

Stanley R. Sloan  
Visiting Scholar, Middlebury College  
Nonresident Senior Fellow, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security  
Atlantic Council of the United States  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Hearing:  
September 5, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, and members of the Committee, for calling today's hearing. I am happy to have the opportunity to talk about the value of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the United States.

Twenty years ago, as a Senior Specialist with the Congressional Research Service, I worked closely with this committee and the Senate NATO Observer Group during consideration of the first round of post-Cold War NATO enlargement.

It is my pleasure to return to discuss the alliance that, in my opinion, remains so important to American security.

I will take this opportunity today briefly to fill in a little of the historical background to the questions you are addressing, to say a few words about NATO as a "political" alliance, and then about the value of U.S. membership in, and leadership of, the alliance.

Over the course of seven decades, U.S. leadership of the alliance has been based on joint management of the "transatlantic bargain" by the Congress, particularly the Senate, and successive presidential administrations. From the very beginning, the Congressional partner regularly raised questions about the persistent burden-sharing issue. This questioning began with the initial debate in the Senate on whether it should give its advice and consent to the Treaty. The administration of President Harry Truman reassured Senators that the European allies would contribute to their own defense and that the United States would not end up carrying a disproportionate share of the burden.

As the European states recovered from the devastation of World War II, some Senators argued that the Europeans had become capable of defending themselves. Montana's Senator Mike Mansfield promoted resolutions from the mid-1960s into the early 1970s that sought to

force administrations to begin withdrawing U.S. forces from Europe. He was opposed by several administrations which argued that the American NATO commitment was essential to counter the Soviet threat.

Since 1949, both Republican and Democratic administrations sought ways to get the Europeans to relieve the United States of some of its NATO burdens. The Congress did most of the complaining while successive presidents of both parties urged allies to do more but largely defended the alliance and its costs as necessary for U.S. national interests.

In this area, President Trump has reversed institutional roles with his burden-sharing complaints and his threats to abandon key commitments in the 1949 Treaty. The Congress and the Department of Defense, in response, have largely assumed the roles of NATO-defender, while still lobbying for better European contributions.

One thing remains clear to me: NATO is both a political and military alliance. I can't tell you how many times I have heard someone erroneously claim that NATO is "just a military alliance."

NATO is a civil alliance with a strong military structure and capability that facilitate military cooperation aimed at deterring attacks against member states and defending them if necessary. Until President Trump, all American presidents have remained committed to the North Atlantic Treaty's Article 5 collective defense provision. Article 5 does not say exactly what member states must do when another member is attacked. That is left for the sovereign decision of each state, whose decision-making independence is guaranteed by the treaty.

Article 5 does commit each member nation to regard an attack on another member as an attack on itself, and to take "such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area." Allied military deployments, training, exercises, plans and weapons acquisitions are designed to endow this commitment with hard military reality, particularly for an adversary. NATO's Defence Planning Process is a historically unique mechanism to share and coordinate plans and acquisitions.

Moreover, the credibility of Article 5 depends not just on military strength, but critically on national political will to use it – will that must be communicated effectively to both adversaries and allied citizens.

Article 5 does not exist in a vacuum. The overall political relationships among member states affect its credibility. The recent NATO summit communique emphasized the importance of cohesion, unity, and shared goals. But our NATO allies believe today that the most powerful and influential among them – the United States – is damaging political trust within the alliance, seriously weakening NATO credibility in deterrence to adversaries and reassurance to citizens.

I doubt this is what any member of this committee wishes to happen.

The preamble of the treaty makes it clear that the purpose is not just to defend territory, but also to defend values – this is where the “political” part comes in. The treaty enumerates those values as “*the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.*” In recent years, the United States and its allies have added “human rights” to the list. The defense of these values by NATO nations puts political backbone into the liberal international order.

The alliance has not always succeeded on the value side. Undemocratic governments have, from time to time, gained power in NATO countries. They were tolerated for geostrategic reasons. But they were the rare exceptions.

Today, many countries on both sides of the Atlantic are facing decisions about what kind of democracy they want. Is it liberal democracy, based on the North Atlantic Treaty preamble’s value statement? Or is it what has been called “electoral democracy,” in which governments are elected but power is increasingly centralized? Or are they headed toward “electoral authoritarianism,” in which elections take place but the rule of law and individual liberties, like freedom of speech and the press, are strictly controlled by central authority.

Decisions by NATO member states, including our own, concerning which path to choose will have at least as much impact on the viability of the alliance as will decisions regarding levels of defense spending. In fact, authoritarian populists like those currently on the rise in the West don't particularly like NATO and tend not to support engaging in collective action to provide public goods.

Moreover, elected officials in sovereign, democratic allied states usually seek to get the best security for their populations at the most reasonable price. This means that alliances among sovereign states will always face questions concerning an equitable balance of costs and benefits

among the members. This reality caused constant friction between the United States and its allies throughout the Cold War.

The burden-sharing issue was built into the transatlantic bargain, emerging in many ways from the foundation provided by contrasting U.S. and European geographic realities, historical experiences, and military capabilities. The original concept of the alliance was that the United States and Europe would be more or less equal partners and would therefore share equitably the costs of alliance programs.

The seeds for a perpetual burden-sharing problem were planted when the original transatlantic bargain was reshaped in 1954 following the failure of the European Defense Community. The revision of the original bargain meant that the alliance would become heavily dependent both on U.S. nuclear weapons and on the presence of U.S. military forces in Europe to make those weapons credible in deterrence as well as to fortify non-nuclear defense in Europe.

The U.S. burden-sharing complaint took many forms and was translated into a great variety of policy approaches between 1954 and the end of the Cold War. In the early 1950s, the allies arranged common funding of NATO infrastructure costs, such as running NATO civilian and military headquarters and building and maintaining fuel pipelines, communication systems, and so on. Each ally was allocated a share of the infrastructure costs, according to an “ability to pay” formula.

As European nations recovered from World War II and experienced economic growth, the U.S. share of infrastructure expenses was progressively reduced. However, such expenses were not the main cost of alliance efforts. The large expenses were the monies spent by nations to build, maintain, and operate their military forces. In this category, the United States always outpaced its European allies.

The administration of President John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s sought a greater European contribution to Western defense. Its policy optimistically advocated an Atlantic partnership with “twin pillars” featuring shared responsibilities between the United States and an eventually united Europe. The Kennedy presidency also witnessed the beginning of the financial arrangements between the United States and West Germany designed to “offset” the costs of stationing U.S. forces in that country. These agreements were renewed and expanded in the

administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon to include German purchases of U.S. Treasury bonds and, in the 1970s, the repair of barracks used by U.S. forces in Germany.

The U.S. experience in Vietnam, French withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966, and U.S. economic problems all diminished support in the Congress for U.S. overseas troop commitments in general and led the Johnson administration to press the Europeans to increase their defense efforts.

This period saw a strong congressional movement, led by Senator Mike Mansfield, to cut U.S. forces in Europe. Senator Mansfield introduced the first of the "Mansfield Resolutions" on August 31, 1966. The Senate was asked to resolve that "a substantial reduction of United States forces permanently stationed in Europe can be made without adversely affecting either our resolve or ability to meet our commitment under the North Atlantic Treaty."

Senator Mansfield reintroduced the resolution in 1967, 1969, and 1970, when the resolution obtained the signatures of 50 co-sponsors. However, U.S. presidents, Republican and Democrat alike, consistently opposed such efforts, and these resolutions and similar efforts through 1974 failed to win final passage. The Nixon administration, after unsuccessfully attempting to get the Europeans to increase "offset" payments, took a new tack. The Europeans objected to the prospect of American troops becoming little more than mercenaries in Europe and argued that the U.S. troop presence was, after all, in America's as well as Europe's interests. Nixon shifted to a focus on getting allies to improve their own military capabilities rather than paying the United States to sustain its own. The so-called Nixon Doctrine, applied globally, suggested that the United States would continue its efforts to support allies militarily if they made reasonable efforts to help themselves.

Congress continued to focus on offset requirements, passing legislation such as the 1974 Jackson-Nunn Amendment requiring that the European allies offset the balance-of-payments deficit incurred by the United States from the 1974 costs of stationing U.S. forces in Europe. However, a combination of events in the mid-1970s decreased congressional pressure for unilateral U.S. troop reductions in Europe.

The East-West talks on mutual force reductions that opened in Vienna, Austria, in 1973 were intended to produce negotiated troop cuts, and U.S. administrations argued that U.S.

unilateral withdrawals would undercut the NATO negotiating position. Congress turned toward efforts to encourage the Europeans to make better use of their defense spending, and President Jimmy Carter, in 1977, proposed a new “long-term defense program” for NATO in the spirit of the Nixon Doctrine, setting the goal of increasing defense expenditures in real terms 3 percent above inflation for the life of the program.

In 1980, Congress, frustrated by allied failures to meet the 3 percent goal, required preparation of annual “allied commitments reports” to keep track of allied contributions to security requirements. Throughout the 1980s, Congress developed several approaches linking the continued U.S. troop presence in Europe to improved allied defense efforts. However, the burden-sharing issue was never “resolved.” In fact, the growing U.S. concern with Soviet activities in the Third World put even more focus on the fact that the Europeans did little militarily to help the United States deal with this perceived threat to Western interests.

In sum, throughout the Cold War, the United States felt strongly that the Europeans needed to “do more.”

Although some Europeans agreed that their countries should increase their relative share of the Western defense burden, the prevalent feeling was that many American criticisms of their defense efforts were unwarranted.

Perhaps ironically, the biggest burden-sharing issue at the end of the Cold War was how the allies should work together to deal with non-collective defense security threats arising beyond NATO’s borders, an issue that had always been a source of division among the allies. That would become one of the biggest challenges for the allies in the 1990s.

At least in the first decade after the end of the Cold War, the United States and all its allies looked for a peace “dividend” by reducing defense expenditures, taking the opportunity to shift resources to other priorities.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the allies, for the first time in NATO’s history, invoked Article 5, the North Atlantic Treaty’s collective defense provision. The allies followed up the Article 5 actions by contributing thousands of troops to the War in Afghanistan, agreeing to establish a NATO command there, and suffering the loss of more than 1,000 military personnel.

In 2014, the Russian annexation of the Crimea and support for separatists in the Donbas region of Ukraine produced a dramatic change in threat perceptions and, consequently, defense spending commitments. The allies agreed at the Wales summit that September to increase defense spending to the level of 2% of Gross Domestic Product by the year 2024. The recent 2018 summit in Brussels added further defense improvement plans to fortify the response to the Russian threat as well as to international terrorism.

That's a summary of the history. Now, here is my summary of the benefits our country receives from NATO membership:

- The alliance reaffirms the legitimacy of the American political system, as the North Atlantic Treaty rests explicitly on our key values: democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.
- It brings together like-minded nations that, for the most part, share our political values and are willing to work with us to defend them.
- The shared interests and values underlying the alliance provide a strong coalition for dealing with international security issues.
- The U.S. role in the world is strengthened by the fact that those countries outside the transatlantic alliance realize that the United States has a coalition in waiting that, under most circumstances, will support us.
- Members of NATO provided their support when they invoked NATO's collective defense clause in response to the 9/11 attacks. They followed up the Article 5 actions by contributing thousands of troops to the War in Afghanistan.
- The NATO consultative framework, Integrated Command Structure, day-to-day defense cooperation and NATO's Defence Planning Process facilitate fighting together when necessary.
- The NATO commitments provide a foundation of common trust that can serve as a stable starting point for managing disagreements when they occur.
- NATO nations provide vitally important base facilities for American army, navy, marine and air force capabilities for operations beyond Europe in the Middle East and Africa.

- A unified NATO presents a strong front to deter aggression by adversaries, particularly Russia in today's world.
- In theory, a unified Europe should be able to defend itself. But in the real world, political/military unification of Europe is not likely in the foreseeable future and transatlantic security therefore will continue to depend heavily on effective U.S. cooperation with Canada and the European allies in NATO.
- The desire for membership in NATO has led many European countries to reform their political and economic systems, resolve differences with their neighbors, and meet other conditions for NATO membership. This stabilizes international relations and supports the spread of democracy.
- NATO has provided a framework for active security cooperation with countries that do not meet geographic or other requirements for membership, or do not choose to join. The Partnership for Peace program expands American influence and strengthens our national security.
- No practical alternative to NATO that would serve U.S. interests as well has so far been developed and defended convincingly

In 1984, on sabbatical from the Congressional Research Service, I wrote a book entitled *NATO's Future: Toward a New Transatlantic Bargain*. The new bargain that I proposed was a more equal alliance in terms of both contributions and influence. It addressed the burden sharing issue quite directly by calling on the Europeans to strengthen the alliance by coordinating more effectively their defense efforts. I cautioned at that time that such improved cooperation would have to take place within, not outside, the broad framework of the transatlantic relationship

A lot has changed since then, and I am less optimistic than I was then about what might be possible among the Europeans, and what kind of leadership the United States would provide.

I see no chance that the members of the European Union will decide to create a full political union anytime in the foreseeable future. In my judgment, this would be required before anything like a European army or fully unified European militaries could come into being.

Our allies are making progress toward improving their cooperation. The European Security and Defense Policy, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the new



European Defense Fund (EDF) are already helping promote better military cooperation among the allies.

Our president's questioning of American commitments to the alliance has led Europeans reasonably to wonder if they can rely on the United States in the future. If they decide that they can't, their cooperation could move toward greater autonomy from the United States, outside of NATO and ineffectively coordinated with the alliance.

Such a development would amount to a total failure of U.S. policy that has supported a strong Western alliance for seven decades. The Europeans may do more, but the questions about the U.S. commitment may lead them to assumptions that would damage what NATO calls "the transatlantic link."

As with previous generations on both sides of the Atlantic, current generations of leaders need to choose whether we will continue to sustain and improve the transatlantic alliance of democracies, of which NATO is the most important pillar. Will we choose to defend democracy, individual liberty and rule of law, or will we risk a much darker future?

This committee, and the Senate as a whole, have long played critical and positive parts in sustaining NATO and its benefits for the United States. You now are challenged once again to choose which role you will play in charting the future of America's membership in this vitally important North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before the committee today.