



**FORSVARET**  
Forsvarets høgskole

## **Influencing NATO**

*Shaping NATO Through U.S. Foreign Policy*

**Justin Sing**

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# Summary

An assessment of the influence of United States foreign policy impact on the decision of NATO members to formally accept policies which align with U.S. strategic goals. The assessment looks at the National Security Strategy and Defense Strategic documents of each United States Presidential Administration following the end of the Cold War to determine changes to U.S. commitment to NATO and the resultant changes to Alliance force posture and defense spending agreements. The paper also assesses the impacts of U.S. Administration changes in rhetoric, and of U.S. direct military action in specific NATO-led operations against the resultant decision of NATO members to accede to U.S. demands for increased defense spending.

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# 1 Introduction

To what degree was the U.S. successful in influencing its allies to meet U.S. foreign policy goals concerning defense spending? In 2014 NATO formally adopted a 2% defense spending goal championed by the United States which would increase defense spending requirements among almost every member of the Alliance. What means have the U.S. used to influence Alliance members to not only arrest a 30-year trend in declining defense spending, but to increase defense spending across the board? I intend to investigate to what degree changes to U.S. foreign policy, administration rhetoric, and calculated commitment of military forces as a demonstration of administration resolve have influenced NATO members to invest in U.S. led initiatives designed to meet the strategic security goals of the United States. I will do this by examining the evolution of U.S. policy aimed at encouraging and pressuring European NATO allies to increase their defence spending.

Throughout the post-Cold War period, United States foreign policy has shifted dramatically resulting in significant changes to their demands and expectations to the Alliance. The rising threats assessed by the United States required modernization and updates to U.S. force structure and deployability. By default, this also placed new demands on Alliance force structure if NATO was to remain interoperable with U.S. forces. Changes to force structure and modernization require not only verbal commitment, but tangible investment. Defense spending within the Alliance slowly emerged as a measure of Alliance member resolve for the United States, and U.S. foreign policy had a direct influence on member investment in defense capabilities following the Cold War; both negative and positive.

U.S. foreign policy following the collapse of the Soviet Union enabled and even encouraged the negative trend among Alliance defense spending. Then, following the September 11 terror attacks, the United States made a significant change to foreign policy that impacted U.S. force structure and modernization which resulted in fundamental gaps in military capabilities and interoperability between the U.S. and its NATO allies. NATO was forced to follow suit as best it could to maintain their most valued ally. By the mid 2000's the United States was demanding alliance members modernize the force and divest themselves from their cumbersome Cold War era conventional assets. In 2006 NATO members verbally agreed to a 2% GDP defense spending target at the summit in Riga. When NATO members did not respond with appropriate defense investment, the United States leveraged the Libya campaign of 2011 as an opportunity to make a point. The limited involvement of the United States military in Libya was a calculated decision which sent a direct message to NATO members. If there

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was not a change in commitment among European NATO to develop their own military capabilities, they may fall short in an engagement should the United States not be able to participate. This event set the stage for events leading up to the 2014 Wales summit where NATO formally adopted the 2% GDP defense spending metric which would require all but 3 members to make significant changes to their national defense budgets.

In this paper intend to determine the effect changes to U.S. foreign policy and administration rhetoric have had on NATO members as it relates to defense spending investment within the Alliance. It is defense spending which enables the modernization demands and force structure changes necessary to meet United States foreign policy initiatives. I will demonstrate U.S. foreign policy change during this period by analyzing the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) and Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) documentation of each administration. These two documents guide and direct U.S. foreign policy as it relates to this discussion. The identified changes in policy are what have driven the dialogue and demands of U.S. Administration officials concerning NATO member defense spending as an enabler to achieving U.S. strategic goals.

The discussion will be limited to the post-Cold War period from 1991-2018. The 2% GDP investment was first verbally agreed to in 2006, and did not become an formally agreed to metric until 2014; however, I will be assessing NATO ally defense spending as measured by percent GDP for all periods discussed in this paper in order to provide a consistent metric of measure concerning this analysis.

I will start with a discussion of the U.S. perspective concerning the “burden” of the NATO Alliance and the defense spending debate. Next I will develop an understanding of how the United States has viewed their relationship to NATO in terms of U.S. foreign policy goals. Then I will assess the progression of U.S. foreign policy through each post-Cold War administration and the resultant changes to NATO force posture and defense spending. Finally, I will tie the previous sections together by analyzing the resultant changes to defense spending investment by NATO members as they have related to each U.S. administration and NATO summit decision. Resultant member compliance discussed in the final section on Defense Spending is intended to demonstrate the weight of the 2014 formal commitment to defense spending versus the previous verbal commitment made in 2006.

It should be made clear that I am not arguing for or against the merits of effectiveness or fairness within the broader burden-sharing debate. The fact is, regardless of the many burden-sharing variables of input and output, public goods, economic scale, etc. which have been debated; NATO members have agreed to 2% GDP as their metric of measure concerning defense spending. I am not debating

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the metric or any aspect of the discussion which brought about its selection. I am focusing on how the United States foreign policy decisions and use of direct military engagement in NATO actions has influenced the decision of NATO to formally implement 2% GDP as the member goal concerning defense spending.

## 2 Method

My method is primarily an analysis of what I have assessed to be key events and administration changes in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy decisions and their resultant effect on the US-NATO discussion concerning defense spending. I follow a rational decision model as my basis for this method. The idea that a shock or key event triggers a rational response which in turn triggers changes to that system in a logical series of steps or events consistent with previously established patterns of behavior. That is, there is not a radical response which breaks with traditionally established responses to similar situations (i.e. the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 resulted in the deaths of 2,400 service members<sup>1</sup> and the United States entry into WWII; therefore it is rational to expect the U.S. to launch a large scale military response following the September 11 terror attacks which killed over 2,900 civilians<sup>2</sup> on American soil).

Discussion of four key events during the post-Cold War period of time demonstrate how changes to U.S. foreign policy or U.S. involvement in military actions have shaped the decision of NATO members to arrest the 30-year decline in defense spending and formally adopt the U.S. championed 2% GDP defense spending metric.

4 Events:

1. The U.S. foreign policy shift from a regional focus to global interdependence
2. The Sept 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States
3. U.S. involvement in the 2011 Libya campaign
4. The 2014 Wales Summit

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<sup>1</sup> (Kiger, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> (History.com Editors, 2019)

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These four events reinforce how changes to U.S. foreign policy and calculated adjustments to direct involvement in NATO operations have manifested as changes to NATO member defense spending agreements and tangible results favorable to the United States. The omission of certain NATO missions, summits, or events is not intended to imply they did not have impact or merit. The limited scope of this work requires a focus on what I have determined to be the most influential key elements of United States policy decisions which ultimately drove the decision to adopt the 2% GDP metric by NATO. Personal bias as a U.S. military member cannot be ignored in this assessment, and likely has an impact regardless of my intention to remain objective in my evaluation.

I have assessed U.S. foreign policy as defined by the National Security Strategies (NSS) published by each administration. I have chosen to focus on the impact of the Executive branch of U.S. government vice the Congress which represents the Legislative branch. The reason for this is because it is the executive branch, not the legislative, which drives U.S. foreign policy and decision. Even though Congress has many checks and balances over the Executive branch of the U.S. government, the Constitution of the United States gives the President the sole power to determine foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> The NSS is the document used by the President to express their foreign policy to Congress, the Department of Defense, and the world. Therefore, U.S. policy is inextricably tied to and defined by each administration regardless of which parties (Republican or Democrat) control the elements of the Legislative branch of U.S. government. It is the policies of each administration which drive the foreign policy decisions of the Department of State, and the military decisions of the Department of Defense.

In a rational system, key events shape policy decisions and key leaders shape alliance decisions. NATO's overt reliance on United States military assets and capabilities regarding the maintenance of a credible defense and deterrence posture places NATO in a position where it must acquiesce to U.S. foreign policy demands or suffer potential degradation to the potency of the Alliance. In a rational system this places the United States in a position of significant influence.

This approach is narrowly focused and does not account for other factors which may impact Alliance member decisions. Geographic location, individual member assessment of threat, economies of scale, status of the global economy, bureaucratic resistance, and domestic constraints or restraints certainly have an impact on individual member decisions. I have also limited myself from assessing the conflicting points of view which abound in American politics. This is intentional. It is the Executive Branch, not the Legislative Branch, which set foreign policy and drive military engagement and

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2020



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direction within the U.S. system. The internal debate concerning U.S. foreign policy discussions or relationships with NATO from a congressional perspective is a thesis in itself and would detract from this assessment.

My investigation into the degree of success concerning U.S. foreign policy influence concerning NATO member defense spending will manifest itself in a determination of High, Moderate, or Low Impact. High Impact is defined as U.S. foreign policy is seen as the driving primary force behind the NATO decision to formally adopt a defense spending goal. Moderate Impact is defined as U.S. foreign policy is seen as having a strong influence among other contributing factors. Low impact is defined as U.S. foreign policy is seen as an ancillary consideration to the NATO decision to formally adopt a defense spending goal.

The key events listed above have impacted the leaders of the United States resulting in rational changes to each administration's focus concerning the NSS foreign policy directives. The NSS reflects U.S. grand strategy of each administration, and ultimately shapes U.S. defense posture. Changes to defense posture or force structure resultant of a shift in focus or design within the NSS create demands from the U.S. to their military alliance members. The NSS is an unclassified document which is published and available, as are the U.S. military's defense strategic documents published by the Joint Chiefs of Staff outlining U.S. defense posture designed to meet the means required to attain NSS defined goals. It is for this reason I have selected these documents as my primary sources. These documents clearly articulate U.S. intentions to our allies and enemies alike, and they shape the internal development of U.S. means to meet strategic ends.

### **3 United States Historical Perspective of the NATO Burden**

Burden sharing is a complex debate among NATO members, and has been approached from many angles. This is not a paper on burden sharing. However, in order to discuss the U.S. influence on NATO member 2% defense spending investment the burden discussion must be addressed. In this section I am focusing on the view of NATO from the U.S. perspective both during and after the Cold War. This baseline understanding concerning the U.S. perspective is informative to the National Security Strategy and direct U.S. military involvement in NATO initiatives to be discussed in subsequent sections.

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The debate of how to define and assess burden among NATO members is as old as the Alliance itself. The United States has made accusations of carrying the European continent on its back since the formation of the Alliance in 1949. A common thread of discord within the U.S. perspective revolves around disproportionate defense investment resulting in divergent capability sets and a lack of Alliance interoperability due to modernization deficiencies among NATO allies.

At its outset after WWII the United States had not intended NATO to be the enduring platform for peace that it has evolved to become today. The United States viewed the duration of NATO as tied loosely to that of the Marshall Plan. It was a strategic puzzle piece in an effort to provide security and stability in a time of reconstruction on the European continent after WWII. According to Eugene Carrol, Vice President of the Center for Defense Information, NATO was designed by its founding members with a well-defined strategic objective:

“to provide a shield for Western Europe and the democratic nations to rebuild their social, political and economic structures free of fear from foreign aggression, but only until such a time that they could take over the responsibility themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

The United States whole-heartedly shared in this viewpoint. Supreme Allied Commander (and future U.S. President) General Dwight D. Eisenhower is said to have believed that if the U.S. was still in Europe 10 years after the creation of NATO, it would signal the failure of the Alliance to achieve its intended purpose (Cooper, 1992, p. 714). He believed that once Europe had their ‘feet under them’ again, the European countries would be able to provide for their own security. His viewpoint changed in September 1949 when the Soviet Union flexed its nuclear muscle with the first public detonation of a Soviet nuclear weapon. From that point forward the strategic focus of NATO rapidly shifted from reconstruction and security to communist containment.

The Soviet Union and the rise of communist influence provided a new *raison d’être* for NATO. A new vision, and a collective focus to the Alliance. Where NATO’s original strategic objective was to provide a general security (a shield) for Western Europe there was now a credibly identified solitary threat of focus for the Alliance, Whatever the U.S. original intentions were concerning their longevity in the Alliance, the specter of the spread of communism backed by a credible nuclear power could not go unchecked. Keeping the wolf at bay during the Cold War era was defined by development and maintenance of credible collective deterrence. The economic burden associated with this task was a

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<sup>4</sup> (Cooper, 1992)

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minimally contentious issue within the Alliance so long as the Soviets presented a credible threat to the western powers. Resultant of this common assessment of the threat to European stability and prosperity, the priorities of the individual Alliance members reflected a more balanced approach to defense investment during this period.

Historical data from this period shows all members of the Alliance maintained defense spending initiatives which remained well above a 2% GDP threshold during the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> The NATO average investment in defense spending during the last 30 years of the Cold War was 3.42% GDP.<sup>6</sup> During the Cold War the containment strategy dictated an Alliance doctrine focused on an established conventional military force and nuclear deterrence capability. This provided concrete guidance on what was required in terms of force and command structure. Once the *raison d'être* was removed with the fall of the Soviet Union on 25 December 1991 that the strategy of containment died.

With eastern Europe clamoring for independence as the yoke of communism lifted, it was an opportune time to re-focus NATO efforts and embrace the opportunity to spread democratic ideals and prosperity. The allied focus of defense and deterrence shifted to exporting stability (Ringsmose, 2010) in support of UN humanitarian operations, development assistance and security contributions to other international organizations (Sandler & Shimizu, 2014). This new focus fit well with the U.S. foreign policy initiatives of the time. New missions from the low end of the combat spectrum took the place of the high-end focus of Cold War doctrines. Missions such as humanitarian aid and peacekeeping served to support U.S. foreign policy initiatives of the early 1990s at minimal risk to U.S. forces. However, this period issued in an age of apathy concerning military investment among many European members<sup>7</sup>, and resulted in the degradation of NATO's high-end military capacity. A fact that would rear its head starting in the late 90s and early 2000s. These years become the turning point of U.S. perspective on the Alliance.

By the mid 2000s calls from U.S. administrations and defense department officials surface for increased defense spending among their European allies in NATO. U.S. foreign policy begins to shift focus from a European continental focus to one of a global commitment, and Europeans start to feel the American sentiment toward NATO souring. Interoperability and force projections concerns arisen

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<sup>5</sup> (SPIRI, 2019)

<sup>6</sup> The NATO average defense expenditure as measured by percent GDP investment was above 4% from 1960-1963, after which it remained above 3% until 1987 where it took its first dip below the 3% mark in the history of NATO. (All calculations reference the SIPRI World Bank database of 1960-2019 (SPIRI, 2019)

<sup>7</sup> See section 6.2: Defense Spending after the Cold War (1990-2014).

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from NATO involvement in Afghanistan, and the shortcomings identified during the execution of NATO lead actions in Libya highlighted the growing divide in U.S. and NATO member capabilities and interoperability shortfalls. By the time of the 2014 Wales Summit, the U.S. view of NATO had reached a point where there was a requirement for European NATO to demonstrate their resolve to increasing the European commitment to credible deterrence. The proposed 2% GDP defense spending investment metric proposed at the 2006 Riga Summit was heavily supported by the United States and was finally adopted in 2014 as the quantifiable metric by which to measure burden for all members within the Alliance.

### **3.1 Funding NATO**

There are many different forms of financial support provided to the alliance by each individual member nation; however, in terms of burden sharing the only financial commitment that counts are the investment made at home. As the old saying goes, “Pay yourself first, and invest the rest.” That is to say, you have to invest in yourself in order to be stable for those you support. NATO is no different. Individual country defense and force development investment is considered to be an indirect funding source to NATO operations as it is directly tied to a country’s Article 3 obligation to maintain a credible force.

The commitment made at home by individual members to develop and maintain a force capable of providing a credible deterrent effect is seen by the United States as an expression of political will and commitment to the Alliance core task of European security (Techau, 2015). The 2% metric is how the U.S. measures this member commitment. As previously stated, even though the 2% metric was not formally adopted by the Alliance until 2014, it has been a dominant factor in the debate since the Cold War era. Even though many NATO members maintained a defense expenditure above the 2% mark, there was still, according to the United States, a significant imbalance in investment concerning economic input to European security between European NATO and the United States.

Burden-sharing issues were part and parcel of NATO politics in the years from its inception to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Most of the impetus for the often-heated disputes about the fair distribution of burdens was provided by Washington and in particular by a Congress determined to avoid European freeriding on American efforts. This was the main pattern of transatlantic burden-sharing during the Cold War. Although other indicators were being employed in intra-alliance comparisons of the individual countries’ contributions to the common good, one measure tended to dominate the discussions: defense

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spending as percentage of GDP – that is, the input side of national defense equations took precedence.<sup>8</sup>

~Jens Ringsmose, Head of Department of Military Operations

University of Southern Denmark

Thus, the dwindling European defense budgets and resultant loss of credible deterrent effect was seen by the United States as a Europe willing to free-ride on U.S. investment in the European continent's security (Deni, 2017, p. 75). In his address to NATO on 10 June 2011 U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates made a statement concerning U.S. resolve on commitment to the European continent: "The U.S. share of NATO defense spending has now risen to over 75 percent...If current trends in the decline of European defense capabilities are not halted and reversed, future U.S. political leaders may not consider the return of America's investment in NATO worth the cost."<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 The 2% Metric

By its very nature an alliance incurs a disproportionate burden among individual members. The literature on this topic cites many factors which impact individual member burden associated with collective action. Many of these factors are not defined by military measure, and the impact of a unitary or coalition action by one party, may well incur burden on non-participating members within the Alliance. Geography, economic status, political influence, societal investment, and impact to infrastructure (Ringsmose, 2010) are just a few variables each member will shoulder differently during any specified event. In their assessment of potential elements discussed within the burden-sharing debate Cimbala and Forster mention resultant population growth, urbanization, ecological disaster, mass migration of displaced persons, and armed insurrection as few of myriad examples of non-military burdens which impact individual nations in different ways but are difficult to attribute or quantify in terms of the NATO burden debate.<sup>10</sup> The impact severity and recovery time associated with any one of these factors will vary depending on the initial strength of the individual country in which they occur. These individual burdens ebb and flow over time as various crises and conflicts test the cohesiveness of the collective.

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<sup>8</sup> (Ringsmose, 2010, p. 325)

<sup>9</sup> (Gates, 2011b)

<sup>10</sup> (Cimbala & Kent Forster, 2017, p. 117) Cimbala and Forster are faculty members in the department of Political Science, Penn State Brandywine, Media, PA, U.S.A and College of Information Sciences & Technology, Penn State University, University Park, PA, U.S.A respectively.

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Collective action requires give and take, including the occasional acceptance of unequal costs and benefits among members in order to achieve peace and security objectives.<sup>11</sup> During the Cold war era the U.S. accepted a greater share of the burden (Deni, 2017; Ringsmose, 2010). Burden sharing within a collective alliance could be defined as long term give and take associated with the relationship rather than short term immediate gain or loss of a single defined factor (Becker & Military Academy West Point, 2012). While the debate over burden sharing has had many different focus points over the years, the fact is that NATO was created as a military alliance whose primary objective is collective defense and deterrence.

Even though there exist ancillary economic, political, and other associated costs to NATO membership the requirement for a credible military force lies foremost in the NATO *modus operandi*. This requirement is rooted in Articles 3 and 5 of the Washington Treaty. Article 5, known to most as the binding article of collective defense and response, ensures a unified NATO response to an attack against any one NATO member. It does not however require all members to respond on equal terms.

Article 5 of the founding Washington Treaty of 1949 states that each member, in the exercise of their right to individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking [such action as it deems necessary] to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.<sup>12</sup> This implies that while collective action may be determined by the council; individual state support may vary depending on their own interpretation of any given situation. Thus, a vote to declare an Article 5 action does not incur the burden of equal military response among all members.

So how do you quantify the burden quantitatively? The commitment of troops or logistical support as a quantifiable metric is not a good measure of burden sharing. For example, a military commitment from a force the size of the United States cannot be equally measured against that of a country the size of Albania. Likewise, it is difficult to quantify the cost associated with the non-military use of

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<sup>11</sup> (Cimbala & Kent Forster, 2017, p. 115)

<sup>12</sup> Article 5: The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security. (North American Council, 1949)

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political capital expended to influence an aggressor. The quantifiable commitment of a large number of troops from a country whose military is not interoperable with the main force could be seen as a detractor to an armed military action. The burden sharing debate has been around for years and did not start with the first and only Article 5 declaration by the North Atlantic Council on 12 September 2001. Article 5 collective action is not the driving force behind the burden debate.

Article 3 is the anchor of the NATO alliance and provides the teeth to Article 5. Article 3 requires all participating members to maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.<sup>13</sup> Article 3 also implies maintaining a credible deterrent capability for the NATO military use of force. This requirement is directly tied to armed aggression and military capability; not generic response which could be measured by political, social, geographical, or other economic metrics. Military capability is born of economic investment in the force itself. To train, man, equip, maintain, and ensure relevance requires economic investment and continuous development of capability to meet the ever-changing advancements in military means. In order to maintain interoperability of forces within an multi-national alliance, a baseline of technological compatibility and advancement must be maintained ("Funding NATO," 2019). These agreements and guidelines fall within the indirect funding line. It is the individual country's responsibility to meet these measures as a member of the Alliance. This is the root of the 2% GDP defense spending initiative.

### **3.3 United States Burden “Shaping”**

The United States has shaped the burden sharing debate to their advantage resulting in the 2014 Wales Summit outcome to use 2% GDP as the defined metric among NATO members. Detractors of the current 2% GDP agreement argue that: First, you cannot use a simple quantitative measure of percent GDP investment in defense spending without tying that investment to a defined quantitative capability output. Second, a simple quantitative measurement does not account for qualitative contributions made.

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<sup>13</sup> Article 3: In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.(Council, 1949)

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Dr. Dominika Kunertova of the Center for War Studies in Denmark believes the 2% metric makes a “triumph of simplicity over complexity, [and] detracts NATO from its real capability problem”<sup>14</sup> by not accounting for output metrics. NATO scholar Jens Ringsmose of the University of Southern Denmark and the Royal Danish Defense Academy acknowledges that burden sharing during the cold war era was pre-dominantly defined by the input metric of defense spending. He identifies the post-Cold War dynamic change to military power projection spearheaded by the United States resulting in smaller members attempting to re-focus the burden discussion to more qualitative output variables enabling free-riding among members. Smaller European members “vigorously sought to promote other measures of contribution to common defense”<sup>15</sup> such as humanitarian aid packages or voluntary support to UN peacekeeping initiatives as valid contributions to NATO credible deterrence and defense posture. Including such “expenditures” as valid inputs would enable members to demonstrate inputs and avoiding actual defense investment expenses while still benefiting from the security of the Alliance provided by those maintaining and developing credible forces, or “free-riding” according to Ringsmose.

Kunertova points out the indicators identified by different economists and rational-choice theorists as operating through a lens of a private-public goods divide.<sup>16</sup> The product provided by NATO (defense, deterrence, and security) is seen as a collective public good, and contributions are voluntarily made through the indirect funding contributions of individual members. According to Dr. Kunertova, as the NATO strategy evolved to include contributions to UN humanitarian operations and aid provided to international NGOs, the methods for measuring burden sharing also evolved and began to take on a more complex structure. Cold War scholars and economists used quantifiable indicators of financial input and capability output. After the Cold War and as NATO membership expanded, less quantifiable mixed civilian-military indicators were used (Ringsmose, 2010).

Many burdens resultant of state interaction are direct results of political agreements and geography. Immigration laws, foreign aid agreements, individual economic strength, etc. are all individual state factors which directly affect the associated generally defined burden placed on each individual nation (Ringsmose, 2010; Seigel, 2009; Sperling & Webber, 2009). The European economic crisis of 2008-2012 had a significant and disproportionate impact among member states within the European continent. These additional burdens are not the subject of this discussion, but are worth mentioning,

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<sup>14</sup> (Kunertova, 2017, p. 554)

<sup>15</sup> (Ringsmose, 2010, p. 321)

<sup>16</sup> (Kunertova, 2017, p. 556)

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as they do have impact on individual member economic and budgetary factors concerning military investment decisions.

It is not possible to share all burdens of a 30-member alliance equally. That is an unrealistic expectation. Likewise, credible deterrence is questionable in an alliance that is reliant on one member providing the majority of this credibility. Christian Mölling, a research associate for the International Security Division, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in association with a report published by the Brookings Center on the United States and Europe, reported that even before the [2008 European] economic downturn there was a discrepancy between the speed at which the U.S. and European members modernized their military capabilities – leading many to suggest that NATO was already a multi-tier alliance (Molling, 2012, p. 8). A model created with a single point of failure is not a sound strategy, and NATO is no exception.

The United States is the principle provider of security guarantees (Ringsmose, 2010, p. 323). From the U.S. perspective, Washington requires an alliance that serves Washington’s national strategic goals. To this day, many NATO countries view NATO membership as a passport to the U.S. security guarantee. Dr. John R. Deni of the U.S. Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute says that states balance military means either externally by forming alliances, or internally by spending more on defense. He believes the assessment of international threats to security form the most important systemic variable to influence an actor to either invest directly in their own capabilities, or to rely on the alliance (free-ride).<sup>17</sup> According to Kunertova, “As a way to measure an increase in military capability the 2% metric is barely useful. It does not measure spending in real terms or actual output. It does show who is and is not committed to NATO’s core task of European security.”<sup>18</sup> As long as members continue to see membership as an entry ticket to American security guarantees and as long as the U.S. maintains an ability to exclude their aid to members, the U.S. holds a distinct bargaining chip to influencing member contributions (Ringsmose, 2010, p. 335)

Since the early 2000’s U.S. national security assessments have drawn focus away from Europe toward not only Southeast Asia, but toward a globally focused influence. The United States no longer enjoys a position as the sole post-Cold War superpower. Increasing non-European pressures on the interests of the United States draws U.S. resources and focus away from Europe and requires an alliance with allies who are active members. Members who are able and willing to project force with relevant capabilities or provide for their own credible defense and deterrence in the event the U.S. is decisively

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<sup>17</sup> (Deni, 2017, p. 75)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

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engaged out of area. The alliances they invest in need to be mutually beneficial, and NATO was formed as a military alliance. The United States will continue to use its considerable influence to apply pressure against member contributions as a demonstration of Alliance commitment. They will rely on other agreements such as the Defense Capabilities Initiative, Major Equipment Spending Guidelines, and the Smart Defense concept to shape the output variables resultant of those investments. To the United States, it is the initial investment of funds which primarily demonstrates Alliance member will and commitment enabling greater interoperability and transformation of the NATO force to maintain a credible partner to meet American national security objectives.

## 4 U.S. foreign policy

U.S. foreign policy, guided by the National Security Strategy (NSS), is driven by the guidance and various policy positions of the current administration. The interplays between the different branches of the U.S. government often have a direct impact on the viability of attaining the goals professed by the NSS. This makes it possible to assess U.S. foreign policy regarding NATO from a presidential administration, congressional, or economic perspective.

As head of the executive branch of the U.S. government, the President is responsible for providing the direction and guidance necessary to shape U.S. foreign policy. The NSS reflects the guidance from the President of the United States to the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense. The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) is penned every four years by the military Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and reflects how the military intends to fulfil their obligation to support the NSS. The QDR defines the requirements which drive U.S. budget decisions concerning defense spending. These two documents provide the guidance and direction which drive policy, doctrine, and economic investment decisions for the country.

I have chosen to focus on the impact of the Executive branch of U.S. government vice the Congress which represents the Legislative branch. The reason for this is because it is the executive branch, not the legislative, which drives U.S. foreign policy and decision. U.S. policy is inextricably tied to and defined by each administration regardless of which parties control the elements of the Legislative branch of U.S. government. The Legislative branch does not set policy directives. It passes laws to enable or limit the powers of the Executive branch, and approves budgets intended to support and enable policy directives.

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It is the policies of each administration which drive the foreign policy decisions of the Department of State, and the military decisions of the Department of Defense. In the following sections I will focus on the Presidential perspective and its influence on shaping NATO member defense spending. For my purposes the executive perspective includes statements and actions of those within the Presidential Cabinet such as the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

## **5 NATO and U.S. Policy**

### **5.1 What does NATO mean to U.S. policy?**

There is no doubt that European stability still plays a significant role in U.S. security strategy, as is noted in every NSS and QDR document ever produced by the U.S. Government. However, over the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union the U.S. assessment of their own security environment has continued to develop beyond the scope of a European focus. Europe no longer holds as prominent and solitary a standing in U.S. security as it did during the days of the Cold War. With the United States focusing on global strategic initiatives and modernization they require allies who are willing to progress with the times. Allies who invest in themselves in order to be in a position to be of assistance to others.

There is much discussion among NATO members concerning the U.S. commitment to the alliance. There is also much discussion within the United States concerning the European commitment to their own defense. The discussion has continued in various degrees for decades; however, it picked up notable momentum after the 2011 announcement of the “pivot to the Pacific” by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton<sup>19</sup>. Will the U.S. abandon the Alliance in favor of a focus on southeast Asia? The discussion was punctuated again during the fallout over the level of U.S. involvement during the 2011 Libya campaign where NATO operational shortcomings were laid bare<sup>20</sup> and the degree of future U.S. involvement in Alliance actions was left to question.

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<sup>19</sup> (H. Clinton, 2011)

<sup>20</sup> See Gates Criticizes NATO (Morgan, 2011), and Security and Defense Agenda (Gates, 2011b)

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The Alliance does not deny its reliance on U.S. military power,<sup>21</sup> and the U.S. does not deny that a safe and secure European continent is part of U.S. strategic objectives. The U.S. is concerned with the effectiveness of the European member commitment to the NATO military alliance. NATO has become a two-tier security relationship (Gates, 2011b). It was Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel who called the end of the Cold War one of the biggest obstacles to Alliance investment. He noted that Europeans viewed the end of the Cold War as the end to insecurity in Europe and the end of aggression by nation-states. Following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 he addressed the NATO defense ministers at the Forum on NATO Expansion and European Security where he chastised them and gave a warning concerning the American commitment: “Russia has tested NATO. Future generations will note whether at this moment – this moment of challenge – we summoned the will to invest in our alliance...America is still spending 3 times the Allied combined defense spending...Russia’s actions in Ukraine have shattered the myth [of non-aggressive nation state relationships and interactions.] ”<sup>22</sup>

The discussion of the European commitment was re-ignited most recently by President Trump leading up to his first summit in 2018 when he called for NATO members to pay for their share of the European defense investment.<sup>23</sup> With President Trump’s administration, it is about “putting your money where your mouth is.” Always a flare for the dramatic, he does not leave much room for political lip service in his debate style. While President Trump may be one of the most vocal administrations, his does not represent the only vocal administration in the recent history of the U.S.-NATO investment relationship. There have been many administration officials and government representatives over the last 30 years which have fueled this U.S. narrative in an attempt to spur NATO members to contribute more money to defense spending.

In his book *The U.S. NATO Debate*, Magnus Petersson defines the characterization of NATO in U.S. foreign policy as being of less strategic importance than it was during the Cold War. He writes that “despite the Ukraine Crisis, the long-term trend in the debate is that the United States is neither capable nor interested in taking care of Europe’s security problems more permanently as it did during

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<sup>21</sup> See *The Politics of 2%: NATO and the Security Vacuum in Europe* (Techau, 2015) and *Security without the United States?: Europe’s Perception of NATO* (Naumann, 2009)

<sup>22</sup> (Hagel, 2014)

<sup>23</sup> See *Trump Says NATO Allies Don’t Pay Their Share* (Baker, 2017), *Sharing the Burden? U.S. Allies, Defense Spending, And the Future of NATO* (Richter, 2016), and *Donald Trump’s Remarks Rattle NATO Allies and Stoke Debate on Cost Sharing* (Chan, 2016).

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the Cold War. The main reason for that is the decreased military ability and political will to engage in regions that are not of first strategic priority for the United States.”<sup>24</sup>

Today’s NATO Strategic Concept defines three core tasks: Collective Defense, Crisis Management and Cooperative Security.<sup>25</sup> It states that in order to carry out the full range of NATO missions as effectively and efficiently as possible, Allies will engage in a continuous process of reform, modernization and transformation.<sup>26</sup> This statement implies that all members must contribute to the effectiveness of the alliance. From the United States perspective, this has been an issue of address since President John F. Kennedy espoused a vision of NATO allies and the United States cooperating on a *basis of full equality* as early as 1962.<sup>27</sup>

## 5.2 U.S. Means of Influencing NATO

The two-tier relationship within NATO identified by Mölling<sup>28</sup> indicates the reliance of NATO on U.S. military capability (and presence) to maintain a credible deterrent effect (Ringsmose, 2010). Considering this direct link between U.S. military capability and NATO credible deterrence, it is not a far stretch to say that U.S. foreign policy changes have a direct effect, an influence, on Alliance initiatives. NATO’s capability to maintain both its initiative for a peaceful and prosperous European continent while maintaining a credible deterrent posture has relied heavily on U.S. economic and direct military investment. A change to U.S. foreign policy which decreases the focus on the European continent has a direct impact to NATO’s credible deterrence posture. In the future, if the United States determines participating in a conflict not to be in line with their national interest or security concerns, NATO will be left to source and execute that operation with limited or no U.S. military support. NATO received a taste of this during the Libya campaign in 2011 when limited U.S. participation and leadership resulted in the Alliance struggling against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country (Gates, 2011b). This reliance on U.S. military capability weakens European NATO credibility. Engagements such as the one in Libya which highlight NATO’s reliance on the United States further intensifies the influence of calls from the United States to increase

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<sup>24</sup> (Petersson, 2015, p. 2)

<sup>25</sup> (*Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 2010, pp. 7,8)

<sup>26</sup> (*Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 2010, p. 9)

<sup>27</sup> Taken from remarks by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta at the 2012 Munich Security Conference.

<sup>28</sup> (Mölling, 2012)

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member defense spending.<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to draw a direct correlation between these actions by the United States and resultant defense spending as measured in this thesis; however, it can be argued the impact of this demonstration of resolve on the part of the United States was likely influential to Alliance members leading up to the 2014 Wales Summit.

## 6 Post-Cold War Administration Influences

President Trump has made it a recurrent soundbite since taking office that he believes the U.S. burden of investment in Europe is disproportionate in terms of both economic military investment and direct military troop commitment to the continent. He repeatedly mentioned the costs associated with deploying and maintaining both the missile defense systems located across the continent, as well as the 65,000 U.S. troops strategically positioned there.<sup>30</sup> However, his admonishment of NATO members concerning this topic is only an echo of previous administrations. This has been a recurrent drumbeat of U.S. policy in relation to NATO for many years and has spanned multiple administrations in Washington D.C. since the turn of the century.

A United States post-Cold War foreign policy review reveals a dynamic change in U.S. prioritization of NATO member defense investment. U.S. policy changed from one that was centrally focused on countering a localized threat to that of global interdependence and influence. During the first decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States ushered in a focus of stability through democracy to NATO. During this period, under the Clinton administration, the U.S. was more than happy to fully bear all the costs of this NATO initiative: leadership, military footprint, and economic costs. It was part of a broader U.S. strategic initiative to expand economic prominence and democratic ideals which they believed would further strengthen and stabilize an uncertain region. The following decades witnessed a change to U.S. foreign policy and involvement in coalition actions, administration rhetoric, and eroding public support for continued one-sided investment in European defense and deterrence.

A review of the National Security Strategies and Quadrennial Defense Reviews from each post-Cold War administration demonstrates a slow but steady change to U.S. focus of military effort and

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<sup>29</sup> See (Ringsmose, 2010, p. 335) and (Kunertova, 2017) concerning U.S. influence to NATO member spending based on reliance of U.S. military credibility impact to member investment, and European defense spending influence on U.S. perception of NATO member commitment.

<sup>30</sup> (Reid, 2019)

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influence which trends away from being centered on the European continent. This review also reveals increasing calls from U.S. administration officials to NATO members to increase their efforts concerning individual responsibility and investment in the development of a credible defense which reduces its reliance on the United States.

## 6.1 George H.W. Bush Era (1989-1993)

The first out of area conflict following the fall of the Soviet Union came with the Persian Gulf war of 1990-1991 following the attempted Iraqi annexation of Kuwait. Iraq's military occupation of Kuwait was an attempt to gain access to that country's rich oil reserves and extricate itself from the debt they had accrued with Kuwait. The United Nations first responded with global sanctions against Iraq. After those sanctions failed to depose the Iraqi occupation, the UN issued an ultimatum. If Iraqi forces did not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15, 1991, the UN would authorize use of force to remove them. At this time, the strength of the anti-Iraq UN coalition force had reached 700,000 troops and included forces from NATO, Egypt, and a small collection of Arab nations. The United States supplied 540,000, or 77% of the ground forces to support the UN sanctioned action.<sup>31</sup> Though the Gulf War was seen by the United States as a beacon of light for coalition operations and UN actions, European NATO participation was extremely limited. The primary NATO members associated with Gulf War military action were the United States, Great Britain and France. Most other NATO Alliance members were either unable or unwilling to project power beyond Europe's borders during this conflict.

The 1991 National Security Strategy issued by President George H.W. Bush issued after the conclusion of the Gulf War speaks volumes to the view the United States had of the post-Cold War world stage. The 1991 NSS is a document marked by hopeful but cautious optimism that makes direct references to fragile fledgling democracies in countries whose civilizations have ancient ties to destabilizing ideals.

“A new world order is not a fact; it is an aspiration – an opportunity. We must recognize the stark fact that our hopeful new era still has within it dislocations and dangers that threaten the fragile shoots of democracy and progress that have recently emerged. It is important that we not let euphoria over the easing of East-

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<sup>31</sup> (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020)

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West confrontation blind us to the potential security problems within a new Europe.”

~President George H.W. Bush<sup>32</sup>

The Gulf War was the first major commitment of U.S. forces after the Cold War and signified the start of a change in the gravitational pull on U.S. forces to a more global construct. The United States did not see the former Soviet Union as a beaten foe slinking back to the shadows, but more as a disheartened combatant. With the primary Asian continental superpower in decline, the 1991 NSS identified new threats to U.S. strategic initiatives and national security likely to emerge. The document espouses concern over both nuclear and non-nuclear arms proliferation. It recognized that the new insular focus of the Russians was likely to leave an opening for other, less prominent, actors to attempt to grab for prominence and influence within the international mainstream. The United States recognized the UN response and leadership during the Gulf War as an indicator that the UN had been “truly vindicated and rejuvenated” as an institution, and believed future military actions were likely to be solved with “hybrid coalitions that include not only traditional allies but also nations with whom we do not have a mature history of diplomatic and military cooperation or, indeed even a common political or moral outlook.”<sup>33</sup>

The U.S. announced its vision of the new world order in the 1991 NSS was the first call to a change in U.S. foreign policy and military force structure which should have alerted Europe to a new U.S.-NATO dynamic. The end of the Cold War ushered in hesitant optimism on the part of the United States. The Gulf War changed the United States’ view of the UN. They now viewed the UN as empowered to meet the intention of its founders as a unifying leader backed by the ability to rally an international coalition response force. The increase in UN prominence meshed well with the U.S. ambition to expand their global focus beyond that of the Cold War era. The reduced regional influence of the Soviet Union left a power vacuum in the Middle East. Washington recognized Europe as an area of strategic significance, but also predicted a rise in ambition of formerly subdued actors emboldened by an increase in arms proliferation as a challenge to U.S. interests.

“Europe remains a central strategic arena, the Gulf crisis reminded us how much our interests can be affected in other regions as well. The east-Asia and Pacific regions include some of the last traditional Communist regimes on the face of the globe.”

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<sup>32</sup> (*National Security Strategy of the United States*, 1991, pp. 1, 7-8)

<sup>33</sup> (*National Security Strategy of the United States*, 1991, p. 13)



The reduced demand on U.S. military force along the Eastern European front, and the view of a strengthened and influential UN allowed the U.S. to shift focus away from European interests. According to the NSS, the United States assessed one of the greatest threats to European stability during this period was support for their fledgling democracies along the eastern flank. The document expresses concern for the “continued freedom, vitality, and national independence of the new Eastern European democracies are also critical to the new structure of peace we seek to build throughout Europe.”<sup>35</sup> This new-found freedom to pursue a more global reach also demanded a change to force structure outlined in the 1991 NSS. It identifies the need to transform the U.S. military to one of rapid deployment and reconstitution with global reach and persistence – signifying the push toward a lighter, more responsive, and less conventional military force design.<sup>36</sup>

The 1991 NSS makes no direct mention of NATO member commitment, or the U.S. burden concerning their relationship with NATO. The United States does, however, express concern over member participation and commitment to alliances in general when it makes the statement:

“We cannot be the world’s policeman...[the] world community must share the danger and risk...[and their] commitments backed by tangible action.”

~United States 1991 National Security Strategy<sup>37</sup>

Over the following years, the United States would begin reducing its footprint in Europe as they re-balanced their forces to support global strategic initiatives. There would be increasing calls to alliance members and coalition partners to back their political lip service with tangible action; however, the influence of U.S. foreign policy on NATO commitments during this period can be assessed as low impact. There was no formal administration documentation or strong rhetoric supporting demands on the European continent concerning defense posture during this period. The United States would not be truly re-focused to the European continent again until almost 23 years later in 2014 when the Russian bear marked its first real strategic grab at power since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>34</sup> (*National Security Strategy of the United States*, 1991, pp. 7, 9)

<sup>35</sup> (*National Security Strategy of the United States*, 1991, p. 7)

<sup>36</sup> (*National Security Strategy of the United States*, 1991, p. 31)

<sup>37</sup> (*National Security Strategy of the United States*, 1991, pp. 2, 7, 27)

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## 6.2 Clinton Era (1993-2001)

Many members of the United States military refer to the 1990's as the peacetime years of our country's fighting forces. A time of stagnation defined by a lack of refinement in strategic force shaping, acquisitions or advancement in doctrine. This may also provide an accurate depiction of the US-NATO relationship during this period, and it was driven by the Clinton era foreign policy founded on regionally focused alliance relationships with regionally focused influence. Clinton's policy of engaged global leadership was married to a domestic policy which spurred the American public to support all facets (and costs) of maintaining and expanding American prominence in foreign domains. However, by the end of the Clinton era the wheels of change had started in motion beneath the surface. Change was coming, but like many large muscle movements of any government, it would be a slow change. The effects of which would not be felt for years to come but would have a ripple effect across the globe.

President Clinton's first published National Security Strategy in 1994 was titled the "Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement". The overarching theme of the Clinton era national security strategy was supporting the spread of democratic ideals and expanding the world's free market economies through dynamic U.S. leadership. Where the previous administration leveled cautious optimism concerning the state of the world order regarding the end of the Cold War, President Clinton made his opinion on the matter crystal clear in his opening statement of the 1994 NSS: "The central security challenge of the past half century – the threat of communist expansion – is gone."<sup>38</sup> The bedrock of his stated central goals would be realized by increasing U.S. national security through a focused plan of active leadership and engagement around the globe.

From a military perspective the 1994 NSS identified a desire to build on the successes of the Gulf War UN actions through active leadership and support to the United Nations peacekeeping initiatives and a pledge to both meet and exceed all US pledges of economic and military support to the organization. This was seen by President Clinton as part of the initiative to promote democracy not just within NATO, but on the world stage. Most mentions of NATO within the 1994 document begin with the statement, "Through U.S. leadership, NATO has been able to...", demonstrating his idea of engaged U.S. leadership within the organization. The Clinton era focus on engaged U.S. leadership was not

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<sup>38</sup> (W. Clinton, 1994a, p. i)

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intended to be only political in nature. The only mention of the burden to the U.S. in the 1994 document was a direct statement of acceptance and commitment:

“We can only engage actively abroad if the American people and the Congress are willing to bear the costs of that leadership – in dollars, political energy and, at times, American lives.”

~President Bill Clinton (National Security Strategy, 1994)

The U.S. had begun refocusing its military posture to reflect the global initiatives espoused in both this and the previous administration’s NSS documents. This demanded an increased focus in areas previously all but ignored. The United States, up to this point, had focused military strategic efforts in two general regions; European and Western Pacific (Southeast Asian) credible deterrence efforts. The defeat of Saddam Hussein’s attempt to secure Kuwaiti resources in the early 90’s did not reduce tensions in the middle east after the Gulf War was settled. The pressure remained as tensions increased concerning the security of vital regional oil reserves, increasing the relevance of the region as a new strategic focal point for the United States. The 1991 NSS call to restructure the military forces of the United States to meet the challenges of a global focus had already started by 1994. The U.S. had reduced their force footprint in Europe, increased their presence in Southeast Asia and augmented both by forward deployed naval forces to meet the desires of achieving a credible deterrent posture.<sup>39</sup>

The 1994 NATO Summit in January was a landmark event marked by NATO approval of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative. The PfP was a U.S. initiative delivered at the summit by President Clinton in an effort to bind the former communist states to the rest of Europe. By the fall of the same year 21 countries, including Russia, had joined the PfP agreement. Leading up to the summit, President Clinton embarked on a campaign to reassure Europeans of the American commitment to European stability through democracy. He called on Europe to invest in their future saying the United States “will benefit more from a strong and equal partner than from a weak one...Europe as a whole cannot be secure if the eastern half remains in turmoil.”<sup>40</sup> He saw the PfP as a stepping stone toward NATO inclusion that was less threatening to Moscow than the rapid outright accession of Poland, Hungary and other Eastern European nations being called for by some NATO

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<sup>39</sup> (*National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, 1994, p. 22)

<sup>40</sup> (Apple, 1994)

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members. Addressing a multinational audience, the day before the summit President Clinton remarked on his proposed Partnership for Peace initiative saying:

“This partnership [for peace] will advance a process of evolution for NATO's formal enlargement. It looks to the day when NATO will take on new members who assume the Alliance's full responsibilities. It will create a framework in which former communist states and others not now members of NATO can participate with NATO members in joint military planning, training, exercises and other efforts. This partnership will build new bonds of cooperation among the militaries of the East and the West. It will reinforce the development of democracies and democratic practices.”

~ President Clinton, Multinational Address, 9 Jan 1994<sup>41</sup>

The PfP demonstrated an instrumental link in the administration's plans for promoting democracy in the region and served as the bedrock of the NATO expansion that followed. The PfP initiative also demonstrates U.S. ability to influence NATO initiatives to align with U.S. national interests.

“The Partnership will expand and intensify political and military cooperation throughout Europe, increase stability, diminish threats to peace, and build strengthened relationships by promoting the spirit of practical cooperation and commitment to democratic principles that underpin our Alliance. This new programme goes beyond dialogue and cooperation to forge a real partnership - a Partnership for Peace. Active participation in the Partnership for Peace will play an important role in the evolutionary process of the expansion of NATO.”

~Declaration of Heads of State and Government, 1994 Brussels Summit<sup>42</sup>

The Clinton Administration's 1997 NSS remained steadfast to the objectives of the previous 1994 NSS and re-stated the American resolve to shoulder all of the costs associated with an engaged leadership role on the world stage in the pursuit of America's strategic agenda. In his State of the Union address the President re-confirmed the prominence of European stability to American national security as one of America's top priorities when he stated, “When Europe is stable, prosperous and at peace, America is more secure.”<sup>43</sup> During his speech he outlined his vision of leading the expansion of NATO to include the first new members by 1999 and cementing the new Russian democracy within

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<sup>41</sup> (W. Clinton, 1994b)

<sup>42</sup> (Brussels Summit Declaration, 1994)

<sup>43</sup> (“U.S. State of the Union Address 4 February 1997,” 1997)

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the PfP commitment. The '97 NSS released two months later cemented this vision with the following statement:

”Our objective is to complete the construction of a truly integrated, democratic and secure Europe, with a democratic Russia as a full participant. This would complete the mission the United States launched 50 years ago with the Marshall Plan and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO remains the anchor of American engagement in Europe and the linchpin of transatlantic security.”<sup>44</sup>

~ U.S. National Security Strategy, 1997

The first ever Department of Defense Quadrennial Review (QDR) of 1997 reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to the European/Southeast Asian focus of the United States national security strategy with a stated commitment to keep 100,000 military personnel in both locations. This review was the first true call to divest from military capability investment, development, and maintenance of conventional force capabilities. The 1997 QDR identifies the turn of the century as a period of technological proliferation which will enable both state and non-state actors with the ability to challenge the United States via unconventional or asymmetric means.

This is significant to the NATO burden sharing discussion as it was the first official call to an adjustment of U.S. defense and deterrence capability development and acquisitions. With the world’s technological advancement facilitating unprecedented access to asymmetric capabilities which could disrupt the U.S. war machine at a fraction of the cost associated with conventional methods, the United States had to alter its focus. The United States began to focus on rapid deployment capability to new focus regions, less conventional force structures with a ‘lighter footprint’, and technological investment designed to keep pace with the advancement of technological innovation. This major military modernization initiative was also mentioned in the 1997 NSS.

This modernization initiative would separate the United States military capabilities from those who were choosing only to invest enough to maintain current capabilities or choosing to decrease investment and down-sizing their forces. The result ended up manifesting in a divergence of interoperability within the Alliance on the European continent over the next decade. Regardless of the stated U.S. willingness to shoulder the burden of expense associated with their involvement in

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<sup>44</sup> (*National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, 1997, p. Sec III)

\*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the position of the the United States Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, or the Department of Defense.

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NATO<sup>45</sup>, this divergence of capability would prove to be a future point of contention. This fact was not lost on then Secretary General Lord George Robertson who during the 1999 Washington Summit made a call to the Defense Capabilities Initiative “to ensure that all allies not only remain interoperable, but that they also improve and update their capabilities to face new security challenges.”<sup>46</sup>

Regarding NATO enlargement, the United States continued to push for new member accession by 1999. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright addressed the NATO member leadership in Brussels at the NATO 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration leading up to the 1997 Madrid Summit. She told the assembled leadership the U.S. desired accession of members prepared and ready to accept the burdens associated with NATO membership. She did not mince words in the view that the United States wanted expansion through members who were willing participants and not free-riders of NATO protection.

“We should inform aspirants clearly what they must do to meet the political and military conditions for membership, and we should be candid about shortcomings. They should be prepared to fulfill as many obligations of membership as possible on the day they join... We understand that if we are to achieve for Europe the kind of future we all want, we have to manage the evolution of this alliance correctly – we have to get it right.”

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, NATO 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Brussels<sup>47</sup>

It is interesting to note that the United States viewed itself as the sole superpower of the day, and it expected to remain so throughout the 1997-2015 period.<sup>48</sup> One of the assumptions made in the 1997 QDR is that the period between the turn of the century and 2015 was predicted to be one ‘marked by the absence of a “global peer competitor” able to challenge the United States militarily around the world as the Soviet Union did during the Cold War.’<sup>49</sup> It was also mentioned that it was assessed as ‘unlikely for any regional power or coalition to amass sufficient conventional military strength in the

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<sup>45</sup> See 1991 and 1997 U.S. National Security Strategy documents (*National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, 1997; *National Security Strategy of the United States*, 1991)

<sup>46</sup> (Lord Robertson, G. 2000)

<sup>47</sup> (M. K. Albright, ,Secretary of State, 1997)

<sup>48</sup> (*1997 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 1997, p. 22)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

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next 10 to 15 years to defeat our armed forces, once the full military potential of the United States is mobilized and deployed to the region of conflict'.<sup>50</sup>

The announced military modernization of 1997 plays a prominent role in the future divergence of the US-NATO relationship. It serves as foreshadowing to the coming divestment of direct U.S. heavy-handed leadership in NATO and the first muted call to a mutually shared burden of investment within the Alliance which came about with the 2000 NSS titled “A National Security Strategy for the Global Age”. President Clinton identifies the Global Age as one of interdependence where, regardless of any one individual nation’s power or prosperity, future prosperity relies on world powers working together. His vision was inclusive, not isolationist. At a time of what can be seen as the height of U.S. great power dominance the President of the United States called interdependence “the defining feature of our age” (W. Clinton, 2000). The significance of this statement coupled with his administration’s mantra of engaged leadership and acceptance of all burdens economic, military, and political therein associated would certainly lead NATO members to believe their declining economic investments in defense spending over the past decade were not a concern of the United States. However, the following statement in the opening remarks of the 2000 NSS made by President Clinton is the first muted call for America’s allies to start pulling their weight. Both a statement and a request to the allies of America’s various alliances around the globe. A muted call which would grow much louder and become more direct with each subsequent administration to follow.

“The ability to assure global security, shared prosperity and freedom is beyond the power of any one nation. But the actions of many nations often follow from the actions of one. America today has power and authority never seen before in the history of the world. We must continue to use it, in partnership with those who share our values, to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges of a global age.”

~President Bill Clinton, 2000 National Security Strategy Preface<sup>51</sup>

President Clinton’s final published National Security Strategy is also the first time the word ‘burden sharing’ appears in the text of a governing document of the United States. The 2000 NSS makes an overt statement that the example set by the United States military investment and forward presence overseas allows for maximum military cooperation with allies and therefore encourages burden

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> (W. Clinton, 2000)

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sharing.<sup>52</sup> Although this is a general statement not tied directly to any identified metric of measure, it is the first time the United States mentions any type of shared allied burden associated with U.S. national objectives. That is not to say the United States did not see their efforts at engaged leadership resulting in a positive change to NATO military involvement on the European continent.

Operation Allied Force, the 11-week NATO-led 1999 Kosovo air campaign against the regime of Slobodan Milosevic to stop the ethnic cleansing of Albanians saw fourteen of the Alliance's nineteen members actively participate. This operation was the first high intensity air campaign ever conducted by NATO.<sup>53</sup> Operation Allied Force proved a stark contrast to both Gulf War and Bosnian War NATO participation, and was seen by the United States as a triumph of their engaged leadership moving NATO toward an inclusive interdependence. U.S. troops comprised only 15% of the NATO-led KFOR occupation force<sup>54</sup> and noted this operation by name in the 2000 NSS as a demonstration of NATO's ability and willingness "to share more of the burden" concerning military action on the European continent.

U.S. foreign policy influence on NATO commitments during this period can be assessed as a moderate impact. The foreign policy espoused in the Clinton era NSS documentation obtained a response from NATO members in line with his rhetoric concerning Alliance posture and investment. President Clinton's foreign policy enabled and encouraged the negative trend in defense spending among NATO members. His direct statements in the NSS concerning America's obligation to bear the burden of costs associated with the defense of Europe and championing the increased level of NATO member participation during the Kosovo campaign signaled to NATO that the Alliance was meeting all U.S. desired outcomes.

### 6.3 George W. Bush Era (2001-2009)

**O**n September 11, 2001, the United States came under vicious, bloody attack. Americans died in their places of work. They died

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<sup>52</sup> See 2000 NSS Section on the Efficacy of Engagement: Enhancing Our Security at Home and Abroad. (*National Security Strategy for a Global Age*, 2000, p. 10)

<sup>53</sup> (*Operation Allied Force Summary, NATO Joint Forces Command Archives, NAPLES*)

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on American soil. They died not as combatants, but as innocent victims. They died not from traditional armies waging traditional campaigns, but from the brutal, faceless weapons of terror. They died as the victims of war - a war that many had feared but whose sheer horror took America by surprise.

~Opening remarks to the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review

Many believe it was the 9/11 attacks and subsequent War on Terror which drew the United States into the middle east and began their supposed withdrawal from a NATO alliance focus. In reality this shift away from European focus in U.S. priorities was not driven by these attacks. The groundwork for the shift in focus had already been laid in the early 90's with recognition of globalization and interdependence of world markets and communication. The War on Terror and subsequent NATO Article 5 declaration did however have a significant impact to NATO force structure and investment needs. The War on Terror and the resultant actions in Afghanistan clearly pulled a disproportionate U.S. focus to the Middle East regional area of influence concerning U.S. warfighting capabilities and force structure. This began the pull towards the US demand for regionally focused alliances with globally focused influence.

The early 2000's began an era of task organized military forces operating almost solely within the realm of unconventional asymmetric warfare defined by disproportionate force capabilities. About as far from near peer competition as modern forces have ever experienced or been task organized to counter. The result being the United States could no longer afford to absorb the position as primary guarantor of credible deterrence within the NATO alliance.

If we look to the supporting documentation defining U.S. foreign policy and military force guidance and focus, we see that while the War on Terror was guiding the close fight, the administration was conducting shaping actions within U.S. strategy to continue developing a reaction force capable of global peer competition. The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review becomes an anchoring document in this discussion. It announces a fundamental change in the U.S. approach to global deterrence from the "threat-based" model of the past to a "capabilities-based" model for the future. The new model focused not on a specific enemy or the location the United States expect to fight should deterrence fail; but on *how* an adversary will fight in the wars of the future. It also redefined a focus on the national security to be the home continent of North America.

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The Quadrennial Defense Review was undertaken during a crucial time of transition to a new era. Even before the attack of September 11, 2001, the senior leaders of the Defense Department set out to establish a new strategy for America's defense that would embrace uncertainty and contend with surprise, a strategy premised on the idea that to be effective abroad, America must be safe at home. As we contend with the difficult challenges of the war on terrorism, we must also proceed on the path of transforming America's defense... and to honor America's commitments worldwide.

~Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 2001 QDR<sup>55</sup>

This was the first overt signal from the U.S. that involvement in Europe's security and deterrence efforts was going to change. The message, while unheeded by NATO members writ-large of that time, did not go unnoticed within the NATO discussion.

Former chairman of the NATO Military Committee, General Klaus Naumann, registered concern over NATO's ability to retain a credible capability of collective defense without the U.S. if Europe was to rely on the autonomous European defense forces. He believed that task to be "undoable" over either the short or long term under the current conditions and member policies concerning defense investment of the time (Naumann, 2009, p. 60). He addressed the need for Europeans to invest in their own capabilities in 2009 when he stated, "The tried-and-true Cold War-era method of "outsourcing" security to the United States is no longer viable, not least because America's role in the world has changed."<sup>56</sup>

This new position concerning the NATO military burden of investment manifested the following year in President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy. It is in this document his administration lays out their desires for an expeditionary NATO force capable of meeting the capabilities-based demands of combating what the U.S. assesses to be the future of warfare and undefined actors of the new information and technological era. A call to modernization and military investment among NATO members that would align NATO capabilities with their own modernization initiatives rooted in US National Security Strategy documentation.

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<sup>55</sup> (2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, 2001)

<sup>56</sup> (Naumann, 2009)

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“NATO must build a capability to field, at short notice, highly mobile, specially trained forces whenever they are needed to respond to a threat against any member of the alliance. The alliance must be able to act whenever our interests are threatened.”

~2002 National Security Strategy statement on NATO military forces<sup>57</sup>

The following bullet points taken from the 2002 NSS outlined the US expectation for changes to NATO, providing a stark contrast to the previous administration’s acceptance of the US burden of engaged leadership to the Alliance: If NATO succeeds in enacting [the following] changes, the rewards will be a partnership as central to the security and interests of its member states as was the case during the Cold War (Bush, 2002).

- Expand NATO’s membership to those democratic nations willing and able to share the burden of defending and advancing out common interests;
- Ensure that the military forces of NATO nations have appropriate combat contributions to make in coalition warfare;
- Take advantage of technological opportunities and economies of scale in our defense spending to transform NATO military forces so they dominate potential aggressors and diminish our vulnerabilities;
- Take the necessary steps to transform and modernize our forces.

The 2006 QDR announced two new initiatives which would directly affect US foreign policy. First, a significantly increased investment and focus on U.S. domestic security development with the aim to transform the Department of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, FBI, and intelligence community with specific guidance to focus on disruptive technologies in the realms of cyber and space operations.<sup>58</sup> Second was to develop alliance capabilities to support Joint Task Force (JTF) organization. This second effort was driven directly by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, who identified the military relationship among allies to be “in a state of transition from an interoperable to interdependent. The key to success during this initiative will be to train, man, and equip [forces] to make them JTF capable, available, and ready...”

The United States was continuing its military modernization effort as part of the national security policy. During President Bush’s administration the United States turned back to being less

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<sup>57</sup> (*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2002, p. Sec VIII)

<sup>58</sup> (*2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 2006)

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magnanimous concerning their willingness to shoulder the expense of coalition and alliance actions. The United States was still bearing the brunt of military equipment and personnel requirements for kinetic actions supplying more than 65% of ISAF forces in Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup> The demand to increase U.S. focus at home in order to ensure safety and security domestically was pulling resources from funding previously used to support overseas force projection and shore up Alliance and coalition member shortfalls. This demand required an increase in both U.S. defense spending as well as allied defense investment if the JTF concept was to come to fruition. During the Bush Presidency defense spending rose from 2.94% GDP in 2001 to 4.66% GDP by the end of 2009 when President Obama inherited the White House.<sup>60</sup> By comparison, non-US NATO average defense spending deteriorated from 1.94% to a meager 1.43% GDP over the same period.

The preface to the 2006 NSS addresses the change to the US domestic situation at home and a population who was growing weary of the Clinton era policy of shouldering all costs of credible deterrence and the expansion of democratic ideals and governments. There was also an acknowledgement that maybe the bilateral policies (Europe-US) of the past which ignored regional and global realities would be unlikely to succeed in a future world of interdependent world markets.<sup>61</sup> The document calls for a strategic focus which recognizes “a need for a global focus in relations with main centers of global power”<sup>62</sup> like China and India. Europe still remained a vital pillar of U.S. foreign policy, but the United States makes a direct statement that “NATO internal reforms must be accelerated to ensure NATO is capable to carry out its missions effectively” (Bush, 2006). The patience with a partner that was slow to change and adapt to the what the United States viewed as a critical adjustment to both world-wide strategic relationships and resultant deterrence initiatives based on capabilities was wearing. U.S. calls for “transformation” become synonymous to demands for an accelerated response to what they see as gaps in effective military alliance capabilities.

There is much made of the U.S. initial call for inclusion of a 2% GDP defense spending initiative at the 2006 Riga Summit; however, there is no mention of a defense spending target in the Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government<sup>63</sup> after the summit conclusion. Only a general statement to halt declines in defense spending among members of the Alliance.

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<sup>59</sup> (*NATO Troops in Afghanistan*, 2011)

<sup>60</sup> ("Military Expenditure (% of GDP) Database," 2019)

<sup>61</sup> (*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2006, p. 36)

<sup>62</sup> (*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2006, p. 36)

<sup>63</sup> (*2006 Riga Summit Declaration*, 2006)

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The U.S. position leading up to the Riga Summit is clearly stated during the congressional subcommittee hearing concerning NATO transformation and the Riga Summit held in May of 2006. During that hearing the International Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats echoes the 2006 NSS and QDR calls for NATO transformation. They call the Riga Summit a pivotal moment for NATO identifying the ‘transformation summit as a “make or break” moment for NATO’<sup>64</sup> concerning U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. was calling for NATO to “develop a truly expeditionary mindset with the requisite capabilities.”<sup>65</sup> The hearing identified seven key objectives for the upcoming summit in Riga, all focused on developing expeditionary capabilities and expanding NATO influence beyond the European continent. None of them focused on allied defense spending goals.

The final administration document assessed of the Bush administration was the 2008 National Defense Strategy (NDS). There is only one mention of NATO in its 23 pages. In the section titled “Strengthen and Expand Alliances and Partnerships there are no specific references to any one alliance, coalition, or partnership, but a general statement which says, “We should not limit ourselves to the relationships of the past.”<sup>66</sup> The Joint Chiefs voice a strong concern over the degradation of deterrent effect resultant of the change to world relations and technological advancement:

“Deterrence is based upon credibility: In the contemporary strategic environment, the challenge is one of deterring or dissuading a range of potential adversaries from taking a variety of actions against the U.S. and our allies and interests. These adversaries could be states or non-state actors; they could use nuclear, conventional, or unconventional weapons; and they could exploit terrorism, electronic, cyber and other forms of warfare. Economic interdependence and the growth of global communications further complicate the situation...For more than sixty years, the United States has secured the global commons for the benefit of all...We must work to develop new ways of operating across the full spectrum of warfare. Our partnerships must be capable of applying military and non-military power when and where needed – a prerequisite against an adaptable transnational enemy.”

US Joint Chiefs of Staff statement on deterrence, 2008 NDS<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> (*The United States and NATO: Transformation and the Riga Summit*, 2006)

<sup>65</sup> (*The United States and NATO: Transformation and the Riga Summit*, 2006, p. 13)

<sup>66</sup> (*2008 National Defense Strategy*, 2008, p. 15)

<sup>67</sup> (*2008 National Defense Strategy*, 2008, p. 11)

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There were no directly overt calls from the Bush Administration to specifically increased defense spending on the part of Alliance members during his tenure. The Alliance would have had to read between the lines of U.S. foreign policy outlined in the governing documents to see there was a turning of the tide away from the Clinton era vision of an America so invested in the success of its foreign policy initiatives that it would happily absorb all costs of implementation. The United States was embarking on an initiative to invest in a transformation of their current international relationships and commitments, as well as the capabilities developed by their chosen partners. The NATO decision to participate in the U.S. led war on terror in Afghanistan necessitated a change to NATO force posture to enable out of area operations and integration with U.S. forces.

The economic interdependence created by the growing free-market economies, growth of global communications, and proliferation of weapons and technologies were changing the landscape of U.S. foreign policy. The days of focusing U.S. security on a sole region or threat had come to an end. I believe NATO recognized this change to U.S. policy, and it was the shift in U.S. prioritization which led NATO to make the changes to force posture. It was the NATO desire to show solidarity with their chief benefactor which brought NATO to engage in actions in Afghanistan. It was not direct calls made by the Bush administration to NATO specifically, but the overall shift in U.S. focus which provided the impetus for the changes to NATO which occurred during this period and set the stage for the Obama era's global focus of effort. President Obama's foreign policy focus was cemented before he took office in 2009. It is for these reasons I have assessed the influence of U.S. foreign policy during this era to be low to moderate.

## **6.4 Obama Era (2009-2017)**

The Obama era's first published National Security Strategy in 2010 did not leave much room for question regarding the United States position on future alliances and alliance relationships. During the development of the 2010 NSS, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made a statement to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations concerning US guidance to NATO's New Strategic Concept. She stated, "The imbalance in military expenditure is one of the issues that some fear could undermine the future cohesion of the Alliance [and that] partners should play an increasing role in NATO activities"<sup>68</sup> which at the time were primarily out of area.

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<sup>68</sup> (M. K. Albright, 2010)

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The 2010 NSS became a defining document of change concerning U.S. foreign policy. It signaled the full transition from the Clinton era of engaged leadership and willingness to shoulder the responsibilities and costs of Alliance defense. President Obama's first NSS made it clear that the United States now sought partnerships with globally minded and capable members who recognize an interdependent world of advanced threats which cannot be addressed through conventional means. Alliances with globally focused influence. He makes it clear that the United States both cannot, and will not, be the sole guarantor of deterrence in any region of the world.

“Americans have risen to meet – and to shape – moments of transition. This is one of those moments. The burdens of a young century cannot fall on American shoulders alone – indeed, our adversaries would like to see America sap our strength by overextending our power. We are clear-eyed about the challenge of mobilizing collective action, and the shortfalls of our international system.”

~President Barack Obama, Opening Statement of the 2010 NSS<sup>69</sup>

This general perspective is echoed throughout the document. In a section dedicated to peacekeeping and armed conflict resolution it is stated that the United States does not believe any one nation can or should be responsible to “shoulder the burden” of the world's armed conflicts.<sup>70</sup> The document repeatedly references initiatives to expand the United States' alliances, coalitions, and partnerships to include globally minded and responsible partners. The saturation of technology based global economic and communications interdependence necessitated a change from regionally focused efforts to globally based initiatives and partnerships. The United States could not afford to sink costs into regionally focused alliances. The United States saw itself as part of a “dynamic international environment” in which the threats to national security were under fire from new asymmetric capabilities and non-state actors who could influence world markets on a global scale.

Advancing our interests will require expanding spheres of cooperation around the world...and may involve new arrangements to confront [current] threats. Our national security goals can only be reached if we make hard choices and work with international partners to share burdens.”

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<sup>69</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2010, p. Preface)

<sup>70</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2010, pp. 47-48)

The U.S. does make it clear that although foreign policy is changing from a regional to a global focus, requiring an expansion of diplomatic, military, and economic endeavors; they desire to maintain and even build upon their current alliances. “We are committed to ensuring that NATO is able to address the full range of 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, while serving as a foundation of European security... This requires investing now... building today the capacity to strengthen the foundations of our common security, and modernizing our capabilities in order to ensure we are agile in the face of change. International institutions – most prominently NATO and the United Nations – have been at the center of our international order since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century; however, what is needed is a realignment of national actions and international institutions with shared interests.”<sup>72</sup> A global focus.

The UK Parliament’s Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy accurately assessed the change to U.S. policy identified in the rhetoric of the 2010 NSS when they concluded “geographical and functional shifts in U.S. policy... [raise] fundamental questions if our pre-eminent defense and security relationship is with an ally who has interests which are increasingly divergent from our own.”<sup>73</sup>

Widening the gap, the collapse and subsequent 4-year recession of the European economy took its toll on European military investment between 2008 – 2012. NATO members seemed all too accepting of a reliance on U.S. investment in the European continent until the Obama era rhetoric began to shed doubt on the future of U.S. participation as they announced the initiative to divest some of their focus from Europe, and reinvest in their strategic concerns on the Asian continent.

In her 2011 article “America’s Pacific Century” Secretary Clinton addressed the lack of U.S. focus concerning the Pacific region while attempting to assure our European partners of our belief in the importance of maintaining our European ties. “By virtue of our unique geography, the United States is both an Atlantic and a Pacific power. We are proud of our European partnerships and all that they deliver. Our challenge now is to build a web of partnerships and institutions across the Pacific that is as durable and as consistent with American interests and values as the web we have built across the Atlantic.” The following removal of two of the four U.S. Army Brigades assigned to U.S. European

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<sup>71</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2010, pp. 34, 36)

<sup>72</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2010, pp. 27, 40-42)

<sup>73</sup> (Becker & Military Academy West Point, 2012; Parliament, 2012)



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Command in 2012 did not bolster the opinion among NATO allies that the U.S. commitment to the European continent remained a priority focus of U.S. foreign policy. What it did accomplish was gaining the attention of European member states within NATO as they assessed the impact this loss would have concerning immediate combat power in the region. This potential impact was demonstrated through the United States calculated decision to participate in a limited capacity during the NATO led Libya campaign in 2011.

The U.S. calculus to ‘take a back seat’ or ‘lead from behind’ once air superiority was assured over Libya paid off for U.S. policy. After years of prodding NATO members to increase their investment in defense spending the U.S. had found an opportunity to drive the point home. What would deter a threat to the European continent if the U.S. was decisively engaged on a non-European front? After the conflict in Libya had concluded NATO was forced to make a re-assessment of readiness and investment in force structure. Libya had tested the alliance in the absence of direct U.S. military involvement and found their Article 3 deterrent capability was next to non-existent if confronted by a credible threat. This was a calculated move by the United States which is highlighted in a statement from then National Security Advisor Tom Donilon in an article he wrote for the *Washington Post* on October 28, 2011. He said the U.S. had used the Libya campaign to “revitalize” NATO. The operation had “identified how the alliance could be more effective in the future. The European allies faced several shortages in military assets and needed to make great investments, especially in precision guided munitions and unmanned systems that were critical on today’s battlefields.”<sup>74</sup>

During his keynote address at the 2011 Munich Security Conference then Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen argued that without proper investment, we risk a Europe that is ‘divided, weaker and increasingly adrift from the United States,’ outlining a scenario in which European governments may be less capable of defending their populations against new threats.<sup>75</sup> During this address the Secretary General also made a formal call to what he labeled ‘smart defense’ within NATO. A structured investment strategy focused on the ability to “pool and share capabilities, to set the right priorities, and to better coordinate our efforts.” He recognized the gap in interoperability required to counter the threats of the current day, and the fact that many member nations had stopped progressing their military capabilities with the end of the Cold War. He followed these statements up by highlighting the fact that European defense spending had decreased by \$45 billion over the previous two year span,

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<sup>74</sup> (Petersson, 2015, p. 45)

<sup>75</sup> ("NATO Secretary General Calls for “Smart Defence” at Munich Security Conference," 2011)

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sighting only France, Britain, and Greece as European members spending the agreed 2 percent GDP on defense.<sup>76</sup> This warning came only 1 month prior to the start of military actions in Libya.

Petersson has dubbed the 2011 Libya conflict to be a “watershed” moment for NATO. He believes the U.S. used that conflict as an opportunity to address the imbalance of responsibility among NATO members. He cites Ellen Hallams, a lecturer at Kings College, saying “Washington is signaling more forcefully than ever to its European allies as well as NATO partners, that they must take on a greater share of Alliance burdens...and move away from a deeply entrenched culture of dependency.”<sup>77</sup>

The Libya campaign demonstrated an erosion of military credibility within European NATO members. After the initial establishment of air superiority by the United States, NATO was largely left to conduct the mission with significantly reduced support from the U.S. military. The limited scale and scope of direct military support from the U.S. during the Libya conflict highlighted the inability of European NATO members to conduct comprehensive military operations on their own. I do not bring the Libya campaign up to debate how it was managed, but to echo the statements made by Petersson and Hallams that it served as a calling card from the U.S. to NATO members. If the U.S. chose to limit participation (or potentially not to participate at all) in an Alliance action, NATO was not prepared to counter a serious threat. An increase in military capability was necessary for the broader NATO membership. The single point of failure was demonstrated during the Libya campaign, and an adjustment needed to be made to Alliance defense capability investments. This became a pivotal moment in NATO and became a point of focus during the 2014 Wales Summit.

The Libya campaign also demonstrated to potential rising powers just how reliant the European continent was on direct U.S. involvement. The United States took the Libya conflict as an opportunity to provide a wake-up call to their European partners. Diplomatic overtures and published policy decisions were not making the message clear to U.S. allies. However, the resultant implication to European security highlighted by the Libya conflict was noted. A New York Times editorial summarized the impact well when it stated, ‘European NATO’s inability to master a minor challenge like Libya should frighten every defense ministry in Europe.’<sup>78</sup> The implication could no longer be ignored. Without direct U.S. military support there existed an erosion in the European Article 3

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<sup>76</sup> (Erlanger, 2011)

<sup>77</sup> (Petersson, 2015, p. 8)

<sup>78</sup> (“Leaderless in Europe,” 2011)

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deterrent effect.<sup>79</sup> US Ambassador to NATO, Kurt Volker, and Vice Admiral (Ret) Kevin Green addressed the Atlantic Council concerning NATO Reform in December of 2011. They addressed four key issues concerning the topic. Number 3 was defense spending disparity among members. They directly identified the decline in defense spending by European NATO members as a causal factor in the erosion of both NATO deterrence and ability to effectively employ forces.

“During the 1980s, Allies were urged to maintain defense spending at 3 percent of GDP. As many nations failed to do so, this target was reduced to 2 percent in the 2000s. Even that target is being missed, and indeed European NATO member defense spending as a share of GDP now averages less than 1.7 percent. The US defense budget once accounted for roughly half of the defense budget of all NATO members, now it is roughly 75 percent...There is no credibility to the notion of Alliance action if most Allies actually lack meaningful capabilities to contribute to NATO missions.”

~ ASOC Issue Brief, Dec 2011<sup>80</sup>

Counter to some of the previously veiled statements concerning burden sharing made by government officials, 2011 proved to be a turning point in U.S. rhetoric on the subject. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates took a very direct approach when addressing the issue at his last address to Brussels in June 2011. Secretary Gates directly addressed the division between those member states capable (or willing) to participate in kinetic actions and those who are not when he said, “In the past, I’ve worried openly about NATO turning into a two-tiered alliance. Between members who specialize in “soft” humanitarian, development, peacekeeping, and talking tasks, and those conducting the “hard” combat missions. Between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership – be they security guarantees or headquarters billets – but don’t want to share the risks and the costs. This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today. And it is unacceptable.”<sup>81</sup>

The U.S. pivot to the Pacific combined with the example set by the Libya campaign may have bolstered the Russian perspective concerning viability of a ‘land grab’ in 2014 when they invaded the Crimean Peninsula. The premonition made by Cimbala and Forster that ‘A fractured NATO, and

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<sup>79</sup> See “Leaderless in Europe,” Editorial, New York Times, 29 June 2011. And “Libya’s Dark Lesson for NATO,” New York Times, 4 September 2011.

<sup>80</sup> (Volker & Vice Admiral Green, 2011, p. 2) Ambassador Kurt Volker served as the US ambassador to NATO and is a Senior Advisor and member of the Strategic Advisors Group at the Atlantic Council. He is also the Managing Director, International, BGR Group. Vice Admiral Kevin P. Green, USN (Ret.) is the Vice President for Defense and Intelligence for IBM Federal.

<sup>81</sup> (Gates, 2011a)

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especially a large divide in purposes or commitments as between the United States and its European security partners, invites aggression and the possibility of inadvertent escalation<sup>82</sup> was realized in this action.

The United States wanted NATO to recognize that a military-based alliance is made with members who provide complementary capabilities which increases the overall effectiveness of the Alliance. The free-riding checkbook diplomacy seen from the Germans in the 1991 Gulf War (Ringsmose, 2010), and the unwillingness to share directly in risk witnessed through Allied national caveats to use of forces in Afghanistan severely restricting Allied commanders called out by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (Gates, 2011b) did not support the idea of a balanced military alliance. As stated shortly after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 by U.S. Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, “Threats to the Alliance neither start nor stop at Europe’s doorstep. Emerging threats and technologies mean that fewer places are truly ‘out of area’.”<sup>83</sup> The U.S. was pressuring European NATO to increase its contributions.

Kunertova recognized the significance of Russia’s strategic move in Crimea as a seminal moment of influence to NATO members concerning defense spending when she noted, “Since Russia’s annexation of Crimea, NATO has put collective defense back on top of its agenda.”<sup>84</sup>

Leading up to the 2014 Wales Summit the burden sharing debate had become a point of political contention not only among members of the alliance, but within U.S. politics. NATO member defense spending took a front seat at the 2013 Senate Confirmation hearings for John Kerry to become Secretary of State when he was asked if he was prepared to “press all members of NATO to increase their defense expenditures.” Senator Kerry replied that he would “continue to urge allied commitments to sustain and build critical capabilities, as part of an effort to invest in a NATO force for 2020 that is fully trained and equipped to respond to any threat and defend our common interests. Adequate levels of spending are crucial to that goal...”<sup>85</sup> The fact that this question was center stage during the Secretary of State confirmation hearing leading up to the 2014 Wales summit demonstrates the severity of concern surrounding this issue at the time.

While the initial commitment to a defense investment of 2% GDP was initially verbally agreed upon in 2006 by NATO Defense Ministers, it was intended at the time to be an indicator of a country’s

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<sup>82</sup> (Cimbala & Kent Forster, 2017)

<sup>83</sup> (Hagel, 2014)

<sup>84</sup> (Kunertova, 2017, p. 552)

<sup>85</sup> Taken from The US NATO debate: from Libya to Ukraine. (Pettersson, 2015, p. 77)

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political will to contribute to the Alliance's common defense efforts.<sup>86</sup> The summits of 2012 – 2018 proved pivotal to the determination of what NATO members would agree defines the debate, as well as a plan of action to rectify the imbalance.

At the final meeting of foreign ministers prior to the 2014 heads of state Summit in Wales, Secretary of State Kerry addressed the defense spending issue when he said:

“As we head to the Wales summit, every ally spending less than 2 percent of their GDP needs to dig deeper and make a concrete commitment to do more. And all you have to do is look at a map in order to understand why – Ukraine, Iraq, Syria – all threats to peace and to security, and they surround the region.”<sup>87</sup>

In recognition of the challenges posed by Russia, the Middle East, and North Africa the members of the Wales Summit approved the NATO Readiness Action Plan. This action plan loosely defines a strategic initiative to ensure the Alliance is “ready to respond swiftly and firmly to the new security challenges [and] changes in the security environment on NATO's borders and further afield that are of concern to Allies.”<sup>88</sup> The problem with this action plan is that even though it did establish tangible outcomes such as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), it did not quantifiably define objectives within a timeline or division of committed assets among members. An issue which will be dealt with at the 2018 summit in Brussels.

Perhaps the most significant event of the 2014 summit occurred when the NATO members defined their own measurable metric of collective burden. At the Wales Summit it was determined that collective burden would be measured in the form of the individual member's defense spending goal which had been verbally, but not formally agreed upon in 2006. A target defense investment of 2% gross domestic product (GDP) by 2024 was defined as the goal which all members would strive to meet. The impetus being to ensure a credible Article 3 and Article 5 capability for NATO.<sup>89</sup>

According to the NATO website NATO leaders agreed to reverse the trend of declining defense budgets and decided:

- Allies currently meeting the 2% guideline on defense spending will aim to continue to do so;

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<sup>86</sup> ("Funding NATO," 2019)

<sup>87</sup> (Kerry, 2014b)

<sup>88</sup> ("Wales Summit Declaration," 2014)

<sup>89</sup> Article 3: In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack. (North American Council, 1949)

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- Allies whose current proportion of GDP spent on defense is below this level will: halt any decline, aim to increase defense expenditure in real terms as DP grows; and aim to move towards the 2% guideline within a decade with a view to meeting their NATO Capability Targets and filling NATO's capability shortfalls.
  - Within a decade Allies who are spending less than 20% of their annual defense spending on major equipment will aim to increase their annual investments to 20% or more of total defense expenditures.

~Heads of State and Government Press Release following 2014 Wales Summit<sup>90</sup>

“Our overall security and defense depend both on how much we spend and how we spend it. Increased investments should be directed towards meeting our capability priorities, and Allies also need to display the political will to provide required capabilities and deploy forces when they are needed...All Allies will: ensure that their land, air and maritime forces meet NATO agreed guidelines for deployability and sustainability and other agreed output metrics; ensure that their armed forces can operate together effectively, including through the implementation of agreed NATO standards and doctrines. Allies will review national progress annually. This will be discussed at future Defense Ministerial meetings and reviewed by Heads of State and Government at future Summits” (Heads of State and Government, 2014).<sup>91</sup>

Both the NATO Secretary General Fogh Rasmussen and the United States recognized the Ukraine crisis as a “wake up call” for the transatlantic community (Petersson, 2015, p. 115). The result of the 2014 Wales summit commitment for each member of the alliance to meet defined defense spending requirements can, I believe, be attributed to a few seminal events. First, the shift in U.S. foreign policy from regional to global focus and its resultant change in U.S. willingness to continue to be the sole guarantor of credible deterrence. Second was the Sept 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States and the subsequent change to force structure required to support the War on Terror. Next, the U.S. calculated role in the Libya campaign highlighted NATO shortcomings and the U.S. desire for NATO to take greater responsibility. Lastly, the presence of a renewed potential Russian threat which resonated with a generation of NATO members who still have vivid memories of growing up in the Cold War era.

Even though the United States was pleased with the outcome of the Wales Summit, the Obama administration kept up the pressure. Vice President Biden highlighted NATO defense spending again in October 2014 when he addressed the Harvard Kennedy School saying that “the transatlantic

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<sup>90</sup> (Heads of State and Government, 2014, Wales Summit Declaration [Press release], Para 14-15)

<sup>91</sup> (Heads of State and Government, 2014, Wales Summit Declaration [Press release], Para 14-15)

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relationship does not sustain itself by itself...it could not be sustained by the U.S. alone. It requires investment and sacrifice on both sides of the Atlantic.”<sup>92</sup> Secretary of State Kerry followed up this message with an address in Brussels that December saying: “Every ally has to pull their weight...we can’t have 21<sup>st</sup> century security on the cheap. All nations, all members of the alliance, need to be increasing their capacity to be able to meet the challenges that we face today” (Kerry, 2014a).

The Obama administration clearly lobbied hard for NATO members to increase and update their military capabilities to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 2010 NSS was riddled with calls to even out the costs of maintaining credible deterrence and defense within the alliance, and to reduce the NATO reliance on the United States as a primary (if not sole) guarantor of security for the European continent. In stark contrast, the 2015 NSS which followed the Wales summit is almost devoid of any calls for equal burden sharing. Where the previous NSS had a large focus on re-balancing of alliance burdens, this one makes almost no mention of it.

“NATO is the strongest alliance the world has ever known and is the hub of an expanding global security network. Our Article 5 commitment to the collective defense of all NATO Members is ironclad, as is our commitment to ensuring the Alliance remains ready and capable for crisis response and cooperative security.”

~2015 US National Security Strategy<sup>93</sup>

Following the Wales Summit, the Obama Administration rhetoric calmed down concerning member obligations and commitments to the Alliance. It was not until President Trump assumed office that defense spending was again brought to the fore of American-NATO interactions. The 2016 Warsaw Summit recognized the Allies’ commitment and progress toward their 2014 agreement:

“Since Wales, we have turned a corner. Collectively, Allies' defense expenditures have increased in 2016 for the first time since 2009. In just two years, a majority of Allies have halted or reversed declines in defense spending in real terms. Today, five Allies meet the NATO guideline to spend a minimum of 2% of their Gross Domestic Product on defense. Ten Allies meet the NATO guideline to spend more than 20% of their defense budgets on major equipment, including related Research & Development...There is still much work to be done. Efforts to achieve a more balanced sharing of the costs and responsibilities continue. Defense Ministers will continue to review progress annually”

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<sup>92</sup> (Petersson, 2015, p. 167)

<sup>93</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2015, p. 25)

This is not to say the issue was solved by the Wales Summit agreement. The years following the 2014 agreement did see an average increase in defense spending among NATO member states which is attributed to the Wales agreement. Analysis of the individual changes to member investment highlighted an apparent gulf between the countries of Eastern Europe (fig. 1), all of which suffered at the hands of Soviet/Russian aggression for decades, and the states of Western Europe (fig. 2), which have lived under American military protection for well over half a century (Richter, 2016). In an interview published in *The Atlantic* in April 2016, President Obama again put allies on notice when he said that “free riders aggravate me,” and further noted that their actions frequently do not match rhetoric (Goldberg, 2016).<sup>95</sup>

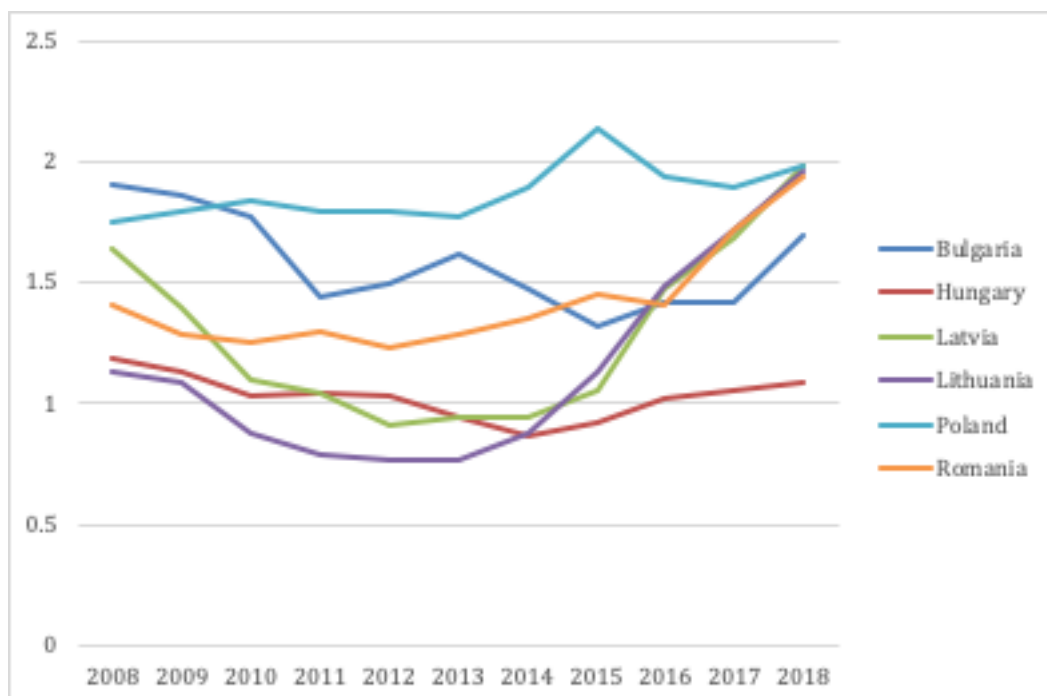


Figure 1. Eastern European % GDP Investment in defense spending 2008-2018 (SPIRI, 2019)

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<sup>94</sup> (Heads of State and Government, 2016, *Warsaw Summit Communiqué 9 July 2016*, Para 34. Retrieved from NATO.int: <https://www.nato.int>. Accessed 24 April 2020)

<sup>95</sup> (Richter, 2016, p. 299)



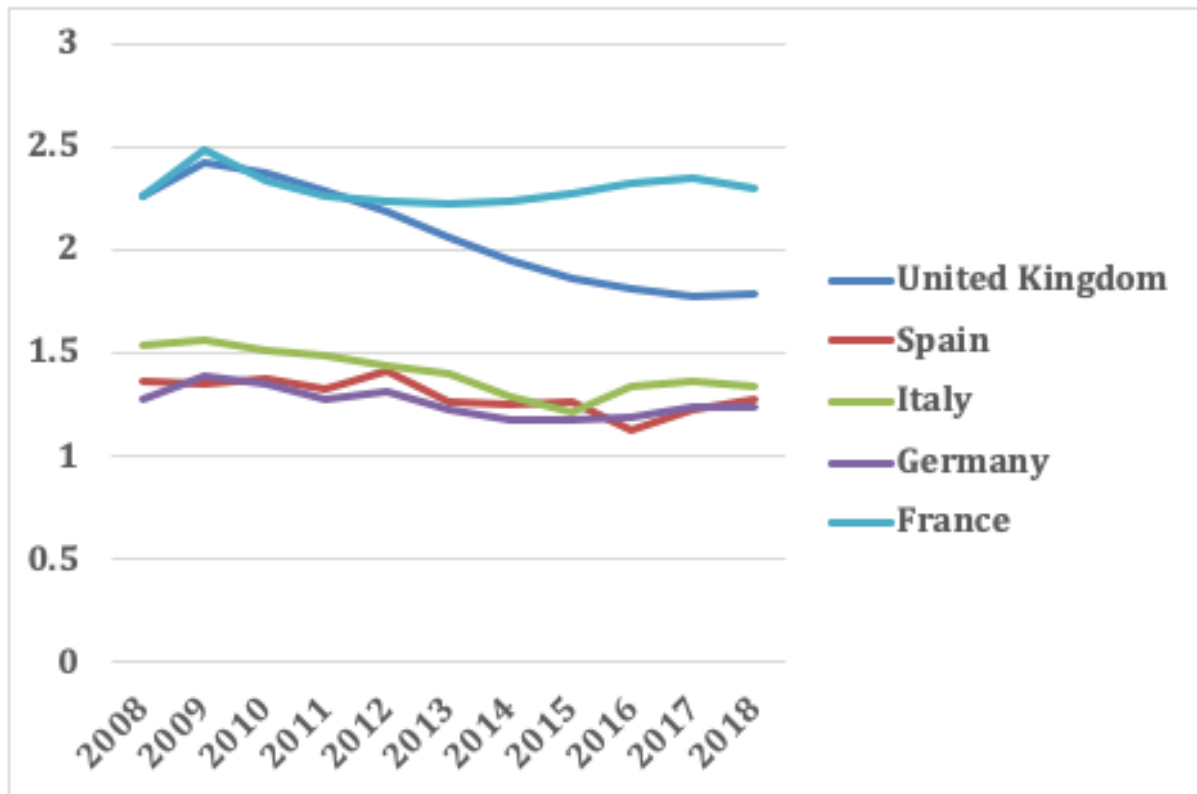


Figure 2. Western European % GDP Investment in defense spending 2008-2018 (SPIRI, 2019)

I have characterized the Obama era influence on defense spending as having a high impact. The Obama administration’s measured calls to a formal agreement of a bottom-line concerning defense spending, and his consistent messaging concerning the imbalance of capability within the Alliance were and global demands on U.S. military assets were instrumental to the 2014 Wales agreement. Obama’s calculated use of U.S. military power during the Libya campaign served to underscore his rhetoric and resolve as well as demonstrate the need for European NATO to invest in themselves.

## 6.5 Trump Era (2017-Present)

Even before being elected, President Trump was beating the drum of imbalanced burden concerning NATO. It was noted that while the message was not new, one way Mr. Trump is different [from previous administrations] is that he has made this a far more consistent and far more intense theme of nearly every discussion he has about NATO (Baker, 2017). At a rally in 2016 presidential hopeful Trump made a statement that the United States may base their future decisions to defend members of the alliance on their decision to foot their fair share of the bill (referencing the 2% defense spending).<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> (Chan, 2016)

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In his opening statement for the 2017 National Security Strategy, President Trump announced his America First foreign policy initiative. He pledged that the Trump Administration would “revitalize the American economy, rebuild our military, defend our borders, protect our sovereignty, and advance our values” (Trump, 2017)<sup>97</sup> He also noted that America’s allies were now contributing more to the common defense, strengthening even our strongest alliances.<sup>98</sup> The document does, however, continue to apply pressure for NATO members to meet the obligation of the Wales Summit agreements.

“The U.S. expects members to assume greater responsibility for and to pay their fair share to protect our mutual interests, sovereignty, and values...The United States fulfills our defense responsibilities and expects others to do the same.”

~2017 National Security Strategy<sup>99</sup>

Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, addressed the America First policy in a panel discussion with Stephen Hadley at the United States Institute for Peace on 30 Oct 2018. Secretary Mattis stated in this discussion that he believed U.S. foreign policy had become militarized during the Obama Administration. This rings true with Petersson’s assessment that the United States saw NATO as a military and political tool during the Obama era (Petersson, 2015, p. 42) versus the cultural tool leveraged by President Clinton. Mattis believed the new America First policy was about ensuring the military means resumed its correct place as an enabling element of national power with the State Department in the lead. “when we talk about America First, it’s not America alone... In history, nations with allies thrive, nations without them die.”<sup>100</sup>

In addition to an America First foreign policy, the 2017 NSS beats the drum of interoperability and integrated effort among allied nations.<sup>101</sup> This echoed the last Quadrennial Defense Review which identified interoperability 11 times as a primary goal of military alliance measures for the United States.<sup>102</sup>

In his first trip to Brussels as the Secretary of Defense Mattis did continue to apply the necessary pressure on members to meet their defense spending obligations:

“There is no way I can go back to America and ask American parents to care more about the freedoms that European children enjoy than European parents do, [Europeans] will have to pay a modicum for the best defense in the world. And

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<sup>97</sup> ("President Trump Announces a National Security Strategy to Advance America’s Interests," 2017)

<sup>98</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2017, p. Preface)

<sup>99</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2017, p. 48)

<sup>100</sup> (Mattis, 2018, p. 16)

<sup>101</sup> (*National Security Strategy*, 2017)

<sup>102</sup> (*2014 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 2014)

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what is that modicum? Two percent. I recognize that only leaves 98 percent for everything else. But I think we can afford two percent for what grew out of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to survive in this world. I think we have to recognize that, after 2014 especially, that things began changing. That it was no longer the same Europe that it was before Putin began his adventures.”

~Sec of Defense James Mattis, 2018<sup>103</sup>

His final statements on the topic of Allied defense spending during this discussion was to ensure everyone understood this was not a new message. He referenced every Secretary of Defense since Secretary Perry in 1997 as making this call to increased defense spending from European members. He identifies the difference now, as the “extremely strong statement of the President that it had gone on long enough.”<sup>104</sup> The initial few years of the Trump Administration concerned NATO members of the U.S. commitment to the Alliance. Even with the increased defense spending, there were still only a handful of members who had increased spending above 2% by 2018.

In his first visit to NATO headquarters on 26 June 2019, acting U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper attempted to re-energize NATO members concerning the U.S. commitment to NATO when he told the assembly of defense chiefs, “It is not a change in mission [the pivot to the Pacific], it is not a change in priorities, and it is not a change in the United States commitment to the NATO alliance.”<sup>105</sup>

The 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration headlined its press release by announcing their commitment to all aspects of the Defense Investment Pledge agreed to at the 2014 Wales Summit stating “two-thirds of Allies have national plans in place to spend 2% of their Gross Domestic Product on defense by 2024.” The press release went on to say, “Fair burden sharing underpins the Alliance’s cohesion, solidarity, credibility, and ability to fulfil our Article 3 and Article 5 commitments.”<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps the most significant agreement made during the 2018 summit is the new NATO Readiness Initiative. In addition to their investment pledge NATO members have agreed to focus defense spending efforts on increasing readiness and responsiveness. The initiative seeks to ensure a credible interoperable force relevant to the challenges of high-intensity warfighting which is capable of rapid deployment at 30 days’ readiness or less.<sup>107</sup> This updated initiative would not be possible under the undefined collective defense spending initiatives prior to 2014. This initiative provided guidance to

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<sup>103</sup> (Mattis, 2018)

<sup>104</sup> (Mattis, 2018)

<sup>105</sup> (Garamone, 2019)

<sup>106</sup> (Heads of State and Government, 2018, Brussels Summit Declaration [Press release], p. 2)

<sup>107</sup> (Heads of State and Government, 2018, Brussels Summit Declaration [Press release], p. 5)(NATO, 2018, p. 5)

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procure a collectively focused defense spending investment with a goal of yielding a truly capable and interoperable force. Not just a list of capabilities that would fall flat if one nation decides not to participate in a NATO action. In contrast to the 2014 Readiness Action Plan, this new initiative outlines specific assets and numbers in a clearly defined and time-bound goal. It is focused on improving readiness of specified current NATO partner assets, not acquisition of new ones. From the overall pool of forces, Allies will offer an additional 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium manoeuvre battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces.<sup>108</sup> This initiative is significant as it is the first defined example of a collectively shared investment burden spread across the whole of NATO membership which is tied directly to an Article 3 credible military deterrence.

The Brussels Summit also saw the alliance commit to non-combat out of area investments with a new NATO training mission in Iraq in coordination with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and an agreement to extend funding for the Afghan Security Forces through 2024. Interestingly, both of these out of area initiatives are led by the United States' initiative to globalize the focus of their alliances.

The pressure the United States has exerted on NATO members since the mid 2000's has yielded results. Even though only nine members have met the 2% target as of 2019, NATO members have increased defense spending for 5 years in a row. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg addressed the U.S. Congress on 3 April 2019. During his address he said, "NATO Allies must spend more on defense. This has been the clear message from President Trump. And this message is having a real impact. After years of reducing defense budgets. All Allies have stopped the cuts. And all Allies have increased their defense spending. Before they were cutting billions. Now they are adding billions."<sup>109</sup> Secretary General Stoltenberg again addressed the issue in late November 2019 when he said that defense spending across European allies and Canada increased in real terms by 4.6% in 2019. "This is unprecedented progress and it is making NATO stronger," Stoltenberg said.<sup>110</sup>

It is difficult to characterize the Trump administration influence on defense spending. He is holding the line concerning the demand for Alliance members to increase spending and 'put their money where their mouth is.' I believe most NATO members are holding the line to see what comes of the next U.S. election in 2020. The Trump administration has NATO members questioning the U.S. commitment to NATO. Trump has potential to have a high impact, but only if he is re-elected and has the opportunity to follow-through on his ultimatums.

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<sup>108</sup> (Heads of State and Government, 2018, Brussels Summit Declaration [Press release], p. 5)

<sup>109</sup> (Stoltenberg, 2019)

<sup>110</sup> (Haltiwanger, 2019)

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# 7 Defense Spending

Sixty-five years of history has revealed that most European countries (and Canada) are simply not prepared to spend what is required to field and maintain highly advanced defense forces. In effect, up until the last decade, European governments have never believed that Washington will diminish its commitment to the Western alliance, no matter how little they contribute nor how shamelessly they free-ride on the United States (Richter, 2016). We have noted a moderate change in that trend since the 2014 Wales Summit, but the current Trump Administration is not backing down the pressure to meet, or potentially increase the target of 2% by all members within the NATO alliance (Haltiwanger, 2019). To date the 2% goal has proved to be elusive to all but 3 of 29 NATO members since the 2014 agreement; however, according to NATO.org all but 2 alliance members are on track to meet the intended target by 2024.<sup>111</sup>

## 7.1 Defense spending during the Cold War (1947-1991)

The *raison d'être* of the Cold War era fostered uncompromising investment in defense and deterrent capability by NATO members. All members with the exception of Italy and Canada were spending over 2% GDP on defense during this period. The NATO average defense expenditure as measured by percent GDP investment was above 4% from 1960-1963, after which it remained above 3% until 1987 where it took its first dip below the 3% mark in the history of NATO.<sup>112</sup> From the time the Soviet Union was seen to be in decline there was a negative trend in defense investment among NATO allies until the 2014 Wales Summit.

With the great threat from the east all but decimated, the need to maintain the military structure and resultant expense was deemed unnecessary to maintain the peace desired among NATO members. It was during the period following the Gulf War that the alliance adopted a collective concept for the first time in 1991 known as the Alliance Strategic Concept. Where the doctrines of the Cold War years were almost solely dependent on U.S. controlled deterrent munitions, the new Alliance Strategic Concept was intended to spread both the burden and the responsibility for defense of Europe more

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<sup>111</sup> ("Funding NATO," 2019)

<sup>112</sup> All calculations reference the SIPRI World Bank database of 1960-2019 ("Military Expenditure (% of GDP) Database," 2019)

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evenly among the members of NATO. While the intention was good, the result was still heavily dependent on U.S. assets and involvement.

## 7.2 Defense spending after the Cold War (1990-2014)

It could be argued that the Clinton era messaging of foreign policy enabled European NATO members to continue their reliance on American assets and investment to maintain the Alliance's credible deterrence posture. Without an imminent threat at the doorstep, and with an American 'benefactor' willing to accept all costs of maintaining the Alliance, post-Cold War investment in defense spending deteriorated significantly within the Alliance. The overall NATO average first dropped below the 2% GDP line in 2000. The 1991-2018 overall NATO average was 1.91% GDP if you include the United States to bolster the numbers. By comparison, the overall NATO average during the last 30 years of the Cold War was 3.42% GDP.

The U.S. was no exception to this post-Cold War downturn in defense spending. U.S. investment in defense spending reached its lowest point in 1999 when it dipped to 2.90% GDP where it leveled out until 2001 and the start of the War on Terror. From there the U.S. investment trended positive to its most recent peak of 4.65% GDP in 2010 at the beginning of the Obama era. During this same time of U.S. investment growth, the NATO average continued on a negative trend until reaching its trough of 1.43% GDP in 2014.<sup>113</sup> The G.W. Bush era witnessed the beginning of a change to how the U.S. viewed NATO. While G.W. Bush still saw NATO as more of a cultural tool to aid the spread of democratic ideals, his administration started the push to shape NATO as a credible member of the War on Terror. The out of area operations associated with a new asymmetric warfare concept required a change to NATO force structure and Alliance commitments. The G.W. Bush era ushered in the beginning of the rhetoric demanding European NATO members begin increasing their investment in defense spending across the board. It is important to note the European economic collapse of 2008-2012 plays a significant role in NATO member defense investment during this period as well as mass immigration of displaced persons resultant of actions in the Middle East causing Eastern European economic instability.

This was a period characterized by NATO expansion with the addition of 13 eastern block and Baltic states to the alliance. The expansion of NATO brought with it the additional challenges to collective

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

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defense associated with the new geographic spread of its members. The challenge to geographically spread allies results in differences of perceived or assessed threat. More members complicate debate concerning opinions on use of political instruments or management and investment in collective resources. However, it was not the addition of new members that brought down the average NATO investment. Of the original members, only the U.S. and France maintained an average above 2.0% during this period of time from the end of the Cold War to present day, with the United Kingdom and Portugal remaining close to the 2.0% threshold.

There were four major events during this period which lay the foundation for a change to NATO formally adopting a metric focused on defense spending investment. The first was the U.S. foreign policy shift to global interdependence and the resultant change to U.S. views of alliance contributions. Second was the Sept 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States and the subsequent change to force structure required to support the War on Terror. Third was the level of U.S. involvement in the 2011 Libya campaign, and fourth was the 2014 Wales Summit commitment to 2%.

### **7.3 Defense spending after Wales (2014 – 2019)**

The progress made on allied burden sharing among Europe and Canada was noted by Secretary General Stoltenberg during a meeting of defense chiefs at NATO headquarters in June 2019 during his opening remarks for the meeting. “There is a real increase of 3.9% in defense spending across Europe and Canada. This comes on top of the increase we have seen over the last years, meaning now that we have five consecutive years of increase in defense spending and the European allies and Canada will have added much more than \$100 billion since 2016.”<sup>114</sup>

In 2014, three Allies (The United Kingdom, Greece, and the United States) spent 2% GDP or more on defense.<sup>115</sup> The number had increased to nine by 2019. According to the NATO.org website, all but two Allies have submitted plans to NATO showing they have created national budget plans to meet the 2% defense spending objective by 2024.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> (Garamone, 2019)

<sup>115</sup> (SPIRI, 2019)

<sup>116</sup> ("Funding NATO," 2019)

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## 8 Member contributions to defense spending

Between the end of the cold war and the 2014 summit in Wales the trend in defense spending as percent GDP was in steady decline (fig. 3) crossing the 2% threshold in 2000. While not all NATO members have responded favorably to the 2% goal agreed upon that year, the non-US NATO average trend has since seen a steady increase towards the intended target.

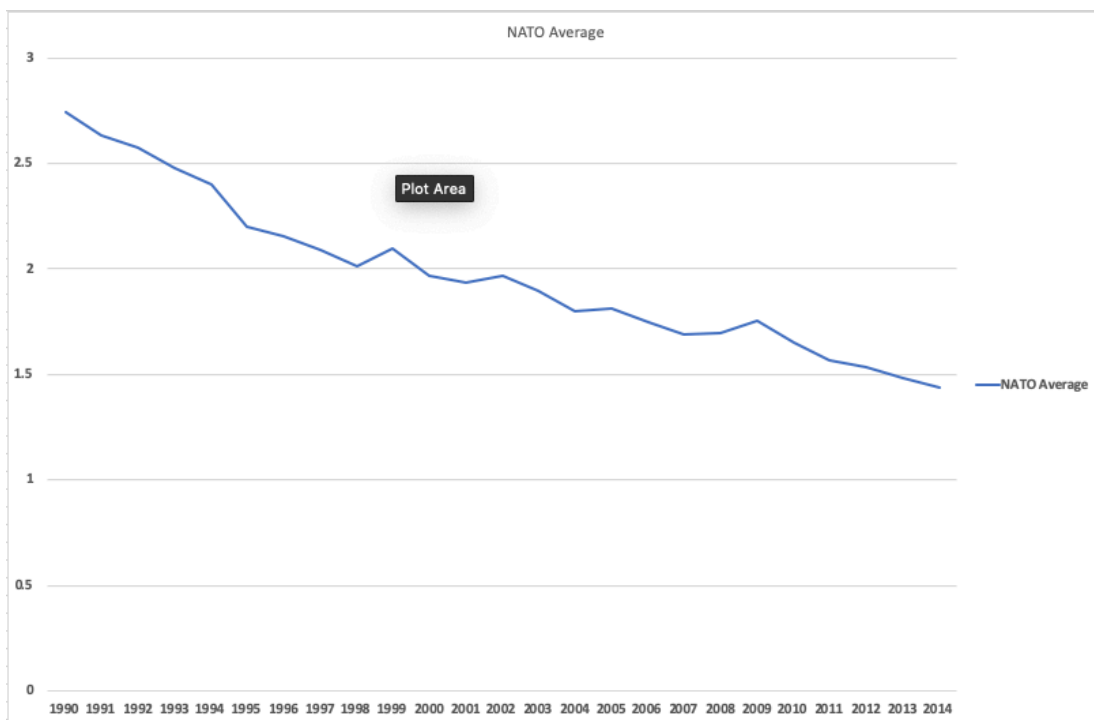


Figure 3. Non-US NATO Average % GDP investment in defense spending 1990-2014 (SPIRI, 2019)

Since 2014 the average annual increase of NATO defense spending as measured by percent GDP investment has been 0.04% per year (fig. 4); rising from 1.435% in 2014 to reach a 2018 mark of 1.598%. This puts the NATO average on track to meet the target goal by 2028.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> All calculations reference the SIPRI World Bank database("Military Expenditure (% of GDP) Database," 2019)



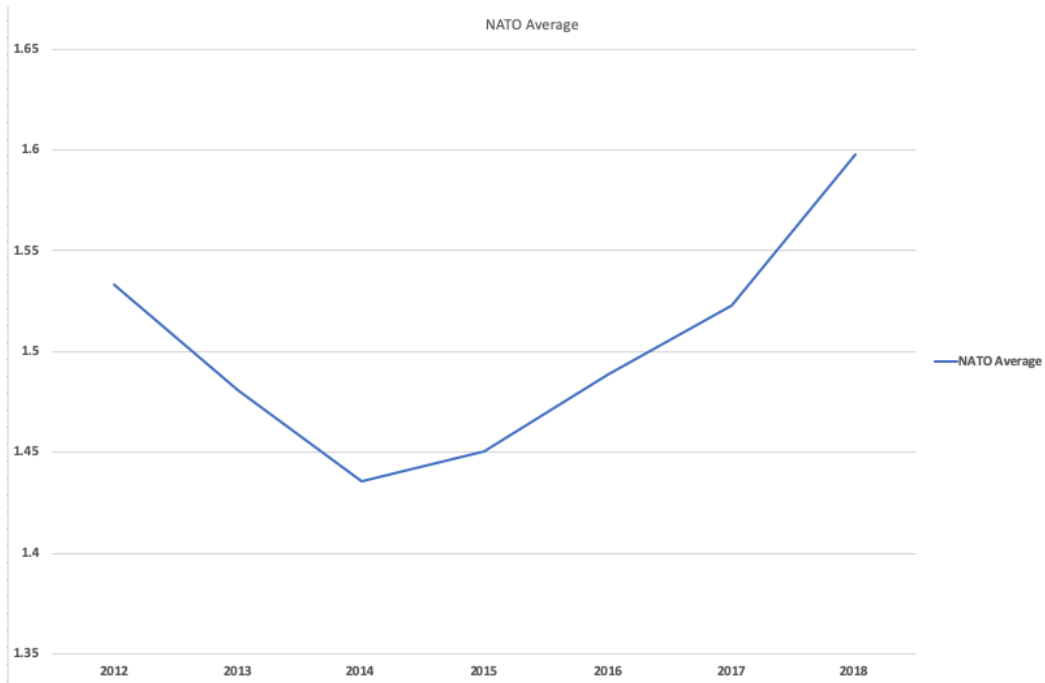


Figure 4. Non-US NATO Average % GDP investment in defense spending 2012 -2018 (SPIRI, 2019)

There have been a number of contributing factors to defense spending in European nations since the end of the cold war in 1991. One of the more notable factors being Europe’s sovereign debt crisis, which started in 2008 with the collapse of Iceland’s banking system and was followed later that year by the global impact of the U.S. sub-prime mortgage crisis.<sup>118</sup> The impacts triggered a cascading effect resulting in a European recession lasting until 2012. The impact was significant and felt deeply throughout Europe. Many NATO nations chose to sacrifice defense spending in order to balance their books resulting in an unwillingness to live up to [NATO’s] ambition to play a global role in foreign and defense matters (Erlanger, 2011). In a press conference held prior to the 2014 NATO summit in Wales Lord Dannatt, a former head of the British Army stated: “The sad fact is that with the exception of a small number of European NATO member states –which include the UK and France principally – the vast majority of the armed forces of other European states lack real usable capability and their governments often lack the political will to fund their armed forces properly.”<sup>119</sup>

When comparing the United States against other NATO members since the end of the Cold War it is clear there has been a disproportionate investment, and without the U.S. contribution NATO falls

<sup>118</sup> (Pettinger, 2016)

<sup>119</sup> ("British Military Chiefs Accuse Underspending NATO Members of Getting a ‘Free Ride’ Ahead of Summit," 2014)

woefully short of the 2% average ambition agreed upon in 2014 (fig 5). It is telling that the average non-U.S. NATO member investment has trended negatively even after the article 5 declaration in 2001. It took a combination of foreign policy change backed with demonstrated resolve to bring NATO members to the United States vision of what is a fair and equitable balance of burden in 2014.

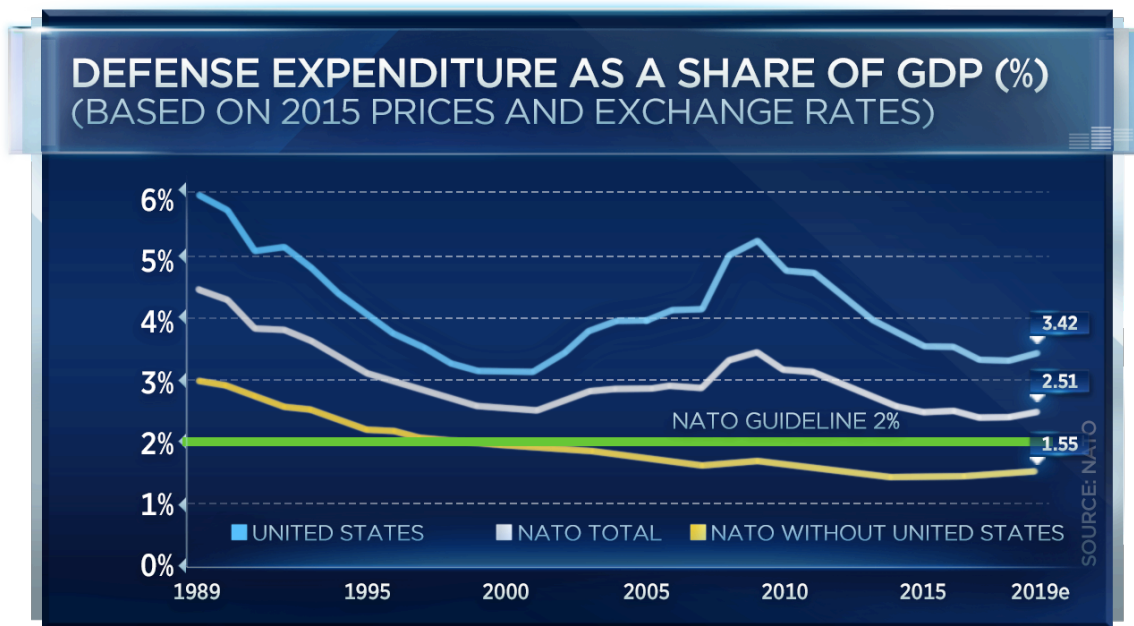


Figure 5. Defense Expenditure With and Without U.S. 1989 – 2019 (Reid, 2019)<sup>120</sup>

Even though today the combined wealth of the non-U.S. Allies, measured in GDP, exceeds that of the United States, the non-U.S. Allies together spend less than half of what the United States spends on defense.<sup>121</sup> It should be noted here that the goal of the United States is not to close the gap in defense spending between itself and other Alliance members, but to set a bottom line investment requirement which the United States believes will enable maturation of Article 3 capabilities within the Alliance to meet future requirements, and reduce Alliance dependence on U.S. assets to achieve those ends. The difference in defense spending between what are primarily locally focused members of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, and the globally focused U.S. Superpower will never be “equal.”

<sup>120</sup> Chart taken from a CNBC report depicting NATO defense expenditure as share of % GDP. The report conducted an assessment of U.S. influence to the inflation of NATO reported numbers. When the U.S. contribution is removed from the data the NATO average investment after the Cold War has not been above the 2% guideline since before 2000.

<sup>121</sup> ("Funding NATO," 2019)

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It is important to recognize that U.S. investment in defense spending is not only targeted to support strategic objectives within North America and Europe but covers commitments outside the Euro-Atlantic area. Today, the volume of the U.S. defense expenditure represents more than two thirds of the defense spending of the Alliance as a whole. Today France, Germany, and the United Kingdom together represent more than 50 per cent of the non-U.S. Allied defense spending, which creates another kind of over-reliance within Europe on a few capable European Allies.

## 9 Conclusion

This investigation suggests changes to United States foreign policy, administration rhetoric, and calculated commitment of military forces as a demonstration of administration resolve have had a moderate impact on NATO member defense spending. The United States has leveraged their position as the primary benefactor of credible deterrence within the Alliance to advance U.S. led initiatives designed to meet the strategic security goals of the United States. Since the end of the Cold War the progression of defense spending by European NATO closely follows the foreign policy initiatives of the United States concerning the European continent as outlined in U.S. National Security Strategy documents. This is in keeping with expectations associated with a response from a rational actor (NATO) when dealing with a partner (United States) who holds significant bargaining power as the chief arbiter of security and deterrence for the region (Ringsmose).

The dramatic turnaround in average NATO defense spending since the 2014 Wales Summit (fig. 4) demonstrates the significance of that particular event. Previous verbal agreements to increase defense spending had not yielded a change in European NATO defense investment. The administration rhetoric and actions of the 2010-2014 period proved critical to formally adopting the agreement to meet a 2% GDP defense spending goal.

I believe further assessment will be required in the near future concerning management of defense investment as it relates to NATO requirements. As stated earlier, I believe the United States will attempt to influence how investment funds are used through demands on other agreements to shape the output variables resultant of those investments to meet U.S. desires. In addition, the narrow focus of this investigation does not allow for assessment of other factors which may impact Alliance member decisions such as geographic location, domestic policies, or impacts of changes in the global economy. My investigation has also identified a divide between Eastern (fig. 1) and Western (fig. 2) European defense spending following the 2014 Wales agreement. Even though the average trend of defense

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spending among NATO members has reversed course to finally trend positive, further investigation is warranted to determine the disparity between these geographic regions.

The four key events driving a change to U.S. foreign policy and their impact on US-NATO relations follows a progression of action-reaction by rational actors. The decline in defense investment after the Cold War was consistent with the low impact of the US foreign policy during the Clinton era which supported a NATO credibility based almost solely on United States leadership in all facets. The change to a foreign policy centered around regionally focused alliances with globally focused influence took two administrations to achieve. The Obama era demonstrated a period of high impact. The political rhetoric associated with the demand for a more engaged NATO member commitment to defense spending required the United States to demonstrate its resolve during the Libya campaign before NATO members took true notice. This action set the stage for the 2014 Wales Summit. Add the specter of a potentially resurgent Russia, and new members with legitimate concern along their eastern flank who are eager to please the United States whom they still see as their primary pillar of credible protection.

All of these actions have positively influenced NATO to formally adopt the 2% guideline championed by the United States. According to NATO reporting, all but 2 members have submitted plans and are on target to meet the agreement by 2024.<sup>122</sup> It is hard to deny that U.S. foreign policy has not significantly influenced NATO members to formally agree to increase defense spending in order to assuage the concerns of and the United States; currently NATO's most credible ally in terms of defense and deterrence.

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<sup>122</sup> ("Funding NATO," 2019)

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\*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the position of the the United States Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, or the Department of Defense.

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