
Defense Report

AUSA



Sharing the Burdens of NATO — Do Our Allies Do Enough?

The politicians and pundits who carp about our NATO alliance partners failing to contribute their fair share to the defense of Western Europe too often couch their criticisms only in terms of dollar signs. In so doing, they frequently overlook the tremendous investments in support facilities, logistics support and, most importantly, manpower which is provided the North Atlantic Alliance by our European allies.

It is a fact that we spend more money on defense than does Europe, but that fact does not reflect the true value of the contributions of Western Europe. Consider, for example, the addition of territorial forces and host nation commitments to augment American logistics support capabilities and the contributions from either side of the Atlantic begin to become more balanced.

It should also be observed that Germany's conscript military forces would be measured to cost some \$700 million more annually if they are to be compared with U.S. volunteer forces of equal size. Such manpower revaluation is appropriate for almost all of our allies, from Norway to Turkey, and many other contributions must be re-measured in the same manner.

Gen. John W. Vessey, Jr., former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, summed up some of these in a recent address. He said, "I am not against criticism, but it must come from an understanding of how NATO works. For example, if you multiply the population of Oregon by 20, give each person a car, bring in another half million armed foreigners, put 50,000 armored vehicles on the road and put a couple thousand jets in the air, at least the Oregonians would know what the Germans have to put up with."

In the same vein, Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, the just-retired Supreme Allied Commander Europe, points out: "There are over 900 U.S. installations in Europe provided by Great Britain and West Germany. The value of the real estate alone exceeds \$20 billion.

Rising defense costs and resource constraints on the armed forces are certainly not uniquely American problems. Our European partners have been feeling the pinch too. So long as each of us continues to share the burden of the defense of Western Europe, we should be able to count on NATO to give us another 40 years of peace there.