

NATO burden sharing 1949-2013: is it time to leave?

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Abstract

This paper studies an (possible) exit dilemma against a background of burden sharing theories on NATO. It asks whether it would be possible to envisage NATO's most prominent member, the US, to exit - as in actually leave - NATO in the near future. To investigate the possibility of a US exit strategy, we will take stock of the member states' burden sharing behaviour over the period 1949-2013, paying special attention to 1990-2013. From our the empirical research it transpires the US carry the heaviest burden by far, but as to the question whether this means they may be expected to exit NATO on the short-term there appear to be some other issues to consider. Perhaps more importantly, European NATO members may ask themselves whether an overpaying and over-contributing US indeed suits the European self-interests best. As, by allowing the US to carry the heaviest burden, consequentially, the European partners are allowing the US to a very large extent to govern transatlantic security and defence, including Europe's own. The exact benefits derived by the US, as a result of being NATO's most prominent member, are probably manifold and cannot be measured by conducting defence economic research only. However, to us it seems recommendable to go out and attempt to get a grasp on these benefits, if only to make clear to apparently free-riding NATO members that what may seem like a good (i.e., the cheapest) deal, perhaps, should be considered penny-wise and pound-foolish.