The Implications of "NATO Forces 2020" for Alliance Burden-Sharing: U.S. Pivot to Asia, NATO Pivot to "Operational Readiness"?


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Abstract

After a brief overview of prominent issues currently concerning observers of the NATO Alliance, this early draft of a paper seeks to understand NATO member states’ calculations in the present strategic context, as may be derived from International Relations Theory. In particular, the aim is to assess, in a theoretical manner, member-state interaction in the field of burden-sharing, and what this may tell us of the Alliance’s prospects in the wake of the “US pivot to Asia” and other recent and relevant developments. The article’s thesis advanced here is that the exploitation of the big by the small, often assumed in the literature on burden-sharing, has not necessarily been the case throughout the history of NATO, and that currently an uncertain future awaits as to the transatlantic alliance and its fundamental burden-sharing arrangements. Various different trajectories are conceivable depending on the operating assumptions and interpretive frameworks used by present and future decision-makers.

Introduction

As it is shifting towards operational readiness from the intense operational engagement of the last decade, the NATO Alliance and, especially, its European component are receiving much criticism from different sources for a number of problems that are fundamentally interrelated
– criticised are the lack of truly strategic thinking behind the alliance, the intra-alliance division of labour, and ultimately the nature and degree of burden-sharing between the member states as well.

Known for his often harsh, outspoken words on strategic issues, analyst and commentator Julian Lindley-French recently opined, in the wake of the Crimean crisis, that “The West has become a self-indulgent strategic void led by the hollow men (and women) for whom short-termism and parochialism is the stuff of politics” (Lindley-French, 2014). This sort of criticism, focused on what is believed to be a strategically debilitating mix of democratic welfare state institutions, populism, public opinion generally opposing the use of force, the legacy of two unpopular foreign military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the overall unfavourable economic context appears at the present not only in response to specific geopolitical developments but in general, with regards to the way the NATO alliance seems to function.

Former US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates famously criticised NATO’s insufficient and inequitable division of labour after the 2011 Libyan intervention laid bare a lack of critical capabilities on the part of some European allies as well as the absolute unwillingness on the part of others to make any contribution to joint efforts. In his words:

“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 (...) This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today. And it is unacceptable” (Gates, 2011).

Besides the allusion to a generally non-strategic posture in world politics, and the inconvenient division of labour, the old debates over burden-sharing play a role, too. Even before the Libyan intervention began, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen noted in his keynote speech at the 2011 Munich Security Conference that:
“Over the past two years, defence spending by NATO’s European member nations has shrunk by some 45 billion dollars – that is the equivalent of Germany’s entire annual defence budget. Indeed, NATO Allies are starting the new decade further apart than ever before in terms of defence investment” (Rasmussen, 2011).

The Secretary-General also referred to how “Ten years ago, the United States accounted for just under half of NATO members’ total defence spending. Today the American share is closer to 75 percent” (Rasmussen, 2011).

On the other side of the Atlantic, this is regularly brought up as a pressing issue. “A lopsided burden threatens NATO’s integrity, cohesion and capability (...) We must see renewed financial commitments from all NATO members,” said US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel in a speech at the Wilson Center in May 2014, reiterating a familiar point with increased urgency in the context of the Crimean crisis (Hagel, 2014).

The new wave of criticism is emerging against the backdrop of the “Asia pivot” announced by the Obama administration through various declarations on different occasions – largely in line with a strategic reorientation that began under the Bush 43rd presidency, and even earlier in fact. Tellingly, in what is now remembered as the “Asia pivot article” itself, Hillary Clinton talked of the need “to pivot to new global realities” after “the Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics” (Clinton, 2011).

This rhetorical expression of already observable and rather obvious trends has nevertheless drawn critical reactions, too, after the events of the “Arab Spring” in the Middle East and North Africa, and later the crisis in Ukraine (and, in the background, Russian assertiveness) proved to be rather persistent drivers of global politics, too. Barno, Bensahel and Sharp wrote in Orbis of the need for a more carefully calibrated balance in the overall US military posture (2012) with a view to this. Clinton herself of course never really intended to call for an abandonment of the strategic alliance with European countries, noting in her 2011
article that “other regions are vitally important, too” and that the US remains “both an Atlantic and a Pacific power” (Clinton, 2011). Still, various European sources worried about the implications of related US signals, and tellingly some commentators even spoke of the need for NATO to “also pivot to Asia” (e.g. Kamp, 2013), even as others rightly questioned the use and the feasibility of this (e.g. Shea, 2013).

This paper will, in the light of the above, briefly present an overview of the burden-sharing debates traditionally shaping intra-alliance politics within NATO, to then develop a conceptually more nuanced and historically contextualised understanding of related processes that can subsequently form the basis of a hypothetical model of decision-making on alliance contributions by individual countries (with specific regard to European countries), illuminating some of the key dynamics of the interaction this generates between member states, and how this dynamic may bode for the alliance at the present.

Refinement of the existing discussion in the literature is hoped to be achieved primarily by the inclusion of the consideration of public opinion’s often inhibiting role in the case of the European democracies making up NATO, with regards to defence spending and contributions to the alliance’s foreign missions. The underlying assumptions of this model are then used to extrapolate its implications in a simple, mechanistic assessment of the future of the alliance.

The paper does not purport to be more than this. Its formalisation of a set of relationships between different variables, and the qualitative evaluation of the possible values of said variables at the present constitutes merely a prospective benchmark for future debates over processes that may well unfold differently due to unforeseen events and, perhaps, due to further, unspecified variables that were either ignored for the sake of parsimony or may have been ignored out of the author’s negligence here.
A brief overview of the theoretical discourse on burden-sharing

There is a substantial amount of theoretical work on alliances in international relations, largely dominated by the Realist school, such as, among others, Snyder (1997). Some, such as e.g. Wilkins (2006) have also connected realist and liberal understandings of intra-alliance insecurity as stemming from fear and mistrust which may as well be regarded as two sides of the same coin. At least the two frequently go hand in hand related to concerns over possible abandonment by others which is the key to understanding why the existence of allies is no ultimate reassurance, and why even a world of allied states is still the lonely world of states, and is thus home to much intra-alliance conflict.

The literature specifically on coalition and alliance burden-sharing was profoundly informed by Olsen and Zeckhauser’s classical 1966 study of burden-sharing within NATO, for its part also influenced by a Realist perspective. Olsen and Zeckhauser inquired about why allies spent a different percentage of their GDP on defence, and why collectively the Alliance was regularly falling short of what it itself deemed necessary in terms of defence expenditure, at various points during the Cold War. In their assessment, consideration of different countries’ peculiar marginal utility curves was included, and the significance of this in shaping countries’ indifference curves was pointed out (for defence spending vs. other spending, or “guns vs. butter”).

Somewhat disconnected to this, there developed in the long-term discourse generated by the paper an understanding of smaller alliance member countries’ behaviour in the framework of an “exploitation” hypothesis. Ringsmose’s work (2009) on Denmark’s long-term performance within NATO is a good example of this, as it points out how it is sometimes useful but generally rather difficult to exclude an under-performing country from the consumption of alliance public goods and how consequently it is hard to pressure it to perform on par with other contributors. Kimball’s abstract analysis (2010) of the guns vs.
butter dilemma in terms of a production possibilities frontier similarly leads to the conclusion that certain countries may exploit alliances by outsourcing or “contracting out” defence to them, thus allowing a higher level of welfare for themselves (and their societies). Even the paradoxically (if only nominally) high contributions\(^1\) of countries such as Denmark or Hungary to operations in Afghanistan can be explained in this framework, as Marton and Hynek (2011) and Marton and Wagner (2011) show: outstanding contributions such as these in the Alliance’s foreign missions may be marginal compensation for what is under-performing by the more general standard of defence budget size.

Others have, however, pointed out how a logic that follows from the interpretation of alliance defence efforts as a pure collective good or even a club good may be mistaken (Hartley and Sandler, 1999; Thielemann, 2003), and that in its stead a “joint product” interpretation may be in order. This view takes into account how much of what alliance member countries do for defence may be useful only to them, or only to a specific group of member countries, or may be useful both to them and to the alliance depending on how they use what they have (assets and capabilities). To this, Thies’ (1989) observation about the impact of large member country bureaucracies may be added, on how weightier members of alliances can generate more burden-sharing-relevant information in the first place, and how they may subsequently use this to generate much burden-sharing-related discourse to thus themselves pressurise others, and contract out some of what they themselves would have otherwise done for their own private defence.

Even if one retains the notion of a debate between public-goods and joint-production schools, not all scholars agree on the merits of the seemingly most important question: that of whether overall defence expenditure is uneven, proportionately to GDP, in favour of US allies, and to the detriment of the United States. Cimbala and Forster note how in the

\(^1\) For example in terms of soldiers deployed per population or in terms of number of soldiers deployed per million GDP dollars.
contemporary context a multi-dimensional measurement of burden-sharing has to include contributions to peace support operations (both under a NATO, an ESDP or a UN umbrella, or in any other Multi-National Forces or coalition-of-the-willing format), and in the field of international development assistance, too (Cimbala and Forster, 2005). Cooper and Zycher (1989), on their part, note two things in particular that should weigh heavily in a conceptual debate over what constitutes fair or appropriate burden-sharing: firstly that expenditures and cost-effectiveness are not one and the same and that taking into account only the former may be an incentive against the latter, and, secondly, but even more importantly, that the opportunity cost of defence spending is different from country to country. The choice between guns and butter is, thus, not only a matter of preferences: spending on guns is an investment for those countries that retain a strong arms industry of their own, whereas it is more clearly a cost in the case of those countries who import most of what they need for defence.

Cost-effectiveness is difficult to measure, just as it is difficult to arrive at a comprehensive assessment of a country’s contribution to international peace and stability. The former may be assessed, among much else, on the basis of how strong one’s ground forces are in terms of Division-Equivalent Firepower or other measures. To stick with the example of the basic measure of Division-Equivalence, however: arriving at a consensual assessment tends to be very challenging in the practice of the alliance. Moreover, in the post-Cold War context, the expectation is to have “leaner but meaner,” or in other, and better, words, more “agile” forces, rather than a great mass of forces. Therefore those forces that can deploy fast and perform successfully in today’s typical peace support operations are worth proportionally more. In the end, countries are thus bound to have different standards of measurement for their own performance and a major part of NATO consensus-building is, in present times, about building consensus on the measures to be used for different countries’ contributions, doing so inevitably in a significantly larger number of dimensions of measurement than
during Cold War times. With regards to this, some even go so far as to argue that “many view responsibility sharing as a preferred term, with burden-sharing seen as outdated and divisive” (Wilton Park, 2014: 4). Indeed, the 2010 Group of Experts report on “NATO 2020” also talked about how “Alliance success depends on the equitable sharing among members of roles, risks and responsibilities, as well as benefits,” never mentioning “burden” therein (GoE, 2010).

Yet, whilst there are those, such as Thies (1989; 2009), who claim that a constant talk of crisis over disagreements and equitability are in fact normal for NATO, and even required for it to have functioning consensus-building and burden-sharing mechanisms, there are some aspects to NATO’s current situation which may be unprecedented. The paper therefore intends to develop, through speculative formalisation, a simple framework of assessment in which an understanding of some present-day dynamics may crystallise (and be debated).

Interestingly, whereas there have been attempts to build “integrated” (i.e. multivariate) conceptual models, for the purposes of process-tracing, of how different countries arrive at different contribution levels within coalitions and alliances (see e.g. in Bennet, Lepgold and Unger, 1994; Herman, 1994; Auerswald, 2004; Ali Ashraf, 2011; Marton and Hynek, 2011), these did not really go beyond naming the key variables and visualising key connections between them. The relevant relationships have not been formally expressed apart from certain aspects of such interactions by Fang and Ramsay (2007) – in their case in the context of an abstract, two-state, game-theoretical model. In the section that follows, this paper will therefore try to lay the foundations for this task in a simple manner, building on an old formula introduced in Joseph Grieco’s classical article “Anarchy and the limits of cooperation” (1988: 496-500).

The simple hypothetical model developed here as a result serves as an argument and as an invitation for further debate – and research.
Formally grasping some aspects of the relationships shaping the politics of intra-alliance cooperation

In the aforementioned article, Grieco was interested in comparing and assessing realist and neoliberal institutionalist assessments of the prospects of interstate cooperation, explaining the difference between the two largely in terms of how they relate to the question of a state’s sensitivity to gaps in payoffs of cooperation between them and their partners. Realists, he argued, would always be sensitive to such a gap (unlike liberal institutionalists), thereby needing to introduce in a formal expression of this the variable of a “state's coefficient of sensitivity to gaps in payoffs either to its advantage or disadvantage,” denoted in his text by the letter $k$. Grieco, in reference to this variable, expresses a state’s utility function as

$$U = V - k(W-V)$$

where $U$ stands for Utility; $V$ stands for the state’s payoffs from cooperating with a given partner; and $W$ stands for that partner’s payoffs from cooperation. In this context $k$ takes a value of zero or higher, thus rendering any gap in payoffs either insignificant (at 0) or significant to varying degrees (when $k > 0$). The application of this is simple: “$k$” would have a low but nevertheless higher-than-zero value for the US in the case of NATO allies, as it is not completely indifferent to the US if others free-ride on cooperation with it. At the same time, “$k$” would of course have a much higher value in the case of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, and a somewhat lower, yet comparatively high value in the case of contemporary Russia, under Vladimir Putin’s presidency.

This paper is not interested in definitively concluding the debate between neoliberal institutionalism and realism on determinants of state action or the fundamental character of state behaviour. In fact, it regards such debates as irrelevant in some respects. These theoretical approaches, and their implicit models, serve more as benchmarks identified in the
framework of speculative thinking. Realism may be as good a benchmark as neoliberal institutionalism, and this paper, with a view to its subject, i.e. the often problematic nature of cooperation, will build rather on the realist formulaic interpretation of interstate cooperation, as outlined by Grieco – it is formulated in such a way, in fact, that it leaves room for even the neoliberal institutionalist interpretation to be fundamentally valid, as this would not take more than the assumption of a relatively high “k” value by default.

With this nominally realist interpretation then a public choice or pluralistic approach is combined in taking into account the role of the public and the role of politicians interested in winning over the support of the public,\(^2\) thus refining the original approach, marginally.

As indicated before, the speculative formalisation that follows stemming from this is merely possible ground for future debate. Still it may be worth noting that the train of thought that follows here is also informed by NATO’s experience in the last decade, in particular in the context of the joint effort in Afghanistan where, contrary to the position taken by Kreps (2010), public opinion played an often inhibiting role from which no degree of elite consensus could have shielded operations. Evidence in favour of this claim will be discussed later on.

In a slight re-naming and re-adjustment of the individual variables in Grieco’s equation, the following expression of state utility may be used as a starting point, using “U” instead of “V” and “U\(_{\text{net}}\)” (Net Utility) instead of “U”:

\[
U_{\text{net}} = U - k(W-U)
\]

where U and W are of course unknown in the absence of analysis. The variable “k” in the context of NATO intra-alliance cooperation refers mostly (albeit not only) to the inclination to cooperate with the US on the part of US partners, with a specific view to European partners.

Payoffs may be interpreted as follows:

\(^2\) Or at the least in not having the public turn against them.
\[ U = T + A + P - C \]

Here “T” stands for „Threat,” and refers to the level of threat a state is interested in countering with the alliance (or coalition effort) concerned, expressing the net reduction of threat achieved by the alliance or coalition in question. “A” stands for „Alliance (dependence)” in the case of a coalition effort or other alliance cooperation where threat balancing is not the main or only motive, and expresses net appreciation by allies, achieved by involvement in cooperation.³ “P” stands for „Politics,” and refers to the domestic political utility of alliance cooperation or coalition effort concerned. Finally, “C” stands for the „Costs” of cooperation. The value of these variables may of course be negative, too.

At the same time, perceptions clearly matter, too, e.g. as far as public opinion is concerned, and as a simple interpretation of domestic political success, we may think of \( P \) as dependent on \([W-U]_{\text{perceived}}\), even if it is not a linear function of it. As the Afghanistan experience may arguably show, \( U_{\text{perceived}} \) may be negative regardless of the actual value of “U,” and \([W-U]_{\text{perceived}}\) may be quite significant as regards public attitudes. The same may be said for \( T_{\text{perceived}} \) and \( A_{\text{perceived}} \).

The latter variables, along with “T,” “A,” as well as \([W-U]_{\text{perceived}}\) may, as a reasonable assumption, be very different in the case of different forms of cooperation: in the case of threat-balancing interventions⁴ (where “T” may be a variable of central significance), in humanitarian interventions (where “T” can only be interpreted in the abstract, or in a post-material/non-physical sense), and related to tasks and expenditure in collective defence (where “T” is present but may be less direct than in a threat-balancing intervention, and therefore “A” becomes more significant).

³ Alliance-dependence and threat-balancing were conceptualised as two key variables in the ground-breaking analysis of burden-sharing in the 1991 Gulf War by Bennett, Leogold and Unger (1994).
⁴ Such as the counter-sanctuary intervention in Afghanistan against al-Qaida in 2001.
This we may refer to as a “teleological context” variable, and it may be expressed with different coefficients weighting the variables concerned differently in the three alternative situations. On the other hand, these variables, i.e. $T_{\text{perceived}}$ and $A_{\text{perceived}}$ are clearly determinants, albeit not in any case exclusively, of $U_{\text{perceived}}$, as well as of $W_{\text{perceived}}$, given how they are elements of a strategic reading of the situation on the part of the public.

Following this logic, Net Utility may be expressed as follows from the point of view of politicians/decision-makers, interested in winning over or keeping public support, who act on behalf of states:

$$U_{\text{net}} = U - k(W - U)$$

or

$$U_{\text{net}} = T + A + P - C - k(W - U)$$

or

$$U_{\text{net}} = T + A - C + U_{\text{perceived}} - W_{\text{perceived}} - k(W - U)$$

One may go on from this point, and express the other state’s utility function, too. The role of $W_{\text{perceived}}$ is, however, noteworthy even without further specification of its constituent elements. That it matters is quite interesting given how little publics are generally aware of some of the information relevant to assessing these variables even in the case of one’s own country (such as Costs), let alone in the case of another; and how differently opining they may be on the role of variables such as “T” and “A,” both in the case of their own country and in the case of the other.

In addition, in any case, public opinion on these variables is also informed by a host of idiosyncratic factors that are not worth including in a model aiming at general understanding and parsimony. Looking for less specificity, the public’s attitude may be speculatively described by the following equation:
\[ U_{\text{perceived}} = U_{\text{net/} \text{perceived}} - k[W-U]_{\text{perceived}} \]

where \( k \) denotes a coefficient expressing sensitivity to one’s own benefits as compared to the difference in payoffs, in paraphrasal of Grieco’s original formula.

Whether expressed correctly or not, the resulting attitude towards defence in general and towards specific foreign military operations in particular is of course no direct determinant of a country’s willingness to cooperate. It can, nevertheless, be factored into that, and to this modest statement one may offer some preliminary empirical support. This (the significance of public opinion to decision-makers’ calculations) is in fact why countries participating in NATO’s foreign military missions needed sophisticated strategic communication efforts to be able to sustain casualties. This is why several countries, including the US, engaged in public diplomacy efforts to influence sceptical publics in partner countries. This is why (full or partial) withdrawal by several countries from military operations occurred time and again after domestic political support collapsed in some form – such examples can be named both in the case of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Public opinion is also one of the reasons why many countries insisted on restrictive national caveats and rules of engagement (RoE) for their troops – criticised eventually as “stand aside” forces in US military parlance (Cordesman, 2011), with coalition governments that were more vulnerable to a breakdown in public support, and which are also, incidentally, more frequent in Europe, consistently more likely to employ such restrictions (Auerswald and Saideman, 2012). And public opposition is also part of why, as far as the larger picture of intra-alliance cooperation is concerned, some countries found it hard, and continue to find it hard, to convince their publics of the need to invest more in defence.

\( U_{\text{perceived}} \), along with [W-U]_{\text{perceived}} , is thus highlighted as another differentiating variable affecting a country’s level of effort required per unit of contribution to any joint/coalition/alliance undertaking. There are good reasons to suspect that it may display
more regular patterns even as it dynamically shifts under the influence of idiosyncratic factors (just as seems to be the consensus in public opinion research [Holsti, 1992]). Patterns there may be in the sense of cross-country specificity, for example. There may be a fundamental difference between “leader” and “follower” countries in a coalition (on followership see e.g. Ikenberry and Kupchan, 1990 or Cooper, Higgot and Nossal, 1991) as well as there may be a difference between countries stemming from their different historical narratives and identities (i.e. a host of intersubjective/cognitive factors).

Implications for NATO and alliance burden-sharing in the wake of the “Asia pivot”

Several simple assumptions inform the assessment of the prospects of NATO burden-sharing in the wake of the “Asia pivot” in the present paper.

Of the above, “C” is the variable that bears the most direct relevance for burden-sharing. Measured multi-dimensionally, and not only in terms of financial costs, it is the “burden” itself.

As pointed out in the brief literature review, defence is not a pure public good, and costs related to it thus cannot all be counted as investment into attaining common benefits. To the contrary, some of the costs are purely investments into private goods. This was always true of NATO, and when it was not taken into account in the discourse, that discourse can itself be seen to have had the role of letting and making people forget about this. To an extent this is also Thies’ argument in his 2009 book about the near-constant discourse of a burden-sharing crisis within NATO: that the discourse is on the one hand naïve, while on the other hand it helps build the eventually persisting consensus on the relatively few things over which there are disagreements. There was a sense and a discourse of a burden-sharing crisis in the Korea War years and the initial military build-up of the Alliance right after NATO’s founding, just as they were there in the Vietnam war era, or in the 1980s related to the
deployment of theatre ballistic missiles to Europe – and connected to yet many other issues.

Referring to the formulae above, the “NATO is in crisis” discourse can be said to have had a role in managing Grieco’s “k” variable.

This was compounded by the 1990s by the discourse of “new security threats” and its framing of global stability and security as a public good in which everyone had to invest, as a responsible stakeholder. Both the Cold War Soviet military threat, and what were framed as new security threats thus served to paint defence investments in general as a non-private good whereas a part of them clearly were investment into private goods.

As it may be commonsensical to assume: any tension between semblance and reality cannot last eternally. The question one ought to pose therefore in the present context is what may happen as a result of the Asia pivot announced in US foreign policy, after both the Cold War and concern about state failure and new security threats are, to some extent, gone – the latter partly down to war fatigue, and partly out of a re-consideration of related issues (see e.g. Mazarr, 2014). In this kind of context it is safe enough to assume that the more there is talk of a reorientation towards the Pacific, the more clearly it will become visible to key actors that the United States is not spending all of its defence budget on items related in any way to Europe’s defence needs.

The Crimean crisis may not reverse this trend. Tellingly, one of the actually resonating arguments in favour of the US taking action of some kind in this case was that the US needed to reassure allies outside Europe, too, that it was taking its existing strategic commitments seriously. Kunihiko Miyake, a former advisor to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told the New York Times in April 2014: “The Crimea is a game-changer. This is not fire on a distant shore for us. What is happening is another attempt by a rising power to change the status quo.” He was warning of Japan’s sensitivity to US signals of strategic commitment anywhere as to Japan’s concerns over current and prospective Chinese actions (Cooper and Fackler,
2014). In a debate at the Washington Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on whether there might be a need to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Eastern European NATO member countries in the wake of events in the Crimea, in May 2014, Peter Doran singled out Japan and the United Arab Emirates as highly interested non-European allies in audience who would need reassurance of some kind related to the respective strategic adversaries they are concerned with (CSIS, 2014).

A consequent realisation that the US is spending with rather different priorities could weaken US pressure on European allies to do more for NATO’s collective capability. Whilst a US turn away from Europe may be an argument in favour of larger European defence budgets (and self-help), however, at the same time, due to the absence of increased defence spending or even continuing cutbacks in defence spending in Europe, the US share of NATO’s overall defence spending may stay where it currently is, rather than decrease itself, falsely reassuring Europeans that the US may continue to bear collective burdens, thereby also working against increased defence spending. So could be the European public’s [W-U] perceived after a decade of what was seen as participation in “America’s wars,” even as “T” at least in the case of Afghanistan clearly concerned Europeans,’ too.

On the other side of the Atlantic, European trends continuing may result in an increase in [W-U] perceived, too, resulting in a corresponding decrease of the US inclination to act on the side of Europe, preferring either leaving things to European countries, or, at the most, leading from behind, as seen in the 2011 Libyan intervention.

Some of the most straightforward counter-arguments to this would be external to the above parsimonious model. One may point out, for example, that “P” (domestic political utility) would include, in the case of the US, the added legitimacy of acting in concert with others, rather than unilaterally, or that through this multilateral approach the US can
meaningfully take on the role of “leader.” These may be derived from a constructivist paradigm of interpretation, and these may keep the US in as far as NATO is concerned.

A counter-argument internal to the model, derived from a public choice approach, may concern the role of the defence industry. Although defence integration could run deeper, it may still constitute a force in favour of holding the Alliance together, especially through defence trade. At this point it may be worth questioning if public opinion merits the outstanding attention it received as the factor with which I sought to refine Grieco’s original formula in this paper. This clearly merits further discussion.

In the end, of course, what we are addressing here is not merely a competition between different strands of theory. It is also about the strategic prospects of one of the greatest and most important alliances in the history of mankind. The power of its unique qualities may, in a constructivist framework, itself be a driver of change leading European countries to eventually change track – which they may well have to, to preserve a meaningful alliance.

**Future research**

This paper was drafted as part of a larger, two-year research project examining Hungary’s, and other smaller NATO member countries’ track record in alliance burden-sharing, supported by the Bolyai Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. As part of this research the author will seek to survey stakeholder perceptions of burden-sharing contributions in interviews with relevant officials in Brussels, Budapest and other countries. Data collection and statistical analysis will also attempt to reveal historical patterns of burden-sharing within NATO using the multi-dimensional measurement seen by many sources included in the literature review as minimally required for a more comprehensive and balanced assessment.
References