



Ensure Alliance Commitments Advance U.S. Interests

America's alliance relationships must be a means for advancing U.S. interests, not simply ends in themselves. The United States should maintain friendly relations and cooperate with our partners and formal allies alike, while recognizing the difference in our obligations to each and clearly defining where U.S. interests overlap and where they do not.

THE ISSUE

The United States has treaty commitments to defend a quarter of the world's nations—over 1.4 billion people and more than four times America's population. Amid growing economic constraints at home and rising multipolarity abroad, the U.S. will be increasingly overextended if it attempts to maintain its current footprint simultaneously across the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Fortunately, our wealthy European allies are well-placed to take a greater role in their own security if they are not discouraged from doing so by U.S. policy choices. Given its existing obligations, America should avoid permanent new security commitments; particularly those that substantially increase the risk of conflict with nuclear-armed adversaries.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

PROMOTE EUROPEAN BURDEN-SHIFTING | Our European allies are wealthy and capable enough to afford to secure themselves against a Russia weakened by fierce Ukrainian resistance. Instead, substantial U.S. deployments in Europe encourage allies like Germany to underinvest in their defense and pass the buck for their own regional security to U.S. troops and taxpayers. When limited U.S. assets and munitions are unnecessarily deployed to Europe, greater interests in Asia and elsewhere suffer.

- Policymakers should change European incentives and support more pressing U.S. interests by drawing down the U.S. military footprint in Europe, starting with a return to pre-2022 troop levels.
- Congress should not fund further increases in American deployments to Europe in FY 2024. Such appropriations would only encourage allies to defer necessary investment in their defense.

AVOID RISKY PERMANENT SECURITY COMMITMENTS | America is already overstretched and currently suffering from rapidly depleting stockpiles of crucial munitions as it continues to aid Ukraine on an

open-ended basis. The United States is not prepared for a major war and should avoid decisions that make one more likely.

- Congress should reject risky new security commitments, such as admitting Ukraine or Georgia to NATO, that bring a heightened risk of war with a nuclear-armed adversary.
- Policymakers should reduce expectations of U.S. partners without formal defense treaties, such as the Gulf states, that America is always willing to intervene, discouraging reckless behavior.

TRANSPARENCY IN ALLIED BURDEN SHARING | Until 2004, Congress required the Department of Defense to submit annual allied burden sharing reports. These documents outlined what U.S. allies were spending on their own security as well as their defense capabilities investments.

- To inform decisions on U.S. commitments abroad, Congress should reinstate DoD allied burden sharing reports.

TRANSFORM AMERICA'S NATO ROLE | The U.S. should continue close cooperation and maintain good relations with its European allies, while encouraging them to assume the primary burden for their own security. This will benefit both American and European security interests in the long-term. European capacity to deter a weakened Russia will free up U.S. resources better used elsewhere, such as in Asia.

- U.S. policymakers should draft and implement a plan to transition America's role in Europe from frontline NATO defense to logistical support. The United States should resume efforts to help European allies identify capabilities that they depend on the U.S. to provide—capabilities which would be unavailable if needed for hostilities in Asia, such as aerial transport, refueling, and ISR systems. This way, European nations can coordinate to backfill these needs as efficiently as possible.
- The Department of Defense should increase outreach and technical assistance to EU and regional European security alliances, such as the European Defence Agency, Nordic Defence Cooperation, and the Visegrad Group. These complementary security blocs can allow European allies more flexibility to address threats without having to rely on potentially unavailable U.S. support through NATO.
- In July, 2022, General Christopher G. Cavoli was appointed European Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). He is the 20th successive American general officer—since the alliance's founding—to hold the position. The next commander of allied forces should be European, consistent with a more balanced transatlantic partnership, which could signal a shift to greater European confidence and self-reliance and greater U.S. strategic flexibility.

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