

## Passing the Buck

May 10, 2014 and August 15, 2016

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*The Economist*, a magazine that works out of England, writes:<sup>1</sup>

- a. "...when America's president speaks of due caution [about military intervention], the world hears reluctance---especially when it comes to the most basic issue for any superpower, its willingness to fight."
- b. "For America's most exposed allies that [military intervention] is now in doubt."
- c. "America's security guarantee used to underpin Japan's foreign policy...now [America]<sup>2</sup> has to assure Japan that it can count on America if China seizes [disputed islands between China and Japan]."
- d. "...Israel, Saudi Arabia, and a string of Gulf nations wonder if [America] will police the Middle East."
- e. "...[There is] a nagging suspicion among friends and foes that on the **big day** [bold text is mine] America simply might not show up."

### A Response

Let's use statements "a" through "e" above to pose another view (I add statement "f" to supplement this information) .

- a. The most basic issue for a superpower is "willingness to fight"? How many simultaneous wars should a superpower take on? The magazine cites Syria, Mali, and Libya as examples of America's unwillingness to fight. I am not a pacifist, but let's spread the wars around a bit more. England, you take on Mali. France, you take on Syria. (You help start the mess there many years ago anyway.) Germany, you take on Libya. ...Oops, Germany does not fight very much. Too much action in WWI and WWII. Now, the country is too busy exporting to America to bother with wars and such.
- b. Which of America's allies are exposed? Any of the NATO countries? Canada? Mexico? Any Latin American countries? Any Asian allies? By the way, is Syria an ally? Is Libya? Is Mali?
- c. Meanwhile, Japan's leaders pay homage to a Japanese war memorial known to commemorate WWII soldiers, some who committed war crimes in China and the outright murder of some of my parents' friends in Bataan. Essentially, Japan said: *I'm honoring people such as the Rape of Nanking and Bataan Death March killers, and I know Uncle*

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<sup>1</sup> "What would America fight for?" *The Economist*, May 3, 2014, 9.

<sup>2</sup> I am changing "Obama" with "America."

*will be upset. Never mind, Sam will have to come to my aid on those islands' issues [islands contested by Japan and China]. It doesn't matter if the islands have no relevance to America's security...or mine either.*

- d. "Police the Middle East." Think about this idea. It is now assumed that the United States is the world's policeman. Thanks to the U.S. cops, oil flows from the Middle East into the gas tanks of America's allies' vehicles. As fracking in America changes the energy equation, I suggest America's allies start training their own cops.
- e. What is the **big day**? Perhaps one **big day** was America not bombing Syria for using chemical weapons. Let's hold this judgment until June 30, the deadline for Syria to finish its clean-up. If the deadline passes with Syria not meeting its stated commitment, then America can bomb...who? The Syrian President's palace? The storage facilities, locations not fully known? (Unlike Iran's nuclear facilities, UN inspectors are not given access to these facilities.) Bring in the Marines, to fight whom? Many of the "battlefields" of the rebels and the Syrian army are diffused. (See "Middle East Muddle" in this series.)
- f. Because the Syrian regime is being supported by Iran, and the rebels are, well, rebels, it automatically becomes the obligation of America to support the rebels. However, a significant population in the rebels' camp is anti-American. It is far from a given that a rebel takeover would result in a Syrian secular democracy. Thus, America might have to go to war again in order to fill its job description of making every country in the world a Christian republic. Russia's view (in addition to its traditional alliance with Syria and Syria's ally, Iran) is that the current Syrian regime at least represents stability in the part of the Middle East.

Here is another jewel from *The Economist*:

"In 2013 Asia outspent Europe on arms for the first time---a sign that countries calculate they will have to stand up for themselves." (I will not add an exclamation point to this sentence.) For the past seven decades, countries "calculated" they did not have to stand up for themselves. The idea embedded in *The Economist* editorial is that America has a duty---an obligation---to stand up for others while they sit down.

There's an old saying, "It's hard to get out of bed in the morning, when you're sleeping between silk sheets." What fine silk sheets the Western countries have slept-in since the beginning of the Cold War. *The Economist* (and other parties) say, "America, stay out of that bed. Go in harm's way and protect us. In the meantime, we'll snuggle-down between those sheets."

Nonetheless, I wish to make certain the reader knows this writer supported the Cold War and its resultant confrontation with Russia, and on occasion, China (especially during the Korean War). The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan rescued a prostrate Europe from....not just an ill-founded and perverted practice of Communist theory, but from a megalomaniac as well: Joseph Stalin.

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August 15, 2016

Since I wrote the article above, I've looked at additional statistics on the military expenditures made by European countries.<sup>3</sup> The comments from President Obama and Donald Trump about some of the NATO countries not pulling their load is correct, as shown in the tables below. The first table shows the money spent on defense as a percentage of a country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Table 3 : Defence expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product and annual real change (based on 2010 prices)

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 e
(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<b>As a percentage of gross domestic product</b>								
Albania	#	1.52	1.59	1.53	1.49	1.41	1.35	1.16
Belgium	1.20	1.16	1.08	1.05	1.05	1.01	0.97	0.90
Bulgaria (a)	2.13	1.75	1.67	1.33	1.35	1.46	1.32	1.20
Croatia	#	1.82	1.54	1.60	1.53	1.47	1.41	1.38
Czech Republic	1.31	1.52	1.29	1.07	1.06	1.03	0.96	0.97
Denmark	1.36	1.34	1.41	1.30	1.35	1.24	1.17	1.18
Estonia	1.78	1.79	1.70	1.68	1.89	1.90	1.93	2.04
France (b)	2.27	2.02	1.96	1.87	1.87	1.86	1.84	1.80
Germany	1.28	1.39	1.35	1.28	1.31	1.23	1.19	1.18
Greece	2.85	3.08	2.63	2.37	2.26	2.19	2.20	2.46
Hungary	1.21	1.14	1.04	1.05	1.04	0.95	0.87	0.85
Italy	1.43	1.42	1.35	1.30	1.24	1.20	1.09	0.95
Latvia	1.52	1.21	1.06	1.02	0.89	0.93	0.94	1.06
Lithuania	1.11	1.07	0.88	0.79	0.76	0.76	0.88	1.14
Luxembourg	0.39	0.40	0.47	0.39	0.38	0.38	0.39	0.47
Netherlands	1.35	1.42	1.34	1.26	1.23	1.16	1.15	1.16
Norway (c)	1.46	1.54	1.52	1.51	1.47	1.49	1.52	1.49
Poland	1.91	1.71	1.77	1.72	1.74	1.72	1.85	2.18
Portugal	1.42	1.53	1.49	1.49	1.41	1.44	1.30	1.39
Romania	1.44	1.33	1.24	1.28	1.22	1.28	1.35	1.44
Slovak Republic	1.46	1.52	1.27	1.09	1.10	0.99	0.99	1.12
Slovenia	1.49	1.59	1.61	1.30	1.18	1.06	0.98	0.95
Spain	1.14	1.13	1.03	0.94	1.04	0.92	0.91	0.89
Turkey	1.97	2.06	1.93	1.76	1.78	1.75	1.70	1.69
United Kingdom	2.44	2.51	2.51	2.42	2.20	2.30	2.20	2.07
<b>NATO - Europe *</b>	<b>1.69</b>	<b>1.70</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>1.56</b>	<b>1.53</b>	<b>1.51</b>	<b>1.47</b>	<b>1.43</b>
Canada	1.28	1.39	1.16	1.23	1.09	0.99	1.02	1.00
United States	5.04	5.32	4.81	4.77	4.42	4.09	3.79	3.62
<b>North America</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>4.94</b>	<b>4.46</b>	<b>4.42</b>	<b>4.09</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>3.37</b>
<b>NATO - Total *</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>3.31</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>2.98</b>	<b>2.82</b>	<b>2.66</b>	<b>2.51</b>	<b>2.42</b>
Croatia	#	-11.1	-6.4	3.5	-6.4	-5.0	-4.6	-1.0
Czech Republic	0.8	10.2	-13.6	-14.9	-2.2	-3.1	-4.8	5.6
Denmark	3.8	-6.0	6.5	-6.8	3.1	-8.3	-4.4	2.3
Estonia	0.6	-13.4	-3.3	6.2	17.9	2.4	4.7	7.3
France (b)	-1.9	-13.7	-0.9	-2.9	0.6	0.0	-1.1	-0.9
Germany	-4.7	2.3	1.4	-1.9	2.9	-6.3	-1.3	0.3
Greece	10.2	3.3	-18.1	-17.8	-11.2	-6.6	1.2	10.1
Hungary	-4.6	-12.1	-8.0	3.1	-2.8	-6.7	-4.8	0.3
Italy	4.3	-5.7	-3.7	-3.2	-6.8	-5.1	-9.8	-12.4
Latvia	1.7	-31.8	-15.8	2.3	-9.5	8.3	3.1	15.6
Lithuania	-0.2	-17.5	-16.8	-4.3	-0.9	4.7	19.0	31.9
Luxembourg	-32.2	-2.5	26.0	-14.7	-3.7	3.0	7.2	25.3
Netherlands	-1.3	1.4	-4.2	-4.9	-2.8	-6.0	0.2	2.6
Norway (c)	0.1	3.6	-1.1	0.5	0.4	1.6	4.3	-0.3
Poland	-8.6	9.4	7.3	2.0	2.7	-0.1	11.5	21.7
Portugal	3.1	5.0	-1.4	-1.5	-9.6	1.5	-8.7	8.6
Romania	2.8	-14.3	-7.3	4.5	-4.1	8.4	8.6	10.0
Slovak Republic	4.2	-1.7	-12.0	-12.2	2.3	-8.6	3.2	16.6
Slovenia	7.0	-1.7	2.4	-18.8	-11.9	-10.5	-4.8	-0.4
Spain	2.2	-4.6	-8.9	-9.7	7.6	-12.8	0.5	1.0
Turkey	8.8	-0.7	2.5	-1.1	2.4	-3.7	-0.1	2.6
United Kingdom	4.8	-1.4	1.4	-1.7	-8.2	6.8	-1.3	-3.5
<b>NATO - Europe *</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>-3.3</b>	<b>-1.5</b>	<b>-3.2</b>	<b>-1.9</b>	<b>-1.3</b>	<b>-1.3</b>	<b>-0.3</b>
Canada	5.5	5.7	-14.1	9.5	-8.8	-7.4	5.1	-0.2
United States	21.4	2.7	-7.2	0.7	-5.4	-6.0	-5.1	-2.0
<b>North America</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>-7.4</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>-5.5</b>	<b>-6.1</b>	<b>-4.9</b>	<b>-1.9</b>
<b>NATO - Total *</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>-5.8</b>	<b>-0.2</b>	<b>-4.6</b>	<b>-4.6</b>	<b>-3.9</b>	<b>-1.5</b>

NATO's arrangements are for each member country to contribute two percent of GNP to defense expenditures. As the table below indicates, few countries are meeting this agreement. The United States' contributions amount to over three percent, which given America's huge economy, makes up for much of the money not coming from the underperformers.

Mr. Trump and President Obama are correct about many European countries not pulling their weight. But Mr. Trump's suggestion that the United States decision to perhaps not defend NATO

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_01/20160129\\_160128-pr-2016-11-eng.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_01/20160129_160128-pr-2016-11-eng.pdf).

allies because they are behind on their “payments into the NATO kitty” is irresponsible. This statement undermines the concept of deterrence. If the potential use of a deterrent is believable, it is more likely that it will not have to be used. Trump’s statements undermine this idea.



