
Defense Report

AUSA



Maintaining Our NATO Alliance — It Takes More Than Money

Certain critics of our continued participation in the North Atlantic Alliance consistently raise the point that our allies do not contribute their fair share to the defense of Western Europe. Acknowledging that there is no accepted formula for measuring a fair contribution to the burdens of the alliance, it is clear, nevertheless, that current defense budgets are not the only criterion.

The United States spends more on defense than does Europe, but we have worldwide defense interests and, like it or not, responsibilities. Furthermore, it can be argued that the gross national product of the United States is some 25 percent higher than that of the combined European members of NATO and thus we can afford to spend more. Even so, Europe's record on defense spending has been one of steady growth. Since the early 1970s, the defense spending of our NATO allies has increased in real terms at an average rate of over two percent per year — more than 30 percent since 1971.

However, spending is but one crude measure of contribution to the alliance and the annual spending figures do not take into account the tremendous investment in support facilities which the Europeans provide to the United States free of charge. Neither does it reflect that in the Central Region alone, Europeans from roughly the same size manpower pool have committed more than twice the number of divisions to the common defense goal.

If the Soviets were to attack Western Europe tomorrow, 90 percent of the ground forces and 75 percent of the naval and air forces to meet the initial attack would come from our Western European allies. This measure alone should give pause to those who question their contribution.

But considering that NATO continues to be the most effective and successful alliance in the history of the modern world, it is important that we evaluate the return we have received from the sum of our combined investment and spend less time allotting shares. We need to put forth every effort to insure that the alliance can keep the peace in Europe for at least another 40 years. If that were to be so, it would surely rate as one of the greatest investments we ever made.