

# The Trump Administration and NATO: The End of the Long Goodbye and the Start of Something New<sup>1</sup>

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In the aftermath of the Cold War the United States put itself on a long glide path toward disengagement from Europe. This disengagement ultimately would have helped to redefine the position of the United States away from its post-WW II superpower status and toward becoming an important participant in a more generalized global structure.

As this article will show, President Trump has reversed the direction of U.S. strategy, acting to reestablish a strong U.S. forward position in Europe. The Trump administration has bolstered the U.S. commitment to NATO, in particular by redeploying ground forces. At the same time, the administration has increased pressure for more robust allied defense spending—with the goal of augmenting, not replacing, U.S. capabilities. This course, if maintained, would result in a strengthened alliance with reasserted U.S. leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> For an in depth discussion of the long shift by the United States away from the post-war containment structure, see Richard Thornton, “The Long Goodbye: American Strategy Since JFK,” *Journal of Strategy and Politics*, Volume 1, Issue 4, Spring 2017.

### *1990-2016: Building Down Toward a New World Order*

The U.S. Army Europe had 213,000 soldiers in 1990. The demise of the Soviet Union meant that NATO's purpose would need to be redefined and the United States assumed the requirement to be able to conduct large scale high intensity ground combat operations would be reduced



President George H.W. Bush, addressing the nation on Dec. 26, 1991 following Mikhail Gorbachev's resignation: "That confrontation [against Communism] is now over."

Army troop strength declined to 122,000 by 1992 as one of the two heavy corps—VII Corps—deployed to Operation Desert Storm and did not return.<sup>2</sup>

The post 9-11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq created an image of an activist and strong United States, but those wars were prosecuted with existing military forces, not with increased strength. The war in Iraq continued to drain more heavy forces from Europe, though two heavy brigades remained there.<sup>3</sup>

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had been a force multiplier for the United States in Europe for decades. NATO at

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<sup>2</sup> "U.S. Army Europe History," U.S. Army Europe, [www.eur.army.mil/Mission-History](http://www.eur.army.mil/Mission-History)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, and "United States Army Europe," Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Army\\_Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_Europe)

its core is organized to provide unity of command for an international military force, and the senior military commander is always an American. After internal debate the United States and allies concluded that this was a useful capability to retain despite the demise of the Soviet Union.

An article of faith for NATO is that it is a defensive alliance. During the Cold War, many allies resisted any suggestion that NATO would ever operate outside the boundaries of the alliance. Indeed, when the U.S. Army adopted the AirLand Battle doctrine in the early 1980s,<sup>4</sup> many allies resisted the complete implementation in NATO because the requirement to counterattack the first echelon of the Soviet forces would result in NATO forces crossing international borders.<sup>5</sup>

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States saw no need to maintain the specific high intensity ground combat capability in Europe, but wished to retain the ability to put together an effective international force under NATO (meaning U.S.) command. Given the reduced probability of invasion against the alliance, the United States needed the flexibility for the command function to be employed in areas outside the boundaries of NATO.

In 1995 the United States overcame allied objections to projecting power and NATO conducted its first operation outside the borders of the alliance in Bosnia. This included developing procedures to allow non-members of the alliance to contribute units to the NATO-led force. Since the senior commander of allied military forces remained American, and committing NATO assets to any operation

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<sup>4</sup> The AirLand Battle doctrine was drafted in 1981 and officially published in the U.S. Army field manual FM 100-5 1982. John L. Romjue, *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine 1973-1982* (Fort Monroe, VA: United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, June 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey W. Long, MAJ, USA, "The Evolution of U.S. Army Doctrine: From Active Defense to AirLand Battle and Beyond," Master's Thesis (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1991), 143, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a241774.pdf>

required consensus among allies, these new capabilities could only be used when it suited U.S. purposes.<sup>6</sup>

The capability proved extremely useful when, from 2006 through 2014, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan commanded combat operations there. Many non-member nations such as Australia contributed to the NATO-led force. The commander was always an American who was dual-hatted and also commanded a separate U.S. force. The usefulness of this capability to the United States precluded a more precipitous U.S. withdrawal, though it did not require maintenance of heavy U.S. ground forces in Europe.

With the decline of U.S. military strength in Europe, the United States pressed other NATO members to increase their military contributions in order to maintain the viability of the alliance without the presence of major U.S. ground forces in Europe. Burden sharing had not been a major internal NATO issue until the United States established this goal. Now it became necessary for European allies to replace at least some of the missing U.S. capabilities. The public manifestation of this was U.S. pressure on allies to spend at least 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense. The Bush and Obama administrations both maintained this position as the long U.S. withdrawal continued.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The author participated in the planning and preparations for the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia as the Military to the Deputy Chairman of NATO's Military Committee. He witnessed the debates over committing NATO forces outside of NATO boundaries.

<sup>7</sup> "Ambassador Victoria Nuland, U.S. Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Remarks at the Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels, Belgium, October 30, 2006," U.S. Department of State Archive, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/75477.htm>; "Remarks by Secretary Gates at the Security and Defense Agenda, Brussels, Belgium, June 10, 2011," U.S. Department of Defense Archive, <http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4839>;

Doug Mataconis, "Citing Ukraine, Hagel calls on NATO allies to contribute more to defense," *Outside the Beltway*, May 5, 2014,

The Bush administration developed plans in 2008 to withdraw the remaining two heavy brigades in the 2012-2013 time frame, though a Stryker cavalry regiment and an Airborne brigade would remain.<sup>8</sup> The Russia/Georgia conflict in 2008 put these plans temporarily on hold as Russia's willingness to annex territory outside its borders generated concern in the United States. The U.S. withdrawal was predicated on an assumption that Europe would be a stable region. A Russia that was resurgent militarily and demonstrating extra-territorial ambitions cast doubt on that assumption.

The concern over Georgia proved transitory as the Obama administration demonstrated the continuity in American designs by moving ahead with the planned withdrawals, and the last U.S. armor left Europe in October 2013.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the continuing U.S. withdrawal from Europe, the U.S. defense budget declined every year of the Obama administration from well over 5% of GDP in 2008 to about 3.6% in 2016.<sup>10</sup>

In February 2014, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel presented his 2015 budget, which proposed to disembowel the Army and crush the Air Force's ability to support ground combat because "changes in the strategic environment . . . make certain capabilities more critical than others in a time of relative austerity."<sup>11</sup> The budget would have reduced the Army to its lowest troop levels since before World War II. Among other cuts, the budget killed the Ground

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<https://www.outsidethebeltway.com/citing-ukraine-hagel-calls-on-nato-allies-to-contribute-more-to-defense/>

<sup>8</sup> Gary Sheftick, "Army planning drawdown in Europe," U.S. Army, March 26, 2012, [https://www.army.mil/article/76339/army\\_planning\\_drawdown\\_in\\_europe](https://www.army.mil/article/76339/army_planning_drawdown_in_europe)

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Dickson, "Hagel's budget to reshape forces meets with strong opposition," *Stars and Stripes*, February 25, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> "Defense Expenditures of NATO Countries (2009-2016)," NATO, 13 March, 2017, [nato.int](http://nato.int). See Graph 3: Defense expenditure as a share of GDP (%).

<sup>11</sup> John Harper, "Proposed Pentagon budget favors high-tech over personnel," *Stars and Stripes*, February 24, 2014.

Combat Vehicle program and proposed to eliminate the Air Force's tank-killing A10 attack jet.

Meanwhile, Russia was moving to increase its ground capabilities. Between 2008 and 2015, when Russia unveiled its new T-14 battle tank, the country had significantly boosted its defense spending.<sup>12</sup> Particularly in the latter five years of that period, American and Russian military expenditures were going in opposite directions. Moreover, through the reporting requirements of the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, the Russians were well aware of U.S. armored weakness in Europe and they understood how NATO worked.<sup>13</sup> U.S. armor departed in late 2013, and in March 2014, the conflict in Ukraine began.



Facing diminished NATO capability, pro-Russia rebels advanced in E. Ukraine. [Original image](#): "Russia-backed rebel armored fighting vehicles convoy near Donetsk, Eastern Ukraine, May 30, 2015," Mstyslav Chernov, Creative Commons [license](#).

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<sup>12</sup> In constant (2016) dollar terms, from the end of 2007 through 2015, Russian military expenditures increased by 76%, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database," [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org), accessed December 31, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Russia suspended its implementation of the CFE treaty in 2007, and four years later, the U.S. announced that it would no longer meet its information sharing requirements under the agreement. Russia also acquired knowledge from participating in NATO's Partnership for Peace and the NATO- Russia Council.

The 2014 Russian incursion into Eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea again raised the specter of a destabilized Europe and forced the Obama administration to respond. In what was initially supposed to be a one-year, one billion-dollar action (these self-imposed limitations continued to signal lack of U.S. commitment), Obama's 2015 budget included nearly \$1 billion for the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). The investment was for, among other things, additional U.S. military presence, though rotational and not permanent. The U.S. Army began periodic rotations of armored and airborne brigades. Given the continued combat in Eastern Ukraine and increased perception of the Russian threat by Baltic allies and Poland, the Obama administration had to continue ERI. The administration's budget request for FY 2017 included \$3.4 billion for ERI and provided for a rotational armored brigade to be in Europe continuously.<sup>14</sup>

The aggression in Ukraine led to a variety of NATO statements, some shifting of air and naval forces, and consensus at NATO's 2014 Wales Summit that all allies would accept 2% of GDP as a target for defense budgets, to be achieved by 2024.<sup>15</sup> However, the absence of U.S. heavy forces precluded any meaningful NATO ground response to the situation in Ukraine, since allies could not be expected to act in ways that Russia would deem provocative without U.S. participation. The clear signals of declining commitment sent by U.S. withdrawal and declining defense spending had reduced U.S. influence. There was some increased allied defense spending,

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<sup>14</sup> Mark F. Cancian and Lisa Sawyer Samp, "The European Reassurance Initiative," Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 9, 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-reassurance-initiative-0>

<sup>15</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," NATO, issued 5 September 2014, last updated 30 August, 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)

especially by eastern European countries, but not much progress toward achieving the 2% of GDP spending target by allies.

NATO works when the United States leads. If NATO is to retain some capability for high-intensity ground conflict, some U.S. conventional armored capability is required. One theoretical option in response to Russian action in Ukraine could have been a large NATO “training” exercise in Poland, involving a significant amount of NATO armor. Some in the United States and allied countries would have been reluctant to undertake such an action because it might be provocative to Russia. Of course it would have been—that is the point. Whether it would have been the best option in 2014, however, is moot. In 2014 such an armored deployment was impossible, because all U.S. armor had been withdrawn by October 2013. Just having the option would have changed the strategic situation. But it was not available, and Vladimir Putin knew it. The lack of U.S. heavy capabilities resulted in the absence of U.S. leverage in the alliance and altered the strategic situation to the disadvantage of NATO.

### *Reversal and Redeployment*

Given most of the media coverage about President Trump's alleged disdain for NATO, there was concern among allies about an even more rapid disengagement and fear for the life of even the temporary deployments of ERI. However, on March 16, 2017, the new administration proposed a defense budget for FY 2018 that raised funding



President Trump signs the FY 2018 Defense Authorization Act on December 12, 2017, with increased spending for engagement in Europe.  
– *White House photo by Stephanie Chasez.*

for ERI from \$3.4 billion to nearly \$4.8 billion.<sup>16</sup> The request maintained a commitment to a rotational deployment throughout Europe to include “continuous heel-to-toe presence of a U.S. Armored Brigade Combat Team” (ABCT). It also deferred previously scheduled force reductions. The request increased ERI funds for the Army from \$2.8 billion in the 2017 budget to \$3.2 billion in 2018. This included \$1.7 billion for building a division-sized set of prepositioned equipment that included two modernized ABCTs.<sup>17</sup>

Prepositioned equipment is a cold war technique to facilitate rapid reinforcement. These brigade sets of equipment are configured with precisely the same equipment as the brigades stationed in the United States. The equipment is maintained and ready to go. The United States flies the soldiers to Europe and they fall in on the same equipment they have trained with at home. Once the equipment is in place it will be necessary to exercise this capability to ensure proficiency, and the exercises themselves demonstrate a powerful capability for rapid reinforcement that underscores U.S. commitment.

On May 25, 2017, President Trump participated in his first NATO Summit meeting. He bluntly pressed allies to move toward the target of spending 2% of GDP on defense. The primary U.S. press theme was that President Trump “failed” to endorse explicitly Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.<sup>18</sup> However, during a press conference

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *The Trump Administration's March 2017 Defense Budget Proposals: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Pat Towell and Lynn M. Williams, RL34234 (2017); and Cheryl Pellerin, “2018 Budget Request for European Reassurance Initiative Grows to \$4.7 Billion,” *The Daily Defense News*, Department of Defense, June 1, 2017, <https://dailydefensenews.wordpress.com/2017/06/01/2018-budget-request-for-european-reassurance-initiative-grows-to-4-7-billion/>

<sup>17</sup> Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), “European Reassurance Initiative, Fiscal Year (FY) 2018,” May 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Robbie Gramer, “Trump Hands Putin a Win at First NATO meeting,” *Foreign Policy*, May 25, 2017; “Highlights: In Brussels Trump Scolds Allies on Cost-Sharing, and Stays Vague on Article 5,” *New York Times*, May 25, 2017; Karen Attiah, “Trump’s behavior at NATO is a national embarrassment,” *The Washington Post*, May 25, 2017;

following the summit, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was more sanguine when pressed several times to comment on Trump's "failure" to endorse explicitly Article 5. The Secretary General responded that Trump and his administration had been clear on the commitment of the United States to NATO and its collective defense. He stressed that the commitment "is not only in words but also in deeds . . . the Trump administration presented a budget proposal with 40% increase in funding for U.S. military presence in Europe."<sup>19</sup> The Secretary General, pressed again on the issue, repeated the "not only in words, but in deeds" comment and continued "the U.S. is now increasing its military presence in Europe with a new armored brigade, with more exercises, with more infrastructure, with more prepositioned equipment and supplies."<sup>20</sup>

Picking up on the Secretary General's "deeds in addition to words" theme, U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis said in a June 2017 speech in Germany that the Trump administration had reaffirmed the importance of the alliance, noting the commitment of \$4.8 billion in the 2018 defense budget to expand the U.S. European Reassurance Initiative. He said, "Beyond any words in the newspapers, you can judge America by such actions."<sup>21</sup> In Poland on

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Justin Huggler and David Chazan, "Trump demands Europe pay more toward Nato in excoriating speech at Brussels summit," *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2017. Even though he did not mention Article 5 in his speech, President Trump did say that, if allies not meeting the 2% target had met the target in 2015, "we would have had an additional \$119 billion for our common defense." "We" and "our" could only mean NATO, including the United States and President Trump, and this should have been reassuring to allies.

<sup>19</sup> "Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of NATO Heads of State and/or Government in Brussels on 25 May [2017]," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated: 26 May 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144098.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144098.htm)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> "June 28, 2017: Remarks by Secretary Mattis at the George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies," U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,

July 6, 2017, the president said, “I would point out the United States demonstrated, not merely with words, but with its actions, that we stand behind Article 5, the mutual defense commitment.”<sup>22</sup>

President Trump signed the FY 2018 Defense Authorization Act into law on December 12, 2017. The reassurance initiative was re-titled the “European Deterrence Initiative” (EDI) and the additional funding enabled the continuous nine-month rotational deployment of an ABCT in Europe of about 3,300 personnel, along with a Combat Aviation Brigade of about 1,700 to provide rotational helicopter support to training and other missions.<sup>23</sup>

While this was going on, the administration encouraged discussion of the advantages of permanent stationing over continuous rotational forces. Part of the justification for considering permanent stationing is a growing perception that permanent stationing is less expensive than a rotational presence over the long term. Of course, the fact that the “long term” matters to the United States also sends a powerful message of commitment. Permanent stationing—with accompanying families, Department of Defense (DoD) schools, and support infrastructure—sends a far stronger signal than rotational forces.<sup>24</sup>

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<https://nato.usmission.gov/june-28-2017-remarks-secretary-mattis-george-c-marshall-european-center-security-studies/>

<sup>22</sup> “Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland,” The White House, July 6, 2017, [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov)

<sup>23</sup> Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *The European Deterrence Initiative: A Budgetary Overview*, by Pat Towell and Aras D. Kazlauskas, IF10946 (2018).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, and John R. Deni, *Rotational Deployment vs. Forward Stationing: How Can the Army Achieve Assurance and Deterrence Efficiently and Effectively?* (U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, August 25, 2017).

Legislation in 2017 called for an increase in U.S. Army troop levels with a significant increase to come to Europe.<sup>25</sup> In September 2018 the United States revealed that, in order “to respond to any crisis,” it would send more permanently stationed troops to Germany. By late 2020 there would be a Field Artillery brigade headquarters and two Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) battalions permanently deployed to Grafenwoehr, with a short-range Air Defense battalion going to Ansbach, also permanently. Various support units would go to Hohenfels and Baumholder.<sup>26</sup> The funding for these deployments does not detract from FY2018 or 2019 EDI funding.<sup>27</sup>



U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison: Poland’s “strong proposal” for permanent U.S. troop deployment is under consideration.  
– *U.S. Mission to NATO*

In May 2018 the Polish government offered to pay up to \$2 billion for infrastructure to support a permanent U.S. military presence there, along with the use of state infrastructure by U.S. Forces. Section 1280 of the conference report of the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act includes a reporting requirement on the feasibility and advisability of permanently stationing U.S. forces in

Poland.<sup>28</sup> On October 2, 2018, U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison responded in a press conference to a question on the Polish

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<sup>25</sup> “U.S. military to send 1,500 more soldiers to Germany by late 2020,” *Reuters*, September 7, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Egnash and John Vandiver, “Army to create new air defense, rocket units in Germany,” *Stars and Stripes*, September 7, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Jen Judson, “Funding to deter Russia reaches \$6.5B in FY19 defense budget request,” *Defense News*, February 12, 2018,

<sup>28</sup> Towell and Kazlauskas, *The European Deterrence Initiative*.

offer: “On Poland, that is definitely under consideration, most certainly the Polish people made a strong proposal.”<sup>29</sup>

Entertaining the notion of permanently stationing U.S. forces in Poland is all the more striking given a controversy over a NATO commitment in the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997. In that document NATO made the politically binding commitment that “in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence (*sic*) and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.”<sup>30</sup> Since this agreement was reached on the eve of NATO’s enlargement to add the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to the alliance, the pledge highlighted above precluded permanent stationing of substantial combat forces on the territory of these and any subsequent new members.

During the intervening years Russia exerted great pressure on the alliance to define “substantial.” NATO never defined the term, even to itself, though the working assumption during the internal NATO negotiations over the wording was that “substantial” meant “more than a brigade.”<sup>31</sup> At the 2016 NATO summit the alliance agreed to a program called Enhanced Forward Presence that established four forward deployed rotational multinational battalion battle groups on the territory of NATO members most at risk of a possible Russian attack or invasion: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and

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<sup>29</sup> “October 2, 2018: Press briefing by Ambassador Kay Bailey Hutchison,” U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, <https://nato.usmission.gov/october-2-2018-press-briefing-by-ambassador-kay-bailey-hutchison/>

<sup>30</sup> “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation in Paris, 27 May 1997,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated: 12 October 2009. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm)

<sup>31</sup> The author served as the head of arms control coordination on NATO’s International Staff and worked extensively on this issue.

Poland.<sup>32</sup> Moscow claimed that these deployments violated the above assurance in the NATO-Russia Founding Act. NATO's response is instructive. A NATO fact sheet refutes Moscow's charge by stating, "the four multinational battle groups deploying to the eastern part of our Alliance are rotational, defensive and well below any reasonable definition of 'substantial combat forces'."<sup>33</sup>

Though NATO rejected the Russian charge, the refutation reflects an internal debate. According to the agreed alliance position, the battalion-sized units cannot be considered "substantial," and rotational is not permanent. These formulations also suggest the assurances of 1997 remain in effect. Permanent stationing of more "substantial" forces in Poland would be a different matter. Indeed the Russians, very aware of the Polish offer and U.S. overt interest in it, have charged that a U.S. Base in Poland would dismantle the NATO-Russia Founding Act.<sup>34</sup> Some allies, led by Germany, hold the position that NATO needs to maintain its commitment to the assurances to retain the moral high ground.<sup>35</sup>

Of course the 1997 assurances "in the current and foreseeable security environment" were made over 20 years ago—before Putin, before Georgia, before Eastern Ukraine, before Crimea, before Syria and before the Russian military build up and acquisition of

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<sup>32</sup> "Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated: 21 January 2019, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm)

<sup>33</sup> "NATO-Russia relations: the facts," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated: 07 September 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_111767.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm)

<sup>34</sup> "Russian Deputy FM: U.S. Base in Poland Will Dismantle NATO-Russia Founding Act," *Sputnik*, September 26, 2018. This is an interview with Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko, who was formerly Russian Ambassador to NATO.

<sup>35</sup> John R. Deni, "The NATO-Russia Founding Act: A Dead Letter," *Carnegie Europe: Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe*, June 29, 2017, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/71385>

the new T-14 tank.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, as previously noted, the alliance never defined “substantial.” Additionally, Russia committed in the Founding Act to exercise similar restraint in its conventional force deployments in Europe. The United States’ strong suggestions that it is considering the Polish offer (whether it decides to permanently station forces in Poland or not) clearly reflects a Trump administration conclusion that the 1997 assurances do not restrict NATO efforts to establish and improve credible deterrence.

The administration’s FY 2019 budget proposal increased funding for EDI from \$4.8 billion to \$6.3 billion, and requested an additional \$250 million for aid to Ukraine that includes lethal weaponry. In December 2017, Trump departed from the Obama-era restriction on providing lethal support to Ukraine by agreeing to the sale of Javelin antitank missiles. The FY 2019 budget continues and expands that decision over the objections of Moscow. The EDI increases by the Trump administration have totaled \$2.477 billion for Army prepositioned equipment for the two ABCTs. An increase of \$1.875 billion has been provided for the deployment of rotational forces and to defer earlier planned force reductions, in order to augment U.S. military presence in Europe.

Finally, in a demonstration of NATO’s resurgence, from October 25 through November 2018 the alliance conducted a large military exercise involving 50,000 troops from all member nations (including 12,000 Americans and 8,000 Germans) and partners Sweden and Finland, using an Article 5 scenario. Though the scenario was fictitious, the choice of an Article 5 situation that had the alliance rallying to counter an attack on Norway, and included non-allies

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<sup>36</sup> Dave Majumdar, “Russia’s Armata T-14 Tank vs. America’s M-1 Abrams: Who Wins?” *The National Interest*, September 11, 2015.

Finland and Sweden, exhibited a new unity—and the Russians took the exercise as directed at them.<sup>37</sup>

*2% of GDP: An Imperfect but Politically Expedient Metric*

With the end of the Cold War, the notion of a “peace dividend” took hold, as politicians and economists anticipated benefits that would result from reduced defense spending.<sup>38</sup> Indeed both U.S. and NATO allies' defense spending declined over many years. U.S. defense spending declined from 6% of GDP in the late 80s to 3% in 1998 with a commensurate decline in military capabilities. Army divisions decreased from 18 to 10, Navy ships from 546 to 357 and Air Force tactical fighter wings from 24 to 13.<sup>39</sup>

European defense budgets declined continuously for over 20 years so significantly that serious concerns developed about the military readiness of the alliance.<sup>40</sup> In 1990 the 14 European NATO members spent about \$314 billion on defense. In 2015 the 26

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<sup>37</sup> Towell and Kazlauskas, *The European Deterrence Initiative*; Josh Lederman, “U.S. steps up lethal aid to Ukraine with plans to provide 210 anti-tank missiles,” *The Times of Israel*, March 2, 2018; “Russia to ‘draw conclusions’ from U.S. lethal aid to Ukraine—Lavrov,” UNIAN Information Agency, February 11, 2018, <https://www.unian.info/politics/2391162-russia-to-draw-conclusions-from-us-lethal-aid-to-ukraine-lavrov.html>; “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Trident Juncture 2018 Distinguished Visitor’s Day, 30 October, 2018,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_159852.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_159852.htm); “Russia threatens response to huge NATO exercise, says its new weapons will be unrivaled anywhere,” *Military Times*, October 25, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Hobart Rowan, “Making the ‘Peace Dividend’ A Reality,” *The Washington Post*, October 3, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Newsweek Staff, “The Peace Dividend,” *Newsweek.com*, January 25, 1998, <https://www.newsweek.com/peace-dividend-169570>

<sup>40</sup> Jan Techau, “The Politics of 2 Percent: NATO and the Security Vacuum in Europe,” Carnegie Europe, September 2015, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_252\\_Techau\\_NATO\\_Final.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_252_Techau_NATO_Final.pdf); Brian Wang, “Peace Dividend from end of Cold War is over as European defense spending up by 8.3% after 20 years of declines,” *Nextbigfuture.com*, February 19, 2016, <https://www.nextbigfuture.com/2016/02/peace-dividend-from-end-of-cold-war-is.html>

European members spent about \$227 billion on defense.<sup>41</sup> While U.S. defense spending declined consistently beginning in 2008, European defense spending declined more precipitously from 2008 to 2015.<sup>42</sup> German spending was down by 4.3%, U.K. spending by 9.1% and Italian by 21% over that period.<sup>43</sup>

The Gulf wars removed U.S. combat forces from Europe more rapidly than might otherwise have been expected. Although “burden sharing” had never been more than an ancillary issue inside NATO, in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, given U.S. declining strength in Europe and attention focused elsewhere, the United States began to press allies to contribute more capabilities to the alliance. Every U.S. Secretary of Defense since Donald Rumsfeld has pressed allies to spend at least 2% of GDP on defense. There are many questions over the validity of this measure. Two percent of a little is a little, while the opposite is true and the absolute meaning varies with how well a nation's economy is faring.<sup>44</sup>

Though the 2% of GDP discussion was in play years earlier, the Ukraine crisis resulted in the alliance accepting the target officially and agreeing to achieve the target no later than 2024. As noted previously, this commitment appeared in the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration. NATO operates by consensus. When there is something that is a “NATO position” or a NATO statement, such as a summit declaration, all alliance members have agreed to every word. Whether

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<sup>41</sup> Techau, “The Politics of 2 Percent”

<sup>42</sup> Wang, “Peace Dividend from end of Cold War is over...”

<sup>43</sup> Techau, “The Politics of 2 Percent”

<sup>44</sup> For example, see Peter Beinart, “NATO Doesn’t Need More Defense Spending,” *The Atlantic*, July 11, 2018; John Dowdy, “More tooth, less tail: Getting beyond NATO’s 2 percent rule” (book excerpt), McKinsey & Company, November 2017, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/more-tooth-less-tail-getting-beyond-natos-2-percent-rule>; Marc Champion, “NATO’s 2% of GDP spending goal paints partial picture,” *Bloomberg News*, July 12, 2018.

2% of GDP is the most accurate metric to judge relative contributions, the consensus demonstrated by this declaration shows that it has become a politically useful measurement.<sup>45</sup>

While 2015 saw increases in European allies' defense spending, especially Eastern allies, there was not significant progress toward the 2% target.<sup>46</sup> Only five countries—the United States, Estonia, Poland, the United Kingdom and Greece met the target.<sup>47</sup> This was the situation when Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election.



NATO members adopted 2% of GDP as a non-binding defense spending target at the 2002 Prague summit; in 2014, it became a formal commitment.

Trump has taken some extreme positions on NATO, and most of the media's coverage has focused on his excoriating allies for their spending deficiencies. Around the time of the July 2018 Brussels NATO Summit, the President repeated a standard allegation that the United States pays the lion's share of NATO's "budget," upping the U.S. portion from 70% to 90%. Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton both used the 70% number during their debates for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Shortly after the Brussels Summit, Sean Hannity of *Fox News* said that the United States pays 70% of NATO's "trillion dollar budget." There is some validity to all of these charges but they are all, at best, misleading.

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<sup>45</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 05 September 2014, last updated: 30 August 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm) (see paragraph 14).

<sup>46</sup> Wang, "Peace Dividend from end of Cold War is over..." The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia had the largest defense spending increases, while West European allies had the least.

<sup>47</sup> "Information on defense expenditures," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated: 10 July 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49198.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm).

There is no trillion-dollar budget. The NATO commonly funded budget is about \$2.5 billion and the United States pays 22% of that, or between \$500 and \$600 million.<sup>48</sup> The 70%-90% numbers come from various studies that add together all allied defense budgets. The U.S. budget is about 70% of that total, up from around 59% in 1995. If the recent increases in U.S. defense budgets to \$700 billion for FY2018 and \$714 billion for FY 2019 are taken into account, that might raise the U.S. share to closer to 90% of the total, and this may explain President Trump's reference to 90%. However, while almost all of European defense capabilities may be charged to NATO, the U.S. budget includes funding for research, development and acquisition, forces stationed in the United States, Guam, Korea, Japan and the Pacific Fleet. How much of these should be counted as NATO expenses?

Sean Hannity went on to compare the U.S. \$700 billion "contribution" to Belgium's \$5 billion. Since Belgium has 1/25 of the U.S. population, \$125 billion would be a better apples-to-apples comparison. And Belgium does not need a Pacific fleet. However, the magnitude of the difference still suggests the United States is carrying an unfair share of the load, though the level of precision in these numbers is non-existent.

Although there were some increases in allied defense spending in the wake of the 2014 Russian aggression in Ukraine, allies appear to have responded more seriously to the president's pressure and to the signs of increased U.S. commitment that the increasing EDI budgets suggest. Since Trump took office in 2017, European allies and Canada have added \$41 billion to their defense spending. All allies have not only stopped the defense budget cuts, they have started to increase defense spending.<sup>49</sup> According to NATO Secretary General

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<sup>48</sup>"Funding NATO," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated: 27 June, 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_67655.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm)

<sup>49</sup> "Peace is our mission, Keynote address by NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottmoeller at the U.S. Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium in Omaha, 1 August,

Stoltenberg, European allies and Canada are expected to spend an extra \$266 billion on defense between 2018 and 2024. Eight allies (not including the United States) reached the 2% target in 2018 and the majority of countries have plans to achieve 2% by 2024. Moreover, the increases are being spent well on new equipment and NATO operations.<sup>50</sup>

### *Strategic Change: Rebuilding the U.S. Position in Europe*

In summation, for two and a half decades following the Soviet Union's demise, the United States—regardless of whether a Republican or a Democrat was in charge—was on a path for a long, but definite withdrawal from Europe. War making requires ground, sea and air capabilities. With the 2013 final withdrawal of U.S. armor from Europe, the United States had given up serious ground capability, and this in turn gave up serious NATO ability for ground warfare. This decline coincided with increased Russian defense spending and, despite economic difficulties, Russian investment in a new tank that may be a match for the American Abrams tank. It is also clear that the Trump administration reversed this strategic direction of the United States and reengaged meaningfully in NATO. In addition to a large increase in overall defense spending, it has increased money for the U.S. military presence in Europe, especially for ground capabilities, to include rapid reinforcement capability and new permanent stationing of ground forces.

A popular image of the Trump administration is that it eschews NATO and alliances in general, and with “America First” has

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2018,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated: 6 August 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_157595.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_157595.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>50</sup> “Keynote Address by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the NATO Industry Forum in Berlin, 13 November, 2018,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_160267.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_160267.htm?selectedLocale=en)

introduced a new isolationism.<sup>51</sup> But Presidents Bush and Obama were withdrawing from Europe, and President Trump is redeploying there. The administration is supplying lethal aid to Ukraine whereas Obama refused to do so. Trump has continued the Bush/Obama call on allies to spend at least 2% of GDP on defense, but he has very much increased the pressure and this seems to be producing results. Allies are meant to add to, not replace, U.S. capabilities. The combination of increased U.S. and allied military capabilities makes NATO a far more viable alliance, with reasserted U.S. leverage stemming from its added commitment. These actions, initiated immediately upon the administration taking office and maintained consistently since then, belie the “hates alliances and favors isolationism” characterization.

Reestablishing a strong U.S. forward position in Europe and challenging the Russian effort to be the preeminent European power is consistent with maintaining the post-World War II position of the United States as a superpower. The abandonment of that position, as undertaken by prior administrations, conformed to a strategic vision of a new role for the United States that fits it into a more generalized world order.

Russian resurgence and the resultant instability in Europe interfered with the U.S. withdrawal and compelled the Obama administration to respond, though there were no signs of a fundamental U.S. re-engagement. Rotational deployments could easily be stopped. The lack of U.S. commitment left allies to consider whether they needed to seek options other than NATO to ensure their security. Even though the alliance, with U.S. rotational forces participating, managed to conduct a large ground training exercise in Poland in 2016, there were signs of NATO fraying around the edges. For example, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

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<sup>51</sup>Jack Peach, “America First: Donald Trump and U.S. Isolationism,” *Tremr.com*; Richard North Patterson, “Trump’s Dangerous Neo-Isolationism,” *Huffington Post*, May 3, 2018; John Brinkley, “What Trump Calls Nationalism Looks More Like Isolationism,” *Forbes*, May 21, 2018; Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, “U.N. Brief: Trump Manages to Unite the U.S.—Against His Isolationist Vision,” *Foreign Policy*, September 26, 2018.

warned NATO against “warmongering” and said the exercise could inflame tension with Russia.<sup>52</sup>

The Trump administration, with its large increases in overall defense spending, increases in EDI funding and the announcement of new permanent deployments in Europe, has demonstrated a far greater and more long-term commitment to NATO. There is a stark change in direction and the administration appears to be working on getting allies to turn with us. Allied increases and plans for increases in defense spending are signs that many are responding.

But some allies have not responded rapidly. The President is pressing all to get on board quickly. As part of that effort, Trump has lashed out at Germany for its cooperation with Russia on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and its dependence on Russia for energy supplies. Hungary also is a staunch supporter of the pipeline. (On the other hand the Germans seemed to have gotten over their 2016 “warmongering” worries by making a major contribution to the October-November 2018 NATO Article 5 exercise in Norway).<sup>53</sup>

The administration appears to be throwing down the gauntlet to stop the emergence of Russian preeminence in Europe by reestablishing the strong forward U.S. position in there, and once again reviving NATO as a viable collective security organization. It remains to be seen whether the departure of Secretary of Defense James Mattis will affect the clarity and consistency that has marked U.S. strategy in Europe for the first two years of the Trump administration.

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<sup>52</sup> “German minister warns Nato against ‘warmongering,’” *BBC News*, June 18, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Dariusz Kalan, “Hungary in the grip of a bear hug,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, May 5, 2016, [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu).