

Europeans Pay More Than Their Fair Share

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One would expect that in anticipation of meeting with the heads of NATO's 29 nations, our so-called president would at least learn some basic facts about this nearly 70-year-old alliance.

Instead, an ignorant and boorish Trump stunned these leaders with a lie that most NATO countries are financial dead beats. He claimed that "many of these nations owe massive amounts of money from past years." With regard to NATO's finances, these nations don't owe anything.

NATO Nations Promised to Increase Defense Budgets

In 2006, under pressure from the U. S., NATO countries promised that they would increase their defense budgets to 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). After the end of the Cold War in 1989, many of them had cashed in the peace dividend and diverted funds to social programs.

The Great Recession of 2008—largely caused by Anglo-American bankers, politicians, and economists—caused havoc with budgets around the world, and by 2016 only five NATO nations had met the 2 percent goal.

Contrary to Trump's claim, it is not U. S. taxpayers who will pay for these extra weapons; rather, it is the citizens of 24 NATO nations themselves. In 2016 22 of the them did increase their defense budgets by an average 3.8 percent, and they all have promised to meet the 2 percent goal by 2024.

Europeans Have Different Defense Needs than the U. S.

The NATO nations could argue that their defense needs and areas of concern are different than those of the U. S. Even so they agreed to send troops to Afghanistan, far outside the North Atlantic. (All together NATO members have lost 1,134 soldiers there.) They have also done their fair share of peace keeping around the world, most recently in the Balkans.

It is the Americans, not the Europeans, who have taken on the defense of the Persian Gulf and the Western Pacific. It stands to reason that the U. S. military budget would be twice the portion of GDP than European defense outlays.

From the War Department to Defense and Foreign Aid

After the United Nations outlawed "wars of aggression," the U. S. War Department was renamed the Defense Department in 1947. (Not to be rushed, the Brits changed their War Office to the Ministry of Defense in 1963.) Presumably, the idea was that the soft power of diplomacy and development aid would replace the hard power of armed intervention.

The European nations have followed this principle much more consistently than the U. S. We did fund the selfless and wildly successful Marshall Plan that rebuilt Europe, and then we lost 36,914 soldiers defending South Korea against Soviet-backed aggression.

The State Department continued to engage in good-will projects around the world (George W's AIDS fund was a huge success in Africa), but the Defense Department started many unnecessary wars in Asia, Central America, and the Middle East.

Defense Spending Has More Waste and Corruption

For the sake of this argument let us count the waste and corruption in foreign aid and military expenditures the same, even though I believe that there is much more in the latter. For example, what was gained, except for shock and awe and a cost of \$220 million, from Clinton's 1998 missile strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan and Trump's recent missile launch in Syria? An investigation of the Sudanese site revealed that the facility was not used for chemical weapons production.

Foreign Aid: U. S. .17 Percent of GDP vs. Sweden's 1.4 Percent

The U. S. spends a paltry .17 percent of its GDP on foreign aid, and the Trump administration has plans to reduce that amount by gutting the State Department's budget. A specific target may be the Office of Religion and Global Affairs. There are unfilled positions in programs tasked with curbing anti-Semitism and preventing radicalization in the Muslim world.

The 28-member European Union, which, with some exceptions overlaps NATO, budgets on average .47 percent of GDP to foreign aid. Sweden, which is in the EU but not in NATO, allocates 1.4 percent and Norway is next highest at 1.05 percent, followed by Luxembourg (.93%), Denmark (.85%), Netherlands (.76%), United Kingdom (.71%), Finland (.56%), Switzerland (.52%), and Germany (.52%).

Sweden Takes a Record Number of War Refugees

Sweden has also taken in a record number of refugees. With a population of 9.8 million, the compassionate Swedes accepted 150,273 asylum seekers from May 2015 to April 2016. This number is 1.5 percent of Sweden's population.

During that same period the U. S. accepted 150,875 asylum seekers, and we would have to accept 4.7 million to match the Swedes. From the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 to 2014, we received only 115,000 Iraqi refugees, while Sweden admitted 78,000, 40 percent Assyrian Christians. They are now the second largest immigrant population after the Finns.

Under Saddam Hussein Christians were safe and respected (his foreign minister was a Christian), but now their numbers have dropped from 1.4 million in 2003 to 275,000 today. Bush's invasion incited a civil war between Sunnis and Shia, and both sides were radicalized as a result. Should Sweden send Bush, Cheney, et al. a bill for giving sanctuary to these good folks?

Sweden is Not an Innocent Player

Sweden is not a completely innocent player on the world stage. Most people don't know that it is the third largest arms exporter per capita after Israel and Russia. Saab went out of the car business in 2012, but it still produces 50 percent of the weapons sold abroad, most of them to third-world dictators.

All is not well with some of Sweden's refugees, and the Swedish government has been forced to spend half of its foreign aid to take care of them. Some young Muslims have turned to crime, many others cannot find work, and most are tired of waiting for their applications to be approved. As a result, some of them have decided to return to their home countries. If those places are safe, then this is obviously the best solution.

Germany's War Refugees: 890,000 in 2015 Alone

In absolute numbers Germany has accepted the most refugees: 890,000 in 2015 alone (1 percent of its population). The total number of Syrian refugees in Germany at the end of 2016 was 567,000. As with all German refugees, these Syrians commit crimes at same rate as citizens, and only nine have been arrested for suspected terrorist activities. In July 2016, Syrian refugee Jaber Albakr, on the run from federal police, was caught and held by other Syrians until authorities arrived to detain him.

Have the French and British Paid Their Fair Share?

A case can be made for sending bills to the British and the French for setting up Syria and Iraq for political failure. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, France and Great Britain divided up the area, drawing artificial boundaries and pitting one faction against another.

The French claimed Lebanon and Syria, and the British took over Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, and the Gulf States. The British supported Sunni minority rule in Baghdad, setting the stage for civil war between Sunnis and Shias and the rise of Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Former French President Hollande promised that his country would accept 30,000 Syrian refugees for the years 2015-2016, but French records show that there were only 3,562 Syrians who had applied for asylum.

In 2015 only 2,609 Iraqis had registered in Britain, and only 8,000 Syrians have been received since 2011. Furthermore, 64 percent of all requests for asylum in the last decade have been rejected.

One could argue that Sweden has a good reparations case against Britain, and Germany could launch an equally strong complaint against the French. The German empire was focused primarily on Africa, and two tribes in Namibia are now making claims against Germany for allegations of genocide at the turn of the 20th Century.

Defense Department: Climate Change is Very Real

The Defense Department has done something right: it is seriously preparing for climate change. In a report (July 29, 2015), which will be difficult for Trump to refute or dismiss (although he will try), the authors conclude that "global climate change will aggravate problems such as poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffectual leadership and weak political institutions that threaten stability in a number of countries." Just one example: with rising sea levels it is essential to know whether Marines can land on a foreign beach any time in the future.

A group of retired military have written a report, which concludes that the U. S. is falling behind China and Europe in clean energy, which they believe is essential for national security.

One of the authors, retired Lt. Gen. Richard Zilmer, states: “If you agree that energy drives an economy and the economy drives the ability of a nation to have a strong diplomatic arm and a strong military arm and a strong national security posture, with this change in energy, sourcing and distribution, we run the risk of becoming junior partners in the relationship.” China and Europe are far ahead of the U. S., and we will fall further behind after Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris climate accords.

Trump Refuses to Reaffirm NATO’s Article 5

In his speech at NATO headquarters Trump refused to reaffirm our nation’s commitment to Article 5 of the NATO treaty. This provision requires NATO to come to the aid of any member country that has been attacked. Significantly, the only time this provision has been invoked was after the 9/11 on the U. S. Presumably, Trump will not make this commitment until all member nations “pay up.”

This is one of the most brazen, irresponsible, and outrageous examples of Trump’s “America First” policy. This refusal gives comfort to Vladimir Putin, who would very much like a weaker NATO, and it puts fear in the hearts of those living in the small NATO countries of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, right on Russia’s door step.

An editorial in the Kremlin-supported “RT” news outlet says it all: “In Europe, Donald Trump is Making Russia Great Again.”

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