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Poland wants us to establish an American base. Let the Germans do it!

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For years U.S. officials variously demanded, urged, and begged European governments to increase military outlays. For years the Europeans reduced spending, manpower, and procurement. There has been a slight uptick under President Donald Trump, but most NATO members are not going to come close to meeting the official standard of two percent of GDP for defense.

Now Poland, which fell just short of that level last year, is requesting Washington to establish a permanent base and garrison. Warsaw proposes to pay Washington up to \$2 billion to confront nuclear-armed Russia in a crisis.

It would make more sense for Poland to send its check to Berlin. German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for European leadership on defense. But her government refuses to meet its military obligations. The Germans could garrison their neighbor in return for the cash.

The transatlantic alliance originally made sense. Western Europe was still recovering from World War II and faced Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. The continent required time to reestablish something approaching a reasonable balance of power.

Still, Dwight Eisenhower, who served as NATO's first Supreme Allied Commander, warned against a permanent U.S. presence, which would "discourage the development of the necessary military strength Western European countries should provide themselves."

Allied outlays remained anemic even after the continent's recovery. The end of the Cold War triggered a rush to demobilize while NATO expanded toward the new Russian Federation's shrunken borders.

The Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and especially the 2014 conflict between Ukraine and Russia reminded Europeans that NATO was a military alliance. However, only "new" Europe, as Donald Rumsfeld had called it, seemed much worried about Moscow's intentions.

"Old" Europe offered mostly verbal assurances. Washington, however, created a special budget line, running \$6.5 billion this year, to augment its forces in Europe.

Vladimir Putin is an unpleasant character, but is not suicidal. Russia today looks a lot like the pre-1914 Russian Empire, intent that its interests be respected and borders be protected. It would lose from triggering full-scale war.

Most of Europe agrees with this assessment. Which is why the recent increase in allied outlays isn't great and isn't likely to be sustained.

So Warsaw wants the U.S. to offer extra protection directly. The U.S. already maintains troops elsewhere in Europe. But Poland is pushing for its very own American garrison.

Declared the Polish defense ministry, "A permanent US. presence in Poland will ensure that both nations can continue to advance, strengthen, and protect [their shared] values and interests." At least the Poles offered to contribute \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion to the effort.

Still, this is an awful idea. First, Moscow doesn't threaten America. And nothing suggests Russia plans to attack Poland.

Second, Polish analysts worry that the proposed contribution would reduce outlays to improve the country's own military. Yet the allies should be taking over their defense responsibilities.

Third, the proposal ignores the fact that the major cost to America is not overseas basing, but creating extra units. The more and greater Washington's military guarantees, the larger the force that is required.

Fourth, American soldiers are not mercenaries to be rented out to the highest bidder. If Poles really believe themselves to be at risk, they should deploy their own soldiers.

There is, however, an obvious solution. Some 240 years ago Great Britain hired "Hessians" from German principalities, to fight American revolutionaries. Poles could hire modern "Hessians" to guard Poland.

After all, Chancellor Merkel called on Europeans to "take our fate into our own hands." The biggest problem today is that Berlin doesn't spend much on its armed forces.

Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen recently said "that we want to reach defense expenditures of 1.5 percent of GDP in 2025." However, the budget caps military outlays at 1.3 percent.

Hans-Peter Bartels, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, admitted that "the Bundeswehr as a whole cannot currently be used in the collective defense." Obviously, the Bundeswehr could use Poland's money

Inadequate resources is not an issue for Europe. The continent enjoys about 12 times the economic strength of Russia. Moreover, the Europeans have more than three times Russia's population.

Yet they have no reason to do more so long as the U.S. will do it for them.

Candidate Trump seemed to understand that America's defense of Europe was counterproductive. President Trump should tell Warsaw no. If Poland doesn't want to raise more of its own soldiers, it should hire a few Hessians from its German neighbor.

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