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## A fair and equitable burden for Europe's NATO allies

**In the past couple of years, the alliance has updated its funding policy to allow countries to pay according to their gross national incomes**

By Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

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When discussing Afghanistan, many newspapers continue to suggest that some of Europe's NATO allies are under-performing in Afghanistan, and are either unable or unwilling to make a greater effort. Naturally, these allies feel that their efforts are under-valued. What is a fair and equitable burden?

First of all, the debate about burden-sharing should not be reduced solely to today's force levels in Afghanistan, because, however important these force levels are, they tell only part of the story.

So let me broaden the debate and offer a more holistic perspective by covering three interconnected elements: defense transformation, operations and the wider context of the international community's efforts.

Defense transformation is a key aspect of burden-sharing. It is a golden rule within the alliance that the bulk of NATO's forces and capabilities are owned by individual nations — the alliance's fleet of Airborne Warning and Command System aircraft is a rare exception. As I don't expect nations to abandon this principle, NATO will continue to depend on individual allies and their willingness to commit resources.

Contrary to popular opinion, the type of forces and capabilities needed by NATO are not as widely available in national inventories as one might think. Large proportions of NATO allies' armed forces are still better suited for static territorial defense than for the expeditionary type of operation needed in Afghanistan.

And, when the right type of forces and capabilities do exist, operations led by the UN, the EU, or ad hoc coalitions, as well as

national requirements, place additional demands on these assets.

Developing the necessary expeditionary capabilities is a major feature of NATO's transformation process. But it is not possible to convert territorial forces into expeditionary forces overnight, and the costs of transformation often must compete with the costs of deploying forces for operations.

Many allies face the dilemma of either spending money on operations or investing in new acquisition programs.

Moreover, many allies' failure to respect the 2 percent of GDP target for their defense budgets exacerbates this dilemma and also widens the capability gap with those allies that are investing in usable and deployable forces. But, while there is no substitute for appropriate defense budgets, we could get more from current spending levels, especially through a smarter approach to defense acquisition.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of NATO and the EU, Europe's defense sector remains fragmented, which leads to duplication, unhelpful competition from too many rival systems and significant capability gaps or incompatibilities. In Afghanistan, for example, national systems for friendly-force tracking, which are vital to preventing accidental attacks on one's own forces or allies, are not compatible. Extra time and money has therefore had to be invested in the acquisition of these capabilities.

In Europe, many national defense budgets can no longer sustain both fully-fledged national forces and a national defense industry. Only smarter multinational and transatlantic cooperation will give us forces that are capable of dealing with today's security challenges.

In an alliance founded on the principle of "all for one, and one for all," it is vital that all nations are seen to contribute fairly to operations. Thus, NATO, developed a burden-sharing mechanism to assess members' manning commitments for critical operational activities relative to their gross national income.

This sort of arithmetic has the merit of giving some indications about burden-sharing, but it has also been shown that burden-sharing cannot be fully captured in graphs and spreadsheets.

How does one decide what is a fair contribution from a country of 50 million people compared with a country with only 4 million? How can you evaluate a contribution of light infantry against the provision of critical enablers such as helicopters or air-to-air refueling tankers? Over what time period do you make your calculations?

Common funding, with all members paying a share according to their GDP, is one instrument that can be used to achieve more equitable burden-sharing. Traditionally, NATO applied a policy of "costs lie where they fall": Each member picked up all the costs

for the operational contribution that it made to an Alliance operation.

During the past couple of years, NATO's funding policy has been updated to allow common funding to be used as an incentive for the provision of certain theater-level enabling capabilities, like medical facilities, airports handling troops and supplies, or intelligence.

Burden-sharing is a sensitive issue, for both NATO and the international community, and passions sometimes run high. By stepping back and looking at the broader picture, it is clear that it is not just a matter of having the right capabilities, but also of having the money and political will to deploy them.

No single measure can resolve the burden-sharing problem. But the range of initiatives now underway within NATO should help: Transformation efforts to increase the pool of usable and deployable forces; wider use of multinational initiatives; greater reliance on common funding to assist force generation; and a comprehensive approach for sharing burdens more equitably across the entire international community.

An alliance like NATO, in contrast to many "coalitions of the willing," has the political consultation structures, proven planning mechanisms, effective command and control and legitimacy that encourages nations to contribute to an operation.

Alliance solidarity is not just a slogan. The sense of keeping one's obligations and commitments to other allies, upon whom one's own security ultimately depends, is a powerful motive for equitable burden-sharing. Totally fair burden-sharing may not be possible, but a security organization like NATO undoubtedly allows us to come closer to it than any other approach.

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