

Defence spending and myths about sharing of burden

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Letter in the Financial Times

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/17a1e468-dede-11e0-9130-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1YODg5VhP>

Sir, Your report on the disparity between what Europeans and the US spend on defence perpetuates a number of burden-sharing myths (“[Western alliance: European cutbacks raise US concerns](#)”, FT.com, September 12). The official US defence budget is nearly \$700bn – although Washington’s true national security spend is probably closer to \$1,200bn – whereas the combined military spending of all 26 European members is just above \$220bn.

However, the idea that the US is protecting Europe at American taxpayer expense is clearly misguided and is a misrepresentation of both the Nato budgeting process and the nature and scope of US defence spending. Large parts of the US military budget – which is now stabilising at levels significantly above cold war peaks (adjusted for inflation) and far above the cold war average, in real terms – have nothing whatsoever to do with Nato or European security.

Within Europe, Nato is seen by most, if not all, of its member states as the cornerstone of their defence policies, whereas in the US it is but one of several regional building blocks for a global military presence.

The bottom line is that Americans do pick up a disproportionate share of the Nato tab but this is nowhere near the level that former US defence secretary Robert Gates, Nato secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen and others talk about.

Europe’s militaries are (with a few exceptions) appropriately scaled for their actual needs, given that the biggest external threats to European interests are economic, not military. Europeans probably do need to spend more intelligently (and some countries may need to increase or pool their defence spending), but the US also needs to spend much less and shift the focus to “soft” security expenditure. The case for reducing and rebalancing US security resources is overwhelming but is often the “elephant in the room” during transatlantic burden sharing discussions.

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