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WHY DEFENSE MATTERS

A New Narrative for NATO

Judy Dempsey

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About the Author

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Summary

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is in search of a new narrative. While Russia's involvement in Eastern Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea will not give NATO a new sense of solidarity, these events have highlighted what the alliance and its members must urgently do. It is time for all NATO countries to engage in a real strategic debate about why defense matters and what members should do to uphold the transatlantic relationship.

A Disjointed Alliance

- Alliance countries face many threats apart from Russia, including terrorism, cyberattacks, instability south of the Mediterranean and in the Sahel in particular, Iran's nuclear program, and China's strategic ambitions. NATO has no strategies to deal with them.
- NATO countries perceive threats differently, which weakens alliance solidarity and purpose, putting NATO at risk of becoming a toolbox for coalitions of the willing.
- NATO members' defense spending is declining, but there is no political will to pool and share military capabilities.
- Washington will not reverse its strategic shift to Asia and refocus on Europe despite the Ukraine crisis, but NATO is unprepared to deal with America's new priorities.
- NATO members refuse to explain to their publics why defense matters, making it difficult to drum up support for the alliance.

Recommendations for NATO

Forge an agreement about what constitutes a common threat to the alliance.

Foreign, defense, and security experts should discuss security at the national level, analyze the threats they believe their countries face, and ask what capabilities they have for dealing with those threats. NATO should agree on a common threat perception at its September 2014 summit in Cardiff, Wales.

Deploy permanent forces to Poland and the Baltic states while revamping relations with Russia. NATO will have to overcome resistance from Western

European countries to deploy eastward, but such a measure would increase the security of NATO's Eastern flank and signal that NATO is not going to leave any part of the alliance exposed to Russian threats.

Discuss the alliance's relationship with Finland and Sweden. Members of the EU but not of NATO, these two countries have played a critical role in events in Europe's East and are debating whether to join the alliance. NATO should determine its position on the matter.

Reform the North Atlantic Council. Member-state ambassadors make the alliance's decisions in this council, but NATO's secretary general must have consensus to put even vital strategic issues on the agenda. Reform is necessary to make discussion of these issues possible.

Introduction

So much has changed since the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) began its defense matters debates in October 2013. Then, the alliance was focused on ending its combat mission in Afghanistan. Few inside NATO had any idea what NATO would do next. It was all to be mapped out at the September 2014 summit in Cardiff, Wales.

One thing, however, was certain. NATO members had no appetite for another long and sustained combat mission. Instead, there was a desire to take stock. This was not a bad thing given how much NATO had been through over the past decade while facing growing opposition to the use of force from most European publics.

Then came the Ukraine crisis—Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its interference in the Eastern parts of Ukraine. That jolted NATO. It shattered a belief (not shared by all members) that since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO faced no security threat from the East.

The alliance’s Eastern countries of Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania now feel highly vulnerable. Russia is their main security concern because they believe that Moscow is attempting to change the post–Cold War geopolitical consensus on Europe’s borders.

The annexation has had another effect on NATO. The alliance had been soul-searching for some kind of post-Afghanistan narrative. Some think they may have found it. As one NATO ambassador said, “We now have a post-Crimea narrative.”¹ But is that really the case?

This paper, which is the concluding part of the first phase of the defense matters debates conducted by NATO and involving Carnegie Europe, seeks to answer that question. It is a first attempt to deal with the implications of the Ukraine crisis for NATO and for the transatlantic relationship as a whole.² The Atlantic alliance has to consider whether the Ukraine crisis will force the United States to reappraise its decision to pivot away from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. Undoubtedly, there are several NATO countries, especially in Eastern Europe, that hope events in Ukraine, which is not a NATO member, will make the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama refocus on Europe. They may be disappointed.

And it would be a big mistake if NATO became preoccupied only with Russia and Ukraine. Alliance members face threats and challenges in North Africa, the Middle East, and especially the Sahel. It was France, with support from the United States, that took military action in Mali to prevent radical Islamists and a plethora of terrorist and criminal movements from establishing

a strong foothold in the region. Until now, NATO has shied away from helping France, let alone adopting any long-term strategy toward the region.

NATO also cannot postpone having a debate about Iran. It is extraordinary that the alliance's ambassadors have never discussed Iran's nuclear program and its implications for the region. The Strait of Hormuz, a choke point off the coast of Iran, is crucial for global trade. Has NATO considered how it would react if the strait were blockaded? And a related question, beyond Iran, has

NATO considered how it would respond to a confrontation between the U.S. Navy or American ships and the Chinese military in the South China Sea? It is not clear how NATO might interpret the mutual defense pact in Article 5 of its founding treaty that says an attack on one member is an attack on all.

These are all hard security issues. And they are all about why defense matters. Assuming that defense does matter, what should NATO defend against? And how? Defense budgets may be dwindling, but there is no willingness to

share resources by giving a greater role to the concepts of smart defense as NATO puts it or pooling and sharing in the language of the European Union (EU). Indeed, the Ukraine crisis will show over time that several NATO members will not be willing to pool and share because they do not believe that the alliance will provide the defense they require. Instead, they will pursue their own defense strategies. That is hardly good news for alliance cohesion.

All this means that there is an overwhelming argument and urgency for a real strategic debate among all NATO countries about why defense matters and what members should do to uphold the transatlantic relationship and its values.

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A Post-Crimea Narrative for NATO?

NATO countries are not united over what the Ukraine crisis means for the alliance. The idea that NATO has found a new narrative after Russia's annexation of Crimea does not seem convincing to everybody. The reason is that NATO countries do not have a shared perception of threats. As a result, they have reacted differently to Russia's actions.

Poland and the Baltic states, for example, have a completely different view about what constitutes a threat than Spain, Portugal, or Greece does. For the former, the primary threat clearly is Russia. "We must get back to basics—defending our borders," a senior Polish diplomat said. In contrast, the Southern European countries, especially Spain, Italy, Greece, and Turkey, are preoccupied with their own neighborhood. From their perspective, threats in the Middle East and North Africa dwarf the crisis in Ukraine. Leaders and publics in Europe's South are not at all convinced that NATO has found a new post-Afghanistan narrative that reflects their concerns.

For Spain, events happening across the Mediterranean have far greater importance than those in Eastern Europe. “Ukraine, frankly, has little relevance for us. It is too far away. Besides, we don’t see Russia as a threat,” a Spanish official said. For Greece, ongoing demonstrations and civil unrest in Turkey and renewed talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriots on the future of Cyprus take precedence over Ukraine and Russia. Besides, Greece has been traditionally pro-Russian.

If Russia does indeed intend to rearrange Europe’s post–Cold War borders, then NATO must be clear about its role in this new geopolitical environment.

NATO’s relationship with Russia had been deteriorating rapidly even before the annexation of Crimea. Yet even now, Russia has not provided NATO with a sustainable narrative. It is one thing to suspend all cooperation between the alliance and the Kremlin, as NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced in March 2014.³ It’s another to decide what kind of long-term strategy NATO should adopt toward Russia. If Moscow is indeed intent on changing borders, as it did in Georgia by effectively taking control of the provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after a short war in 2008, then NATO will require a long-term strategy to counter such moves.

NATO cannot yet decide on its long-term strategy toward Russia. Alliance members waver between containment, isolation, and deterrence. The Eastern European members support the idea of containment based on NATO deploying permanent forces in their countries. These Eastern European countries also see such a deployment as a kind of deterrence, believing that Russia would not dare threaten them if NATO had a strong presence on these territories. As for isolation, the very idea of adopting such a stance seems unrealistic. Whatever the problems that exist between NATO and Russia, both sides did establish ties over the years. Some NATO countries do not want to throw away all that effort. Germany, for one, would oppose an isolationist policy and would instead favor some kind of engagement and cooperation with Russia. That, however, would mean setting out the conditions for cooperation, something that Germany has always been vague about.

Over the past fifteen years, NATO had tried to establish some kind of cooperation with Russia, and in 2002, it created the NATO-Russia Council (NRC).⁴ But the NRC never achieved its goals of building trust and predictability. Russia wanted an NRC that would give it a substantial say in NATO affairs. The alliance feared that such a step would eventually mean giving Russia a veto over NATO decisions. More often than not, the NRC became a small-scale talking shop where NATO members did their best to avoid all the important issues.

Russia also resented the eastward enlargement of NATO. In 1999, the alliance admitted the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. In 2004, Bulgaria,

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Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined, followed in 2009 by Albania and Croatia.

Those enlargements upset Russia. But what infuriated Russian President Vladimir Putin even more was the U.S. decision in 2011 to base components of its antiballistic missile defense shield in Poland and the Czech Republic. That completely changed the dynamics of the relationship between NATO and Russia. It moved from Russia's grudging acceptance of the NRC to out-

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right criticism of the alliance. The official Russian view was that the American missile defense system would be able to disable Russia's own nuclear weapons, whereas in fact the system was not capable of doing that because of its trajectory, which NATO repeatedly pointed out. The Kremlin also rejected NATO's offers of cooperation, convinced that missile defense was designed to undermine Russia's security interests.

Germany did not like the idea of the system being deployed in Eastern Europe precisely because it feared the project would antagonize Russia. In contrast, Poland and the Czech Republic were in favor because they viewed it as an additional guarantee of their own security—against Russia.

Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 confirmed the worst fears of Poland and some other Eastern European countries. But NATO, the United States, and the EU were very slow to react. Russia's actions allowed the Kremlin to test the resolve of the West, which was weak, indecisive, and divided. Now, with Russia's annexation of Crimea and growing instability in Eastern Ukraine, NATO is confronted with having to deal with its former Cold War adversary in very changed circumstances.

NATO Returns Home

"For fifteen years, we were told, 'Don't worry about Russia. Retool your armed forces for expeditionary warfare. War in Europe is unimaginable,'" one senior Eastern European diplomat said. Diplomats from Poland and the Baltic states believe that Russia's latest belligerence has brought NATO's focus back home to Europe. But has it?

When NATO took command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, established by the United Nations (UN) in 2001,⁵ most Central and Eastern European countries did not like the idea of NATO going so far out of area. Although they ended up supporting the mission, they were very uneasy about the implications for their own territorial defense. No wonder. There is still a huge security vacuum in Poland and the Baltic states. One main reason for this is that many of the big Western European NATO countries wish to uphold a commitment that NATO entered into with the

then Russian president Boris Yeltsin in 1997. The pact stipulates that NATO will not permanently base a substantial number of troops in Eastern Europe.⁶

“Well, these are changed times,” Estonia’s president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, told the 2014 Lennart Meri Conference, an annual meeting of foreign and security policy experts.⁷ He and other leaders in the region want NATO to react in a much more robust manner to what Russia has been doing in Eastern Ukraine. They want NATO to deploy troops on a permanent basis in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states.

Rasmussen and General Philip Breedlove, the commander of U.S. forces in Europe and NATO’s top soldier, understand the threat Russia poses. Apart from giving speeches that are critical of Russia’s actions—unusual for NATO’s top brass—they moved surprisingly quickly in March and April 2014 to reassure their Eastern European allies. This was despite resistance from some NATO countries.⁸

Ships and fighter jets have been deployed to the Baltics. NATO plans to hold exercises there as a sign of reassurance to its Eastern member states of the alliance’s commitment to Article 5. NATO has also promised to help Ukraine train its armed forces. Interestingly, it was the United States that promised to send military personnel to step up training in Poland and deploy troops there on a rotational basis. And when Obama was in Warsaw on June 3–4, he proposed a \$1 billion package to train and improve the capabilities of Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania. Called the European Reassurance Initiative, it first has to be passed by Congress.⁹ If it goes through, more U.S. troops would be posted to Eastern Europe on a temporary basis, there would be greater U.S. involvement in NATO exercises in the region, and additional U.S. warships would be deployed in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.

But that’s where the West’s engagement stops. As of June 2014, NATO will not be putting boots on the ground in any permanent way in Eastern Europe. Nor has the alliance any intention of moving out of area by supporting Ukraine directly, which is completely understandable. Ukraine cannot reasonably expect to be covered by Article 5. Instead, NATO appears to be returning to a limited form of territorial defense.

That is not good news for the alliance. During the first half of 2014, the gap between NATO’s leadership, with its demands for standing up to Russia, and the attitude of several Western European member states has widened, despite the rhetoric of the NATO leadership. Western Europeans fear that any permanent NATO presence could escalate the situation vis-à-vis Russia. But there is another reason for Western Europeans’ reluctance. They just don’t seem to be committed to maximizing the defenses of Eastern Europeans. They have a different perception of the threat Russia poses.

NATO’s commitment to Eastern Europe could be tested if Russia’s actions in Ukraine were to spill over into the Baltic states, which have sizable ethnic Russian communities. But would Putin really be prepared to test NATO’s

resolve by fomenting unrest in any of those countries? As long as Russia confines its actions to Ukraine, there is a likelihood that NATO members will continue to have their own specific perceptions of threats and how they should react to Russia's destabilizing behavior in Ukraine. It is as if NATO has written off Ukraine.

No U.S. Pivot Back to Europe

In this context, much depends on the strategic priorities of the United States. Some NATO members are nursing fond hopes that Washington will now invest far more diplomatic and political energy into the alliance. But it would be unwise to count on that.

During his visit to Poland in early June, Obama made promises to Poland and other countries in the region: "Poland will never stand alone," Obama said. He continued, "Estonia will never stand alone. Latvia will never stand alone. Lithuania will never stand alone. Romania will never stand alone."¹⁰

However, the administration warned that such efforts "will not come at the expense of other defense priorities, such as our commitment to the Asia Pacific rebalance."¹¹ In short, there is no reason to believe that the Ukraine crisis will be enough to persuade the Obama administration to reverse its eastward pivot.

That strategic shift would be an issue for any U.S. president, whether Republican or Democrat, for the simple reason that China is just too important as an economic, security, and military rival to warrant a sea change. North Korea under its young dictator Kim Jong-un is too unpredictable. Washington will not be willing to put its interest in a secure and stable Asia-Pacific region on the back burner.

The importance of the Asia-Pacific for the United States was confirmed in April 2014 when U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel visited the region. During talks in Japan, he announced that the United States would send two additional ballistic missile destroyers to Japan to counter the North Korean threat and Pyongyang's "pattern of provocative and destabilizing actions" that violate UN resolutions. He also said the ships, which will be deployed by 2017, would help protect the United States from those threats.¹² Hagel's message was clear: the United States is not going to change strategic direction. Obama's subsequent visit to Asia in late April and his strong support for the Japanese government confirmed that course.

So if NATO's Eastern European members hope that Russia's new assertive policies will revive Washington's interest in NATO—or possibly even reverse the Asia pivot—they are in for a disappointment. America's reaffirmation of its commitment to NATO is one thing; its strategic direction is another.

What this means is that NATO will not be able to depend on the United States to pick up the baton and lead as it has done over the past sixty-five years.

There is no reason to believe that the Ukraine crisis will be enough to persuade the Obama administration to reverse its eastward pivot.

The United States now has different strategic priorities. And Europe is not one of them. Yet, the European members of NATO have still to understand the implications of this shift: the United States will not be willing to take the lead in NATO missions. Furthermore, NATO countries still continue to ignore the fact that they lack a shared perception of the threats they face.

An Era of Coalitions of the Willing

“The absence of shared threats is not a new situation for NATO,” a U.S. official said. “It’s been there for a long time.” Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO has had to operate on the basis of its members having different strategic priorities. Because of these differences, coalitions of the willing have become an option for an alliance. Such coalitions are increasingly accepted for reasons of practicality: some member states might not want to join certain missions, while non-NATO countries might want to contribute to a particular operation.

Think about what happened when NATO imposed a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011: less than half of the alliance’s 28 members participated militarily, but several nonmember countries, including Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, provided military support.

Of course, some NATO members warn against coalitions of the willing, arguing that such arrangements weaken the alliance’s esprit de corps. Another downside is that these coalitions can create resentment if it is always the same group of countries that takes on difficult tasks. Under the NATO principle of “costs lie where they fall,” participating states end up footing the bill.

At the same time, NATO has vast and permanent infrastructure, from headquarters and agencies to bases and airborne early warning and control systems. This has to be paid for by all alliance members, even though only those states belonging to the coalition of the willing might actually use it. Essentially, these coalitions have the effect of turning NATO into a convenient toolbox from which countries can pick and choose which parts of the alliance they want for certain missions.

Follow the Leader?

That suits the United States. Washington has seen over the past twenty years how difficult it is to reach consensus in NATO. It has also seen how, at least during the Libya operation, some European countries, notably France and Britain, were ready to take the lead. The United States was no longer prepared to play the role of the world’s policeman—even though its assistance to NATO during the Libyan campaign was absolutely crucial. Despite that, the Europeans are still not prepared or even willing to reduce their military and security dependence on the United States or indeed take on more of the burden, which Washington has so often requested.

This imbalance is one of the big, negative legacies of the Cold War. During that era, NATO's role was clear. There was one enemy—the Soviet Union—and one goal—the defense of Western Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union left NATO floundering. Not even the Balkan wars of the 1990s that plunged this part of Southeastern Europe into horrific violence could restore the alliance's sense of mission.

The NATO attack against Serbia during the 1999 Kosovo War gave the alliance a new impetus, but not for long. That first out-of-area mission showed how much NATO's European members were lacking in logistics, heavy transport airlift, and intelligence. Nevertheless, they refused to spend more on defense. In that sense, the Kosovo War ended up being a missed opportunity for the alliance.

With few exceptions, after 1999 the Europeans slipped back into the comfortable zone of trusting and believing that the United States would always be there to lead NATO and fill the other members' capability gaps. Even the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States did not force Europe to reappraise its attitude toward its dependence on Washington.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a different matter; it caused a huge breach inside the alliance. At one stage, French, German, and Belgian leaders, who vehemently opposed then U.S. president George W. Bush's war plans against Iraq, proposed the establishment of Europe's own security and defense structures as an alternative to NATO. That went nowhere. The split did not just run between Europeans and Americans; Europe itself became deeply divided over the Iraq War. Countries were divided into Atlanticists and those who wanted the EU to have an independent security policy.

The EU was also split on the issue of how much hard power was needed to underpin its panoply of soft power tools. It was a horrible time for Europe. Those differences over the use of hard power persist. It is an issue that most of the European members of NATO and the EU have ducked for too long.

The Retreat to Soft Power

Despite the acrimony over the U.S. invasion of Iraq—with the ambassadors of France and the United States engaging in shouting matches at the weekly North Atlantic Council (NAC) meetings in which the alliance's decisions were made—NATO managed to stick together in Afghanistan. That achievement should not be underestimated. Over the eleven years of its duration, the NATO-led ISAF mission metamorphosed from a stabilization task to a huge combat operation.

Yet during that time, European governments kept trying to maintain the pretense to their publics that the ISAF mission was a humanitarian one, while in fact it was a war that NATO lost. That cost the alliance a lot of credibility. Apart from its enormous financial outlays, the mission cost the lives of many

NATO soldiers and many Afghan civilians, leaving the public on both sides of the Atlantic increasingly hostile toward the operation.

Indeed, opinion polls have consistently shown that the European and American publics have had enough of war.¹³ There is also a widespread view, based on experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, that military interventions have been ineffective. In short, it is hard to find support among most European countries for resorting to hard power. With the exception of a few countries such as France and Denmark, there is general disillusionment about the effectiveness of the use of force.

This retreat to soft power is taking place at a time when Russia is not only spending much more on defense than NATO members but is also pursuing hard power tactics in Eastern Ukraine.¹⁴ The Kremlin's tactics mostly take the form of the pro-Russian militias that suddenly emerged after Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014. Those NATO members that hope the Ukraine crisis will encourage European governments to increase defense spending will be let down.

The Diverging Paths of Europe's Core Countries

Defense ministries throughout Europe are going through tough times. With few exceptions, such as Poland, most of them are all under pressure from their finance ministries to cut spending. The need to make the armed forces of NATO countries leaner and more efficient is long overdue. In the past, much spending was earmarked for personnel costs, not training, equipment, or research and development.

Yet the cutbacks among two of Europe's core countries—Britain and France—will in the long run damage NATO's ability to conduct military missions and the European Union's ability to develop its own security and defense ambitions. The other two core countries, Germany and Poland, will be unable to fill the gaps left by Britain and France. Berlin and Warsaw have completely different views as to why defense matters.

The experiences of two other groups of states offer additional perspectives on Europe's security and defense priorities: Nordic countries and those in Europe's South that are NATO members.

France

France's armed forces have been badly hit by cuts announced in 2013. The budget for last year was €31.4 billion (\$42.7 billion), or 1.2 percent of gross domestic product. That is well short of the 2 percent that NATO recommends. But with rising unemployment and low growth, French President François Hollande had little choice but to introduce stringent savings across the board.¹⁵

Still, neither he nor the armed forces want a budget that is so low that it hampers France's ability to conduct military missions on its own. That is why Hollande, honoring an election promise, pulled French troops out of Afghanistan in 2012, a year earlier than the rest of the alliance. This made it possible for France to send troops to Mali in early 2013. That mission was hugely important for Hollande. He wanted to demonstrate that France had the strategic foresight to act, even though his critics accused him of launching such a mission in order to deflect from his waning popularity and economic problems back home. Hollande put paid to those critics.

"We acted because it was in our interest to prevent the Islamic fundamentalists from taking over Mali," a French diplomat said. France's focus on the Sahel and other parts of Africa is unlikely to change. As a former colonial power in the region, it knows the history, the allegiances, and the tensions. Above all, it knows how the region's weak states have made it very susceptible and vulnerable to extremism, fundamentalism, and criminality. However, French officials now admit that Russia is a threat to the Eastern members of the alliance and that these countries' defense capabilities will have to be improved and increased.

France is relieved that the Afghanistan mission is over. It was never comfortable with NATO going so far out of area. Former French president Jacques Chirac was highly skeptical about the alliance going into Afghanistan and only reluctantly sent French soldiers to take part in the operation. Both he and Hollande disliked the fact that the United States was running operations.

Now that the combat mission in Afghanistan will be over by the end of 2014, France wants the alliance to return to its traditional concept of putting common defense first. That means having NATO back in Europe, an approach that suits France's interests and—surprisingly—even its Gaullist instincts. Contrary to general perception, France has come to appreciate the usefulness of NATO.

In 2009, France rejoined NATO's integrated command structure, which meant giving France an influential say in military issues. In doing so, France overturned a long-standing suspicion of alliance structures, which stemmed from the fact that they were dominated by the United States at the expense of European influence.

This shift toward NATO has much to do with France's disappointment over Europe. There is no doubt that France—and also Britain—has been extremely frustrated with Europe's reluctance to think strategically and accept the necessity of having hard-power tools to underpin diplomacy and soft power. Paris had long lobbied for the EU to build up its own security and defense policy, with France wishing to play a major role. But it also wanted a stronger Europe. They both saw how Europe, militarily and politically, had been so disunited, so unprepared to deal with the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and its descent into civil war.

In December 1998, Chirac and former British prime minister Tony Blair launched what became known as the Saint-Malo initiative.¹⁶ To great public acclaim, the two leaders set highly ambitious goals for building up troops for future EU interventions. It was too late to make a difference.

NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia, which was about stopping the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo, confirmed their worst fears. Europeans lacked essential capabilities to defend their own backyard.

Sixteen years later, few of the goals of the initiative have been attained. The lack of political will among EU countries scotched the Saint-Malo accord.

In 2010, France and Britain tried a different tack: they forged their own defense alliance when then French president Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron signed the Lancaster House treaties. The accords were a damning confirmation of Europe's inability to move ahead with a common security and defense policy. France and Britain were no longer prepared to wait any longer for the EU to act.

The Lancaster House treaties were another letdown. Four years on, French officials admit that the results of the deal have been very disappointing. "Some things still work, such as nuclear cooperation," said one French diplomat. "But frankly, it has not met our expectations."

These repeated setbacks in Anglo-French defense cooperation explain why France has come to rely on NATO—meaning the United States—as a more useful toolbox than the EU. "NATO has a culture of interoperability," the French diplomat added. "It has a culture of collective defense, of common norms, which is particularly important for the smaller countries." France knows that NATO can establish ad hoc coalitions depending on the mission, which suits France's interests. At the same time, France can rely less and less on Britain as a major military power and ally. That is a blow to France's ambitions, to NATO, and to the EU.

Britain

Britain's armed forces were once the pride of European NATO countries and considered a model for the alliance in terms of competence, professionalism, and experience. Today, they are going through an unprecedented period of retrenchment.

Under Cameron's Conservative-led government, Britain's armed forces will be cut by 30,000 personnel to 147,000 by 2020.¹⁷ In 2010, London announced an 8 percent cut to the defense budget for the period 2011–2015, and there are plans for further savings.¹⁸ Chief of the Defense Staff General Sir Nicholas Houghton, who was appointed in 2013, recently warned of hollowed-out armed forces.¹⁹

"Unattended, our current course leads to a strategically incoherent force structure: exquisite equipment but insufficient resources to man that equipment or train on it," Houghton said. "This is what the Americans call the

specter of the hollow force. We are not there yet; but across defense, I would identify the Royal Navy as being perilously close to its critical mass in manpower terms,” he added.

The British government has failed to explain what role its smaller armed forces should play. Cameron hasn’t spelled out Britain’s strategic interests either. This is a critical gap in government policy. Security experts are hoping that the next Strategic Defense and Security Review, due in late 2015, will remedy this. But Britain’s allies, particularly the United States, are alarmed by the lack of debate over this review. Neither Britain’s future strategy nor the risks it considers relevant are being publicly discussed.

This lack of strategic thinking was evident during a hearing by the UK House of Commons Defense Select Committee.²⁰ The hearing was convened to ask hard and direct questions about what the next review should contain and why defense matters.

Paul Cornish, an adviser to Houghton and a professor of strategic studies at Exeter University, bemoaned the lack of clear thinking about the future role of Britain’s armed forces. “There is . . . a sort of schizophrenia in public opinion as far as defense matters are concerned,” he told the committee, adding:

There is immense and gratifying support for the armed forces . . . There is, however, a complete lack of support for what is considered to be the political strategic mission or . . . grand strategic mission; and my explanation, for what it is worth, is that Afghanistan and Iraq were presented in some way as the embodiment of our grand strategic mission in the world, and it did not wash. I do not think that the public expects that and it was an error to present it at that level. Our grand strategic mission does not need to be said; it is what it is. We are a medium power with an enormous reputation for our advocacy for human rights and, as a tolerant liberal democracy, we have all of that. I do not think we need to present these expeditionary operations in such a way.²¹

But the British public does want to know why young men and women were sent into battle in faraway Afghanistan. Soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq have been buried back home with honor and respect in funerals that show Britons’ wide support for the armed forces. But the public needs to be told why defense matters. The Cameron government has not broached the issue.

Britain’s stance is frustrating for NATO, for its relationship with the United States, and of course for its relationship with Europe. The British government must surely know what kinds of threats it considers relevant and what kind of strategy it should adopt to deal with them.

The threats include all the dangers and unpredictability posed by failed and failing states across North Africa, the Sahel, and the Middle East. These threats, which Britain, as a former imperial power, understands, require a particular strategic outlook to deal with them. Yet Britain can no longer go it alone as it did during its highly successful military intervention in the Sierra Leone civil war in

2000. Britain's defense cutbacks mean that whatever strategy it adopts, it must find partners to secure the capabilities necessary to realize that strategy.

Washington is acutely aware of the decline of Britain's armed forces. Former U.S. secretary of defense Robert Gates pulled no punches about the impact the cuts in Britain's armed forces would have on the special transatlantic relationship and on Britain's security and defense role in Europe. "With the fairly substantial reductions in defense spending in Great Britain, what we're finding is that it won't have full spectrum capabilities and the ability to be a full partner as they have been in the past," Gates said.²²

Even without the effects of spending cuts, the UK-U.S. partnership is undergoing a dramatic change. When British parliamentarians last year voted against supporting possible U.S. air strikes against Syria, it showed how deeply Cameron erred when he took support for the transatlantic relationship for granted. He was out of touch with the British public, which did not and does not want Britain to do America's bidding, as it did during the Iraq War. Voters will be highly reluctant to send British troops into battle without a clear exit strategy.

It is not only the Anglo-American relationship that is under strain. Britain's relationship with the European Union is close to disastrous. The victory of UKIP, the United Kingdom Independence Party, in the European Parliament elections that were held on May 25, 2014, confirmed how Britain and Europe are growing further and further apart. Besides pushing for much tougher laws that would restrict immigration, UKIP wants Britain to leave the EU. This is something that deeply concerns the United States. It wants Britain to be part of Europe.

Washington wants London to play a strong and influential role in giving Europe's security and defense policy real substance. Obama has repeatedly told Cameron that the United States wants Britain to be one of its interlocutors in Europe. This is not about the EU competing with NATO. It's about Europe pulling its weight—not only in the interests of NATO but also for its own sake.

Britain, however, has steadfastly refused to take up this baton. Euroskeptics in the UK fear that if the EU were to develop a credible security and defense policy, this would inevitably lead to the creation of a European army. Cameron has done little to dispel that idea, even though it is not something that many other countries could stomach in the near future.

What it boils down to is that today's Britain is simply not willing to commit to a strong European security and defense policy.²³ The British debate over its relationship with the EU will be decided in a referendum in 2017 if Cameron is reelected in the 2015 general election. The specter of that referendum has poisoned any debate over what kind of defense and security policy, or ambitions, the EU should have.

In short, Britain's defense cuts and its Euroskepticism are extremely damaging for NATO and for Europe. NATO is being deprived of a country whose military experience and professionalism strengthened the European pillar of

the alliance. The EU is being deprived of a country that had strategic vision and capabilities to realize it. The United States and the EU are the big losers.

Germany

Joachim Gauck, the president of Germany, certainly knows how to create a stir. In a speech to the 2014 Munich Security Conference, he encapsulated the dilemma facing the transatlantic relationship: “At this very moment, the world’s only superpower is reconsidering the scale and form of its global engagement,” he said. “Europe, its partner, is busy navel-gazing. I don’t believe that Germany can simply carry on as before in the face of these developments.”²⁴

Yet, in Gauck’s view, Germany was doing precisely that. “We feel surrounded by friends but hardly know how to deal with diffuse security threats such as the privatization of power by terrorists and cybercriminals. We rightly complain when allies overstep the mark when they use electronic surveillance to detect threats. And yet, we prefer to remain reliant on them and hesitate to improve our own surveillance capacities.” It was time, the president concluded, for Germany to assume more responsibility.

The last German politician to speak out with such conviction was Joschka Fischer, when he was foreign minister. He believed that Germany needed to support the NATO bombing of Serbia during the Kosovo War in 1999 for moral reasons. Yet, four years later, Fischer was equally convinced that the United States did not have valid reasons for attacking Iraq. Today, Gauck builds on what Fischer tried to do: to start a long-overdue strategic debate about Germany’s responsibility in the world and the kind of military intervention Berlin should support.

Ursula von der Leyen weighed into the debate too. Since becoming Germany’s defense minister in December 2013, she has shaken up the top ranks in her ministry. She, too, has called for Germany’s armed forces to become more engaged in international missions.

During her speech at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, von der Leyen made it clear that Germany and the EU as a whole have to take on much more of the responsibility for their security and defense.²⁵

“European nations ought to be prepared to take over a fair share of the transatlantic burden,” she told her audience. “Germany is ready to contribute to this endeavor. . . . Indifference is never an option—neither from a security perspective nor from a humanitarian perspective,” she added. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier also called on Germany to take on more responsibility in defense and security affairs.

However, the person whose views count most in Germany—Chancellor Angela Merkel—has steered well away from the debate. Indeed, she was quite annoyed with the speeches that Gauck, von der Leyen, and Steinmeier gave. They did not clear their remarks with her.

Merkel's reluctance to enter this debate is true to form. Merkel has always had a very good feeling for what the German public wants, and voters in Germany simply don't see why their country should play a greater security role in European or global affairs. That is not just because of Germany's history; it is because Germans are highly ambivalent about security and defense issues. They prefer to remain as neutral as possible.

German neutrality has been particularly noticeable during the Ukraine crisis. A majority of the German public is opposed to sanctions and highly skeptical about giving NATO a greater military role in Eastern Europe. One poll, conducted in April, showed that 49 percent of those asked wanted Germany to take a middle position between Putin and the West, while only 45 percent said Germany should be solidly with the West.²⁶ A majority of Germans also oppose stronger sanctions against Russia.²⁷

No wonder then that von der Leyen received no support when she proposed that Germany send troops to Eastern European NATO countries to reinforce their defenses.²⁸ Merkel, for her part, has been highly critical of Putin's annexation of Crimea and has at least gone down the road of imposing sanctions on Russia.

Yet, with few exceptions, Germany's political leaders have not tried in any way to explain that Russia's actions may threaten the stability of NATO's Eastern borders. Indeed, Germany, thanks to the alliance's enlargement to Eastern Europe, feels far more secure today than at any time during the Cold War. Then, East and West Germany would have constituted the main battlefield. Today, Germany's Eastern neighbors serve as a buffer against any threat from Russia. Still, Germans don't seem willing to think about the security vacuum that those neighbors are experiencing. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that if any of the Baltic states were attacked or threatened, Germany would defend them. As Jörg Wolf wrote in his contribution to the defense matters debates, "Solidarity with allies in the case of an attack is an iron-clad commitment."²⁹

Even so, Germany retains a lingering ambiguity toward Russia. It is an ambiguity that means Germans try to find excuses for Putin's annexation of Crimea and pro-Russian militia violence in Eastern Ukraine. It was extraordinary how the former Social Democratic chancellors Gerhard Schröder and Helmut Schmidt condoned Russia's actions. Schröder is on the payroll of Russian energy giant Gazprom, so it should be easy to dismiss his views. But Schmidt, when he was chancellor in the 1970s, defied his own party by agreeing to the deployment of U.S. Pershing missiles in West Germany. Today, both men tap into the pacifism that Gauck criticized and that feeds German ambiguity toward Putin's actions.

This is not good news for NATO or for Europe's security and defense ambitions. The reality is that Germans do not feel threatened and do not see much need to boost the defenses of their Eastern neighbors, even though people in Europe's East certainly feel threatened by Russia's actions in Ukraine. In short,

neither the German public nor their political elites want a debate about why a strong security policy might be necessary.

Neither the German public nor their political elites want a debate about why a strong security policy might be necessary.

Germany's refusal to acknowledge the need for hard power became particularly clear in 2011 when Horst Köhler, who was the German president at the time, gave an interview to German radio during a trip to Afghanistan. During the course of the conversation, he said that German ships were involved in the EU's antipiracy mission off the coast of Somalia to protect Germany's economic interests.³⁰ What a furor that led to! The media pounced on Köhler, criticizing him for suggesting that it would be appropriate to use military means for base commercial gain. Köhler threw in the towel. He resigned.

Poland

Poland is extremely worried about the state of defense in Eastern Europe. Ever since the country achieved its independence from the Moscow-aligned Warsaw Pact after the fall of Communism in 1989, successive Polish governments have never lost sight of the need to be safe from Russia. Poland's foremost goal was to become part of the Euro-Atlantic structures. It attained that by joining NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004.

Traditionally, Poland has looked to NATO and the United States, not to Europe, to safeguard its security. This was particularly true under the presidency of Lech Kaczyński and the government of his twin brother, Jarosław Kaczyński. Both had founded the nationalist and conservative Law and Justice Party that governed Poland from 2005 to 2007. The twins also considered Poland's links to the United States much more important than its membership in the EU. Somehow, a secular Europe would undermine Polish sovereignty and erode Poland's sense of national and Catholic identity. Above all, they believed that NATO, thanks to the U.S. plans for missile defense for Europe, would guarantee Poland's security. The EU could not match that.

When Obama decided in 2009 to scale back America's plans for missile defense in Europe, Poland's new center-right Civic Platform government led by Donald Tusk made a radical strategic shift. It realized that the Obama administration was drifting away and that Poland would have to make its future in Europe. But Tusk and his foreign minister, Radosław Sikorski, truly believe that Europe has to stop depending on the United States and needs to begin taking its own defense seriously.

Given the disinterest of most other European nations in either a strong EU or a strong defense, Poland is facing an enormous uphill struggle. When it proposed, for example, that the EU should have its own military planning cell, Britain said no, even though the United States had few objections.

Poland never believed that NATO's out-of-area mission in Afghanistan was wise, even though the Polish government at the time supported the decision

out of loyalty to Washington. What was and is of primary importance for Poland is that NATO retains its *raison d'être* as a collective military organization committed to Article 5.

Putin's annexation of Crimea and the instability in Eastern Ukraine have vindicated the Polish establishment: Russia cannot be trusted; NATO must not neglect territorial defense. Yet the fear runs deep in Warsaw that in this crisis, Poland can rely on neither NATO nor the EU for all the help that may become necessary.

Poland welcomes the measures that NATO has been taking in response to the Ukraine crisis. It appreciates that Rasmussen and Breedlove have moved quickly to reassure the alliance's Eastern European members. But for Warsaw, that is not sufficient. It wants NATO or U.S. boots on the ground because it believes that they will constitute a major deterrent for Russia. The White House and also several Western European governments are against stationing troops in Eastern Europe. They fear it will provoke Russia even further.

Given this reluctance on the part of its allies, Poland will push hard to strengthen its own armed forces. Even before the Ukraine crisis, Warsaw was setting out its own defense and security agenda, based on a radical modernization of Poland's armed forces and defense industry, in a bid to make the country as self-sufficient as possible. The government is now well on track to spend 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense, the target set by NATO.³¹

This will certainly help the alliance. But above all, the spending is about Poland defending itself. There will be no commitment to smart defense or to pooling and sharing. "We want to spend on equipment that we need for our security," a Polish official said.

The Nordic Countries

The Lennart Meri Conference held in Tallinn, the Estonian capital, in 2014 was something special. There were several debates about Finland's and Sweden's attitudes toward NATO. As members of the EU but not of NATO, these two countries have played a critical role in events in Europe's East in view of their relations with the Baltic states, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other. Now, they are deeply engaged in a public debate about whether to launch a bilateral defense union and whether to join NATO. The Finnish and Swedish governments have not yet formally raised the question of joining NATO, and they will not do so until they know that they will both say yes. And, of course, they need the support of their respective publics.

Why have Finland and Sweden changed their attitude toward NATO after years of pursuing a proud independence that gave them the flexibility to set their own course and strategies? One explanation is that defense has become more expensive. It's much more difficult and costly to go it alone now than in the past, although Finland and Sweden are surely aware that they will not be

able to compensate for their own capability shortfalls by resorting to pooling and sharing inside NATO.

Helsinki and Stockholm also see the need for more security as Russia modernizes its armed forces and focuses increasingly on the Arctic. The two Nordic countries perceive a common threat: Russia. And a kind of Atlanticism is seeping through the main echelons of the political elite in Finland and Sweden. Regardless of the U.S. pivot to Asia, the two countries know how important NATO is as a collective security alliance.

The influence of Denmark—a member of NATO and the EU (but not part of the EU's security and defense policy)—and Norway, a member of NATO but not the EU, on the positions of Finland and Sweden cannot be underestimated.

Denmark has undergone a major shift in its defense outlook. From being a relatively passive member of NATO during the Cold War and in the 1990s, Denmark assessed the geopolitical environment and made a decision to act strategically. It informed the Danish public that it was boosting defense spending for security reasons. It embarked on a comprehensive modernization of its armed forces. It moved away from acting and thinking on a regional, even provincial, basis to acting globally and strategically. Successive Danish governments embraced a strong Atlanticism.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Denmark had no qualms about supporting the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, sending in combat troops and suffering heavy casualties. And when the United States invaded Iraq, Denmark joined America's coalition of the willing. Yet the public has continued to support its government's security and defense strategy, which is three-pronged. The first is national defense, a priority for any country. The second is the wider defense of NATO member states, including the United States. The third is regional cooperation with Denmark's Nordic and Baltic neighbors.

Norway, too, has been a stellar NATO member and Atlanticist. Just as important for the alliance's future, Norway has been actively encouraging the regionalization of security, with the involvement of the Baltic states. This regionalization could lead to imbalances in NATO, with a mini-alliance of NATO and non-NATO members working closely together in this part of Northeastern Europe. But it could also show that these kinds of partnerships, which NATO has been actively pursuing over the past fifteen years, do really work.

If that is the case, then why should Finland and Sweden even consider joining NATO? For one thing, if they did join—and one would not join without the other, as officials from both countries stress—they would have a say about NATO strategy. Second, NATO would give them a security guarantee enshrined in Article 5. And third, Finland and Sweden could shift NATO's focus toward the Arctic, which is becoming a major geostrategic issue for Russia, the United States, and the Nordic countries.

Europe's South

Spain and Portugal are still struggling with drastic budget cutbacks that were imposed as a result of the eurozone crisis and affect almost every aspect of the public sector. It would be very difficult for any of these governments to explain to their citizens, who are facing austerity measures, why defense spending should be exempted from such cuts.³²

More importantly, these countries have become inward-looking because of the crisis. Foreign policy and strategic analysis of the threats these states face have taken a back seat. Morale in Southern Europe's foreign ministries is low because funds have been reduced. Ideas presented by security and defense experts are relegated to desk drawers. This is a worrying trend. If these countries do not pay attention to strategic planning and analysis, then will they be able to cope with a crisis in their own immediate neighborhood? North Africa and the Middle East remain highly volatile regions.

Ukraine, by comparison, is far away. Realistically, it is hard to see the crisis in Ukraine or Russia's annexation of Crimea having the effect of persuading any of these governments to maintain current levels of defense spending, let alone increase the budget for the armed forces. In fact, defense ministries will remain under pressure to rein their spending in further.³³

Curiously, there is an exception: Greece continues to spend 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense. It is amazing that the Greek government is intent on maintaining such a high level of expenditure. But then, the bulk of it is earmarked for personnel costs, not equipment.³⁴ A refusal to cut spending may have more to do with the Greek government's fear of higher unemployment than with any realistic appreciation of threats, though many also consider this to be a reflection of the relationship between Greece and Turkey. As for pooling and sharing, it has had little traction among any of the countries in Southern Europe.

What Pooling and Sharing?

Given all the constraints on defense spending, would now not be a good moment to finally take seriously the concept of pooling and sharing, as the EU calls it, or smart defense in NATO parlance? The Ukraine crisis certainly brought home to some NATO countries how important it may be to have an effective military. But the fact that alliance members perceive threats differently depending on their geographical location has consequences for both their level of defense spending and their willingness to pool scarce resources.

NATO members have economic and trade interests all over the world. But there is little debate among Europeans about how to protect these interests in case of a major crisis. "Europe, as the largest trading bloc in the world, depends on a global security system which is in part its responsibility to maintain,"

stated a European Parliament report on the cost of European countries not spending on defense.³⁵ Yet neither NATO nor the EU is prepared to assume the responsibility for these new security challenges.

One reason for this ambivalence is that the European public is unaware of what defense really means. There is still an outdated view that it is mainly about fighting wars. But security is becoming increasingly complex. Just think of the antipiracy missions off the Horn of Africa that NATO and the EU have been carrying out over the past several years. The alliance has been involved in its counterpiracy operation, called Ocean Shield, since 2008. The EU embarked on its Atalanta mission in large part because member states recognized the importance of protecting vital shipping lanes.

Missions cost money. And with few exceptions, European countries have not been prepared to maintain adequate levels of defense spending.

What is more, implementation difficulties make it unlikely that pooling and sharing will ever truly happen. There have been several multinational armaments projects in recent years. They include the Eurofighter Typhoon as well as the much-delayed A400M transport aircraft carrier and the Tiger helicopter from Airbus, to name just a few. All have exceeded budgets, all have missed deadlines, and the experience of several governments and several armaments industries across Europe working together has proved disastrous.

There are other convincing practical reasons why many NATO countries oppose pooling and sharing. When, for example, German officials are asked about pooling and sharing, they immediately maintain that defense is an issue of national sovereignty. Member states do not want to have their hands tied when it comes to opting into or out of any NATO or EU mission. Nor do national governments want to give up control over their military capabilities. From that point of view, the Ukraine crisis has weakened the case for pooling and sharing. Why, for example, should Poland, which is now prepared to spend far more on procurement, pool expensive equipment that it needs for its own security requirements? Why should Poland share its resources when NATO is not prepared to deploy troops on a permanent basis in the country? In the words of one Polish defense official, “the Ukraine crisis confirmed to us that we have to be prepared to defend our country. That means having the equipment and training and infrastructure that we need.”

Other European countries do not like pooling and sharing for another reason: the impact on their defense industries. Europe’s defense industry is huge. It has an annual turnover of €96 billion (\$131 billion), employs 400,000 people directly, and indirectly supports another 960,000 jobs across Europe.³⁶ The leading nations of Europe’s defense industry, which include Germany, France, and Britain, oppose pooling and sharing because they believe their defense industries would be forced to specialize. At issue then, are jobs, competition, and protection of the national markets. Member states do not want

to cooperate because they fear job losses or losing the markets they have built up over the years.

These attitudes—as understandable as they are—perpetuate duplication, prevent interoperability, and hinder the creation of a common armaments industry that could compete on an international level. It is clear that collaboration could be more productive and cheaper, but so far, it has not been a great success. Even NATO’s own “framework nation” concept is questionable. This concept was proposed in 2013 by Germany. The idea was that smaller allies without the money to spend on a wide range of capabilities would be able to access the capabilities that the big nations have, such as headquarters, communication and information systems, joint intelligence, and surveillance and reconnaissance.³⁷

The resulting fragmentation of European markets is enormously costly and erodes NATO’s ability to act effectively. Europe has sixteen major military shipyards; the United States has two. Europe pays for the luxury of 26 separate helicopter training programs while cutting funds allocated to research and development. Between 2006 and 2012, the share of national defense budgets dedicated to research and development decreased from 5 to 2.5 percent.³⁸

The less European governments spend on research and development and the less willing they are to collaborate, the more damage will be caused to Europe’s technological base. Over time, Europe will lose any chance of having a competitive military-industrial base able to pioneer new technologies and support the EU in its endeavor to invest more and better.³⁹

Europe even lacks a pan-European system of certification for defense items, making it slow and costly for products to reach the markets. The European Commission, the EU’s executive, has estimated that the lack of common certification for ground-launched ammunition costs about €1.5 billion (\$2.0 billion) each year, compared with a total of €7.5 billion (\$10.2 billion) spent on ammunition.⁴⁰

Frank Mattern, who heads the German office of U.S. management consultancy McKinsey & Company, is pessimistic about the future of Europe’s defense capabilities. “European defense is hampered by lack of cooperation, by duplication, and by other problems. And it is getting worse,” he told the 2014 Munich Security Conference. “European defense assets are highly fragmented. Only 1.2 percent of defense budgets is spent on research and development. In terms of military capabilities, the gap between Europe and the United States is widening.”⁴¹

Mattern said that European governments did not have the luxury of being able to continue in this manner. “The U.S. pivot to Asia will require Europe to step up capabilities,” he argued. As of now, most European governments have yet to understand the implications of that pivot for Europe’s own security.

The less European governments spend on research and development and the less willing they are to collaborate, the more damage will be caused to Europe’s technological base.

Disparities in Defense Spending

Europeans continue to depend on the United States to pick up the bill and to fill any capability gaps. In 2013, the United States accounted for 73 percent of NATO's defense expenditure.⁴² That share is rising, not falling—it is up from 68 percent in 2007 and 72 percent in 2012.⁴³ Yet, as Paul Cornish of Exeter University argues, “NATO's 25 European allies appeared hardly to notice the problem, and seemed barely concerned with the implications for their security of the U.S. ‘strategic rebalancing’ announced by President Obama in January 2012.”⁴⁴

NATO is becoming a multitier alliance with three types of members: those that are willing to use and pay for their armed forces; those that are prepared to pay for others to engage in military missions; and those that are prepared to do neither.

The present imbalance is neither sustainable nor fair. It means that the Europeans are not treated as equal partners with the United States. Of course, there is no way that any single European country could ever match U.S. defense spending. But that is not the point. If the Europeans collectively accounted for 40 percent of NATO spending, that would certainly soothe America's growing impatience and irritation with its European allies. It would also mean that the Europeans could claim a real say over the alliance's needs and future course. But it is very hard to see such a shift in spending happening.

Instead, NATO is becoming a multitier alliance with three types of members: those that are willing to use and pay for their armed forces; those that are prepared to pay for others to engage in military missions; and those that are prepared to do neither.⁴⁵ The question is whether countries can ever agree on the threats facing alliance members and their interests and how to respond to them.

The Threats Facing NATO

NATO officials repeatedly talk about the threats facing the alliance. Yet too often there is no consensus about the kinds of threats NATO has to tackle. The threats from terrorism, cyberattacks, and vulnerable energy infrastructures are often cited. But they are so general that it makes it difficult for NATO to agree on how to deal with them.

There are, however, specific threats in NATO's immediate neighborhood and farther afield that NATO members cannot afford to ignore. The big question is whether all NATO members can agree that these are threats that affect each country.

Russia

The Ukraine crisis and Russia's growing military strength are a huge concern for the alliance. But NATO is far from united over what strategy to adopt

toward Russia. It is time for that to change. Even if Ukraine reverts to some stability, it does not mean that the Russian threat will diminish. In fact, Russia had posed several threats to NATO countries even before the Ukraine crisis.

Latvia has a sizable Russian minority that gives Moscow the opportunity to meddle in this Baltic state. Add to that the fact that Latvia is completely dependent on Russian energy. Furthermore, the Latvian government's ability to fight corruption and weaken the power and influence of Russia's oligarchs has often been disappointing. All these factors have fundamental implications for NATO, especially the question of at what stage the alliance would be forced to invoke Article 5 and consider an attack on Latvia an attack on all members—or at least to base NATO troops in the country permanently.

Elsewhere in the region, Russia is preparing to deploy nuclear missiles in Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave that is sandwiched between EU and NATO members Poland and Lithuania.

Of more concern to NATO, the United States, and the Nordic countries, Russia has stepped up its military maneuvers in the Arctic. For the Nordic states in particular, Russia's growing presence in the Arctic has become an issue of regional security with long-term geopolitical and geostrategic implications. These concerns are repeatedly raised at the Arctic Security Round Table (ASFR) that was founded in 2011 and consists of NATO members Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and the United States as well as Finland, Russia, and Sweden. But so far, NATO as an alliance has not been invited to join the council, even though Norway's defense minister, Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide, asked NATO to consider how it would defend its members' security in the Arctic.⁴⁶

If the Nordic countries and NATO wish to protect the Arctic from being militarized by Russia—and avoid a military competition with Moscow—they will have to make tough choices. As it stands, Russia's advance into the Arctic has exposed shortcomings in NATO's naval capabilities. Yet so far, NATO does not want to get involved.

South of the Mediterranean

Nor can NATO afford to ignore its Southern flank. One of France's biggest security nightmares in the Middle East and North Africa is the future stability of Algeria. There, the ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who in April 2014 was elected for a fourth consecutive term, has cracked down heavily on any groups that threaten the country's stability or even demand a gradual opening up of the political system. French President François Hollande's highly sensitive state visit to Algeria in December 2012 underscored France's determination to improve its political and security ties with its former colony.

Further afield, France and the United States are acutely aware of the fragility of the Sahel. In January 2013, France sent troops to Mali to prevent radical Islamists from taking over the north of the country. That decision showed that Paris was extremely worried that failing states in the Sahel were the perfect

platform for radical Islamists as well as warlords involved in drugs, gunrunning, and human trafficking.

However, France cannot lean on NATO (nor does it want to) or the EU for military support in trying to stabilize Mali or the Central African Republic, to which France began dispatching 1,600 soldiers in December 2013, followed by another 400 in February 2014.⁴⁷ Instead, Paris is increasingly relying on Washington as its main partner in its attempts to contain the conflicts in the Sahel.

NATO will have to recognize that the Sahel poses a huge threat to Europe's own stability.

NATO will have to recognize that the Sahel poses a huge threat to Europe's own stability. Growing poverty and conflict, which can be so easily exploited by radical movements and criminal gangs, will inevitably lead to more unrest and big migration flows. Perhaps it is time for NATO to establish special partnerships with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, two regional organizations that are slowly trying to build up their own security and military capabilities.

Piracy

Another threat facing NATO is piracy. Since 2008, the alliance has been heavily involved in trying to protect the shipping lanes off the Horn of Africa. This is one of the busiest and most important commercial maritime routes in the world. Any major disruption to these shipping lanes would have devastating effects on the global economy. NATO's big member states recognize this, as, indeed, does the EU. The protection of trade and commerce has become so important to NATO that Rasmussen has made maritime security a major issue to be discussed at the alliance's September 2014 summit in Wales.

Iran

The rationale for NATO's missile defense shield was to protect European countries and the United States against an attack by Iran. The warming of relations between Washington and Tehran after Hassan Rouhani was sworn in as Iranian president in August 2013 has certainly reduced tensions. Both sides, with the EU playing a major role, are thick in negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. As a result of this improved atmosphere, some sanctions against Iran have been lifted.

But Rouhani's power is limited. Ultimate power rests with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, who can make the strategic decision over the future of Iran's nuclear program. If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, that would change the geopolitics of the region in a fundamental way. Iran would become the big player, challenging the role of Saudi Arabia, in many ways the most influential country in the region.

Despite the improved political atmosphere between Tehran and Washington, the United States is taking no chances with Iran. It has increased its naval presence in the region, which has important implications for NATO. If Iran were to block the Strait of Hormuz or, indeed, attack an American naval vessel, NATO would surely have to react.

Yet despite long-running tensions between the United States and Iran, NATO has not once held a major debate among its ambassadors in the NAC on what measures it would adopt if these events occurred or if Iran produced a nuclear bomb. This refusal to have such a comprehensive debate belies some of the persistent problems inside the organization. The alliance is not proactive. Nor does it want to be seen to be discussing major strategic issues lest it be accused of putting in place military options. This is shortsighted for an alliance that keeps talking about new threats. Surely the incoming secretary general and former Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg could put much-needed issues on the NAC agenda.

China

China is potentially another one of those threats. The United States is devoting resources and intelligence to the Asia-Pacific region. The Obama administration, as well as the Bush administration before it, has been forging ever-closer ties with Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Japan remains a key strategic partner of the United States.

Washington's goal is to build up economic, political, and security partnerships with countries throughout the region. The United States and these countries share a common concern about China's strategic ambitions. Beijing's role in the South China Sea is becoming a test of wills between the United States and China.

What worries the U.S. administration profoundly about a stronger China is Beijing's anti-access/area denial strategy, which aims to prevent enemy forces from entering a theater of operations and limit their room for maneuver. In practice, this would give the Chinese People's Liberation Army the capability to attack transportation, bases, and other facilities and systems to defend China's sovereignty, its interests, and, especially, its claims on Taiwan, which it considers a breakaway province. China has intensified work on its aircraft carriers, successfully launching its first prototype in August 2011.

But it is the newest generation of China's Dong-Feng 21D medium-range ballistic missile that is truly giving Washington nightmares. The U.S. military fears that these missiles, armed with a single conventional warhead each, could be aimed with enough accuracy to destroy an aircraft carrier from a distance of 930 miles.⁴⁸ If these fears proved to be true, China could effectively deny the U.S. Navy access to most of the South China Sea, radically shifting the balance of power in its favor and affecting global trade. The questions of how

NATO would react and whether the United States would drag the alliance into any ensuing conflict are ones that NATO should debate at the highest level.

Islamic Fundamentalism, Cyberthreats, and Energy Insecurity

Some NATO countries want the alliance to focus on Islamic fundamentalism, others on cybersecurity or energy security. NATO is divided on all three. With the exception of Britain, France, Spain, and the United States, allies recognize the threat of Islamic terrorism only in a very abstract way. As for cybersecurity and energy security, NATO headquarters is attempting to make the member states aware of their vulnerability to cyberattacks and how to make energy supplies secure. Nevertheless, several NATO countries believe that the alliance has no business dealing with these issues, which they consider to be civilian responsibilities. This explains why these threats have gained little traction inside NATO.

How Can Defense Work?

With divergent threat perceptions, capabilities, and domestic challenges among NATO countries, it is no wonder the alliance struggles to persuade its member states to pool and share resources or to spend a bit more on defense. How can NATO explain that defense matters?

Once again, the big three in EU foreign policy—Britain, France, and Germany—are instructive. In Britain, drastic cutbacks to the defense budget are eroding morale among the armed forces but also damaging the vision and stretch that shaped Britain’s military for years. Defense experts are seriously worried about the impact this will have on NATO and the EU. The armed forces of other big countries are under pressure too. France has been reducing its special forces, but it has at least set out its security and strategic interests, maintained its current spending level, and recognized NATO’s role.

For NATO, Germany’s role in defense matters cannot be underestimated.

As for Germany, the speeches by the country’s president, defense minister, and foreign minister at the 2014 Munich Security Conference confirm that the culture of restraint advocated by the previous conservative-liberal coalition is no longer sustainable. Now, much depends on how Chancellor Angela Merkel and the German public will react to these calls for Germany to take on more responsibility for security matters. The key question is whether the country will finally begin to think seriously about its strategic and security interests. For NATO, Germany’s role in defense matters cannot be underestimated.

Time is not on NATO’s side. The longer the alliance takes to define its new role, the more it will struggle to remain relevant. The hard questions are all there—they just need to be answered.

The starting point is for the alliance's member states to agree on what constitute common threats. Foreign, defense, and security experts should discuss security at the national level, analyze the threats they believe their countries face, and ask what capabilities they have for dealing with those threats. Russia's actions during the Ukraine crisis provide a good example of how member states differ over the nature of a given threat and the appropriate response to it.

Member states also need to think about the implications of the U.S. strategic shift from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. For far too long, Europeans have ducked this issue, believing that America's security umbrella and commitment will always be there.

Once the member states have discussed their common threats and the consequences of the U.S. shift, they should bring their findings to NATO for an open discussion. The debate about each threat should be coupled with a fourfold assessment: how the threat will affect alliance members' economic, security, and political interests; whether the threat may require appropriate and effective military means; what capabilities and assets NATO has at its disposal for dealing with the threat; and how the Europeans can respond if the United States turns its attention elsewhere. NATO should agree to a common threat perception at the September 2014 Cardiff summit.

It is then up to national governments to reach out to their publics to explain the results of this debate on needs and means. As long as there is no consensus among governments about what constitutes a threat and how it should be countered, NATO will be unable to act as an alliance.

Contrary to intuition, the Ukraine crisis has not provided NATO with a new *raison d'être*. Quite the opposite: the fact that allies have such widely differing views on whether Russia constitutes a threat could actually pull NATO apart even further. The example of Poland shows the effects of disappointment in the alliance's cohesion. That country may become even more unwilling to engage in pooling and sharing if it believes it cannot trust NATO to show full solidarity in a conflict. If NATO turns itself into a convenient toolbox for coalitions of the willing, it will not be sustainable as a coherent alliance.

NATO needs to re-create a sense of solidarity among its members, and this will be possible only if all of them regain at least some shared perception of threats. This is the challenge that lies behind the post-Afghanistan narrative. The Ukraine crisis is no solution, but it does have the merit of highlighting what NATO and its members urgently need to do.

If NATO turns itself into a convenient toolbox for coalitions of the willing, it will not be sustainable as a coherent alliance.

Notes

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