregate all the small fibs, it's hard not to come up with a big fib."

As a result, NATO is rife with recriminations. Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini charged that "some European countries," such as France, were shirking their responsibilities. A British official complained: "Frankly, France's current deployment is too small for a country with that big an army." Toby Archer of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, noted: "Particular ire was aimed at Germany and France and the word 'cowardice' crept into the public debate."

In any case, while the Aussies, British, Canadians, Danes, and Dutch are noteworthy for their combat efforts, most of the allied contributions are limited in geography and restricted by national "caveats," making them of only modest security value to the mission. Yet nation-building in Afghanistan is diverting European resources from the defense of Europe.

During the Cold War the Europeans routinely enjoyed a cheap if not quite free defense ride. And since 2,000 the European share of NATO military spending has decreased even as the European share of NATO GDP has increased.

The U.S. devotes almost four percent of GDP to (baseline) defense spending. Only four other NATO members, including Greece, which is arming more against fellow NATO member Turkey than any non-NATO adversary, break the two percent level. Most members are below 1.5 percent.

The trade-off between Afghanistan and European defense is evident even in America's closest ally, Great Britain. Defense Secretary Bob Ainsworth announced new measures to support operations in Afghanistan, explaining that "We cannot exclude major shifts in the way that we use our defense spending to refocus our priorities." The *Economist* observed that most of the cost of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq "will be found by raiding other parts of the overstretched defense budget."

There is no unity of purpose in Europe. Charged *Washington Post* columnist Anne Applebaum: "There is almost no sense anywhere that the war in Afghanistan is an international operation, or that the stakes and goals are international, or that the soldiers on the ground represent anything other than their own national flags and national armed forces: Most of the war's European critics want to know why their boys are fighting 'for the Americans,' not for NATO."

The problem runs much deeper, however. Mature "Old Europe" long has preferred to devote its resources to sustaining an expensive welfare state. Even Central and Eastern Europeans, which most fear possible Russian coercion, spend more time clamoring for greater support from the U.S. and Western Europe than in augmenting their own forces. In a recent study for the Strategic Studies Institute Col. Joel Hillison reported: "While Russian military expenditures began to rise after 2001, the average defensive burden of these new members continued their gradual fall."

Military spending will drop even in America's most reliable European ally. Prime Minister Gordon Brown reportedly plans to commit his Labour government to spending more on the military, but his proposal is a campaign gambit. With Britain facing bigger financial problems than America and the Conservatives expected to win the election due by June, defense outlays almost certainly will come down.

In fact, in mid-January the Royal United Services Institute released a report predicting

significant military cutbacks. Personnel levels -- 332,000 when the Cold War ended -- could fall from 175,000 to 140,000 by 2016. Real military spending dropped nine percent between 1988 and 2008 and faces likely cuts of 11 to 15 percent in the future. London also is discussing slowing the construction of two new aircraft carriers and reducing or eliminating its nuclear deterrent.

Some leading Europeans, such as former British Defense Secretary John Hutton, criticize European nations for their minimal defense effort. Far harsher is Robert Kaplan, who dismisses the Europeans' "decadence." He contends: "with their patriotism dissipated, European governments can no longer ask for sacrifices from their populations when it comes to questions of peace and war. Ironically, we may have gained victory in the Cold War, but lost Europe in the process."

Yet the Europeans are entitled to spend whatever they want on defense. If they don't believe they face any threats against which they must arm, they have no reason to do more. The U.S. should not shield them from the consequences of their decisions, however. Today the Europeans concentrate on economic development and social welfare while shortchanging the military.

The Europeans' lack of effort threatens the Atlantic alliance. Sally McNamara of the Heritage Foundation writes: "if the United States continues to be failed by Europe in [Afghanistan], then America will have genuine cause to doubt NATO's founding ethos that transatlantic security is indivisible. And Europe may consequently find itself without America's security guarantee, which has kept peace in Europe for the past 60 years."

Yet what precisely does NATO do these days? Writes Applebaum: "NATO, though fighting its first war since its foundation, inspires nobody. The members of NATO feel no allegiance to the alliance, or to one another. On its home continent, NATO does precious little military contingency planning, preferring to hold summits."

Only now, after years of NATO expansion, is the alliance preparing contingency plans to defend Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This follows Poland's insistence on development of a similar defense program. Whether alliance members actually would implement these plans if war threatened is not obvious.

In fact, alliance expansion has been both frivolous and feckless. Gen. Charles Wald (ret.) said: "The attitude was, the more the merrier." Alliance membership became more a political than military act. Added Wald: "NATO didn't really look at the Article 5 part of it." Moreover, the alliance discouraged new members from building competent militaries and instead urged them to make "niche contributions," such as counterterrorism.

Some Europeans are attempting to use the latter contributions to win greater American security guarantees. For instance, a group of Central and Eastern European policymakers argued that their ability to sustain support for their nations' participation in U.S.-led operations "depends on us being able to show that our own security concerns are being addressed in NATO and close cooperation with the United States." Would-be members, such as Georgia, have followed the same strategy in an attempt to win backing for alliance membership.

What does the U.S. get out of the present arrangement? Sally McNamara criticizes European

efforts to establish an independent defense because it "would essentially create a back door for America's withdrawal from the European continent in figurative, and possibly, real terms. Neither the EU nor any single European nation is capable of stepping into the breach this withdrawal would create, leaving a dangerous power vacuum with unpredictable outcomes."

Actually, Moscow has little ability to threaten a continent with ten times its economic strength. And the leading European states are capable of developing a more effective, integrated military force. Their unwillingness to do more when Washington offers to defend them does not indicate that the Europeans would not do more if the U.S. ended security welfare.

Moreover, the likelihood of a Russian attack on "Old Europe" is vanishingly small. The potential grows somewhat as the alliance moves east, but the U.S. would not be vitally affected by a still unlikely conflict involving former Warsaw Pact states. Even less relevant to America is the security of alliance aspirants such as Georgia, Macedonia, and Ukraine.

Some NATO officials recognize that the alliance is not well. Secretary General Rasmussen declared: "I am here as a reformer." But one of his first acts was to appoint former secretary of state Madeleine Albright to head a group of 12 experts to develop a new strategic concept for the alliance. Alas, Albright is a captive of Washington's worst conventional wisdom.

Alas, some in Washington believe that the U.S.-European relationship requires treating Europe as a permanent military dependent. "We need partners. We need allies -- and our natural ally is Europe," stated former Ambassador Nicholas Burns late last year.

That should mean real partners, however, rather than security dependents. As the Conservative Party's opposition defense spokesman, Liam Fox, argued, "For NATO to work properly as a security alliance in the post Cold War world, NATO members must have the willingness to take equal risks with regards to supplying troops and equipment." Yet while the U.S. does more, Europe does less.

Some Europeans acknowledge the obvious, that NATO discourages the Europeans from doing more. Vassilis Kaskarelis, the Greek Ambassador to the U.S., told the *Washington Times*: "They don't have the capabilities, because in the last 50 years, the U.S. offered an umbrella in terms of military, security and stability." So "You had the phenomenon [in which] most of the successful European economies -- countries like France, Germany, the Scandinavians -- channeled all the funds they had on social issues, health care, pensions, you name it."

Washington should say no more. Liam Fox has proposed withdrawing Britain's 25,000 soldiers from Germany since it "wasn't necessary" after the end of the Cold War. He added: "If other countries are willing to take up roles in continental defense, that leaves Britain and France able to take on expeditionary roles."

Washington should adopt a similar approach. Washington does not advance American security by defending international welfare queens that could defend themselves. Cooperation on issues of mutual interest should continue, but should not be purchased by U.S. security guarantees which make Americans less secure by adding more security liabilities than benefits.

Change will come only if the U.S. drops its defense guarantee. Noted Kaskarelis: "It's difficult

to imagine that European publics could be persuaded to give up this deal, and few European politicians are urging them to do so." Which is to be expected.

During the Cold War America could ill afford to allow the Soviet Union to dominate "Old Europe." Today nothing has replaced the threat posed by aggressive, hegemonic communism. NATO's *raison d'être* has disappeared. So-called out-of-area activities are no substitute.

Europe will do more for international security only if it can no longer rely on Washington. Instead of constantly badgering NATO members to contribute more troops to Afghanistan, the U.S. government should reduce its military forces in Europe. The Cold War is over. It is time to adjust the Cold War's outdated security architecture accordingly.

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