Towards a 'post-American' alliance?
NATO burden-sharing after Libya

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On 31 October 2011 NATO successfully ended its seven-month military mission in Libya (Operation Unified Protector). Coalition air strikes were instrumental in protecting civilians and ousting the Qadhafi regime. In terms of alliance politics, the operation also seemed to reflect a new transatlantic burden-sharing model. The United States, the most powerful military actor within NATO, decided to play only a supporting role, forcing some European allies, predominantly France and Britain, to take the lead. Consequently, some commentators saw the Libya campaign as a 'historical milestone' for the Atlantic alliance and a potential model for future NATO burden-sharing.[1] The US government seemed to share this view. In a speech in Brussels in October 2011, acting Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta described the Libya operation as an example of a more equal transatlantic burden-sharing arrangement. He also emphasized that the current level of US commitment to the alliance was unsustainable owing to the significant pressure on the US defence budget.[2] In June that year his predecessor as Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, had also called for better burden-sharing across the Atlantic. Specifically, he criticized the lack of defence spending on the part of most European allies and predicted a 'dim, if not dismal, future' for the alliance if this trend is not reversed.[3] NATO's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, has also called for members of the alliance to make renewed efforts to come to a better burden-sharing arrangement whereby European allies invest more in 'smart defense', with its emphasis on the pooling and sharing of military resources.[4]

Against this background, it is critically important to assess if we are really witnessing the emergence of a new NATO burden-sharing arrangement. Is Libya indeed a model for future NATO operations? After all, US calls for greater European defence commitments are as old as the alliance itself. Some might therefore argue that recent events indicate the repetition of a transatlantic ritual rather

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[1] Brian Knowlton, 'In Libyan conflict, European power was felt', *New York Times*, 20 Oct. 2011.
[2] US Department of Defense, 'Carnegie Europe (NATO)', speech by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta, Brussels, 5 Oct. 2011, http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1618, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.
[3] US Department of Defense, 'The security and defense agenda (future of NATO)', speech by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Brussels, 10 June 2011, http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.
[4] Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'NATO after Libya: the Atlantic alliance in austere times', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 4, 2011, pp. 2–6.

than a substantive US policy change.[5] This article will argue that there is indeed a new dynamic in the transatlantic security relationship which makes the current imbalance between the US and its allies unsustainable over the long run. Changing US strategic interests, finite resources and a generational change are all making Washington's political elite ever more sceptical about the value of the alliance. While the US will certainly maintain an interest in NATO as an instrument of its foreign and security policy, its willingness to lead it in operations of lesser national interest will diminish.

That said, the article also finds that the Libya operation does not provide a template for future NATO burden-sharing in practice. Not only did it expose serious deficits among European allies in conducting modern military campaigns, but some major European allies refused to participate at all. Further, the mission's restricted scope and duration limit the guidance it can provide in terms of future NATO operations. Thus it is doubtful whether such 'European coalitions of the willing' organized around France and Britain can provide a real transatlantic burden-sharing model for the future. Moreover, US calls for European allies to increase their defence spending will probably remain fruitless. NATO therefore still lacks a sustainable burden-sharing model which could reduce the risk of a further disintegration of the alliance. What is needed is a more pragmatic burden-sharing arrangement centred upon active US support for a 'post-American' alliance, which puts increasing emphasis on greater European defence cooperation, the development of alliance-wide assets and niche capabilities, and an enhanced role for partner states.

A very short history of NATO burden-sharing

Burden-sharing debates have always been part of NATO. In the past, they usually revolved around disagreements about the 'fair' sharing of costs and complaints about 'free-riding' by some member states. During the Cold War, those disputes focused primarily on national contributions to NATO's defences against the Soviet Union. As early as 1951, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR), warned European allies that America's disproportionate military deployment was not sustainable in the long run. Throughout the Cold War, the US repeatedly demanded a more equal sharing of burdens but never carried out its threats to disengage from the alliance if this did not come about.[6]

It refrained for good reasons. Quite often calls for greater burden-sharing were more for domestic consumption, that is, a tool of US administrations to deal with a sceptical Congress, than an expression of real strategic concerns. In addition, economic theories of alliances suggest that the largest member of an alliance usually devotes a greater share of its income to defence than smaller member

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[5] Olaf Theiler, 'NATO tensions no cause for alarm', *Atlantic Council*, 18 March 2010.
[6] Alan Tonelson, 'NATO burden-sharing: promises, promises', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 23: 3, 2000, pp. 31–8.

states simply because it serves its interests to do so.[7] That is to say, the US benefited considerably from its hegemonic position in NATO during the Cold War, using its dominant role in European security to 'secure a wider range of commercial and political advantages'.[8] America also had global interests, requiring a globally oriented (and more expensive) force posture. In addition, US complaints about relatively low defence spending on the part of some allies, such as West Germany, not only disregarded the specific restraints on German military power after 1945, but also overlooked the fact that the Federal Republic contributed roughly 500,000 troops to the defence of the western alliance.

Quantitative indicators, such as defence expenditure as a share of a nation's gross domestic product (GDP)—an indicator also commonly used in the contemporary debate on transatlantic burden-sharing—were also of limited value. This particular indicator, for example, disregards differences in the efficiency of forces. Pure quantification also overlooks qualitative indicators such as the 'strength of a nation's commitment to NATO as reflected in its willingness to support the alliance leader'.[9] During the Cold War the alliance was seen as embodying a wider sense of an 'Atlantic Community'. Despite disparities in resources and capabilities, its member states were intimately bound together by shared values and history, and a powerful sense of common purpose. Thus, not only did the United States benefit from its hegemonic position within the alliance, it also benefited from the sense of community that was generated, reflecting and embodying its own values of liberalism and democracy. Although the alliance's focus on deterring the existential threat posed by the Warsaw Pact inevitably invited 'free-riding' by some alliance members, such tensions were contained within the transatlantic community.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had a substantial impact on NATO's burden-sharing debate during the 1990s. In the expectation of a 'peace dividend', most allies during the 1990s drastically cut their armed forces and defence budgets. For example, the US halved its defence spending from 6 per cent of GDP in 1989 to 3 per cent in 2000. During the same period, on average the five largest European allies (UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain) cut their defence expenditure from 3.1 per cent to 2.0 per cent.[10] As a result, the gap in defence spending as a percentage of GDP across the Atlantic narrowed. Furthermore, NATO adjusted its goals and mission spectrum. 'Out-of-area' operations and efforts to integrate Central and East European countries into a new European security architecture were added to the alliance's agenda.[11] Some European allies also contributed to UN peacekeeping operations, reducing the salience of the defence burden gap within the Atlantic alliance.[12]

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[7] See Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, 'An economic theory of alliances', *Review of Economics and Statistics* 48: 3, 1966, pp. 266–79.

[8] Malcolm Chalmers, 'The Atlantic burden-sharing debate—widening or fragmenting?', *International Affairs* 77: 3, 2001, p. 573.

[9] Keith Hartley and Todd Sandler, 'NATO burden-sharing: past and future', *Journal of Peace Research* 36: 6, 1999, pp. 669.

[10] Chalmers, 'The Atlantic burden-sharing debate', p. 574.

[11] NATO, The Alliance's New Strategic Concept, 7–8 Nov. 1991, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

[12] Jyoti Khanna and Todd Sandler, 'Conscription, peace-keeping and foreign assistance: NATO burden-sharing

However, while defence spending disappeared (temporarily) from the transatlantic agenda, the US-led intervention in Iraq in 1990–91 indicated a widening gap in military capabilities across the Atlantic. For NATO this became a more serious problem during the alliance's engagement in the western Balkans, which exposed the inability of European nations to resolve the crisis without US diplomatic and military power. The resulting military operations in Bosnia (1995–6) and subsequently in Kosovo (1999) reflected the reality that most European allies were no longer able to operate effectively alongside their American ally. Operation Allied Force in Kosovo was particularly telling in that the US dominated all aspects of the campaign, highlighting the deficiency of most European armed forces in modern war-fighting.[13]

The campaign left huge doubts on both sides as to whether NATO could actually operate effectively in future military operations, with the US internally concluding that it would never fight another cumbersome 'war by committee'.[14] At the same time, however, the US was eager to retain its leadership position in NATO. The Balkans represented the alliance's first real test of its ability to conduct real-world military operations and to rise to the challenges of the post-Cold War security environment. Thus the US had significant interests at stake in ensuring NATO's success. The Clinton administration's decision to support the Kosovo war basically reaffirmed America's commitment to the alliance and its claim to leadership in European security affairs.

That said, in the absence of an existential threat to member states, the structural imbalances within the alliance displayed during these campaigns took on a new quality. Where previously the existential threat posed by the Soviet Union ensured that such imbalances were contained within NATO, after the end of the Cold War alliance unity became strained as NATO's new missions dramatically reinforced the degree of European dependence on the United States. As a result, debates over burden-sharing resurfaced after Kosovo and began to threaten the wider cohesion of the alliance. Such debates would take on a new urgency following the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

The Bush years and the limits of US leadership

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the US administration of President George W. Bush was inclined to avoid 'entrapment' into traditional alliance politics. This approach reflected not only the experience of the Kosovo campaign, but also the administration's more unilateralist orientation. While Washington welcomed NATO's evocation of Article 5 (collective defence) in response to the attacks, it nevertheless bypassed the alliance when it came to selecting the 'coalition of the willing' that toppled the Taleban from power. While the invocation of Article 5

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in the post-Cold War era', *Defence and Peace Economics* 8: 1, 1997, p. 118.

[13] John E. Peters, Stuart E. Johnson, Nora Bensahel, Timothy Liston and Traci Williams, *European contributions to Operation Allied Force: implications for transatlantic cooperation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001).

[14] Ivo H. Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon, *Winning ugly: NATO's war to save Kosovo* (Washington DC: Brookings, 2000).

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was politically useful for the US, the disparity in capabilities left policy-makers in Washington questioning the military utility of many of their European allies for operations in Afghanistan. As a result, the new currency in the US-led 'war against terror' was to be loose coalitions of the willing and able, rather than formal alliances.[15] This policy was reinforced by America's decision to intervene in Iraq in 2003 (Operation Iraqi Freedom) without the support of major European allies such as Germany and France.

Yet the Iraq operation also showed that US leadership in NATO was no longer uncontested within the alliance. Despite US efforts to get NATO consent for the Iraq operation, key allies were not willing to follow. This must have come as an unpleasant surprise to the Bush administration, which moved to repair some of the damage done to its leadership position in NATO. In 2003 Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pressed for the development of a NATO Response Force (NRF), designed to develop more European expeditionary forces for out-of-area operations in order to generate greater burden-sharing. US support for the NRF also reflected the sad reality that the transatlantic military capabilities gap had actually widened.[16] This fact was only reconfirmed when NATO took over command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in August 2003. Although the alliance took on a greater share of the burden in Afghanistan, this operation did nothing to suggest that a more equitable burden-sharing relationship between the US and its European allies had emerged. Indeed, if anything, the ISAF mission reinforced the notion that NATO was moving towards a 'tiered' alliance, with the US and just two or three key European allies contributing the vast majority of troops and capabilities. A number of nations also placed significant caveats on the use of their forces, generating bitter arguments within the alliance about the distribution of risks and burdens. Finally, the operation re-emphasized the huge problems faced by most European allies in attempting to participate in the conduct and maintenance of a complex military campaign such as that in Afghanistan.[17]

The Bush administration's ability to encourage European allies to shoulder more of the burden in Afghanistan was hampered by a diminution in the credibility of US leadership following the Iraq War. During President Bush's second term the US re-engaged with the alliance on the basis of a more nuanced understanding of NATO's value, asking its allies to get involved in Iraq and to increase their engagement in Afghanistan—an approach that met with mixed success. After 2003 many European allies remained wary about US leadership and interest in the alliance; in their view, a US leadership model based on the unilateral use of unmatched power had limited attractions.[18] As a consequence, European allies agreed only to assist with a NATO training mission in Iraq (NTM-I) in 2004. In Afghanistan, the allies

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[15] Daniel Byman, 'Remaking alliances for the war on terror', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29: 5, 2006, pp. 767–811.
[16] Stephen J. Coonen, 'The widening military capabilities gap between the United States and Europe: does it matter?', *Parameters*, 36: 3, 2006, pp. 67–84.
[17] John Sperling and Mark Webber, 'NATO: from Kosovo to Kabul', *International Affairs* 85: 3, May 2009, pp. 491–511.
[18] See the contribution by Christoph Bertram in G. Lindstrom and B. Schmitt, eds, *One year on: lessons from Iraq*, Chaillot Paper 48 (Paris: European Institute for Security Studies, 2004), pp. 13–20.

agreed to widen ISAF's operational reach and to expand its mission spectrum in 2006; yet many were still reluctant to engage in a full-blown counterinsurgency operation. Moreover, by 2008 the credibility of US global leadership had suffered further, and significantly, owing to the difficulties Washington had experienced in translating tactical success in Afghanistan and Iraq into strategic victory. This strongly underlined the limits of American military power.[19] Thus the issue of NATO burden-sharing remained unresolved right up to the end of the Bush presidency. Obama's taking office in 2009, a change in US leadership welcomed by most European allies, provided a good opportunity to revitalize transatlantic security relations.

Enter Obama

When US President Barack Obama came to power, he faced major challenges to US leadership. He inherited two unpopular and messy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a budget deficit exceeding US$500 billion, and a belief among many analysts that the world had entered into a 'post-American era'. In their view, the 'unipolar moment' was coming to an end and the US was faced with an almost inevitable decline, undermining its ability to lead.[20] Even before his presidency, Obama had vowed to 'renew American leadership' by promoting greater cooperation with allies and partners. However, although he aimed at fostering a renewed spirit of mutual trust and respect within NATO, Obama also repeated familiar claims about the lack of fair burden-sharing between the US and its European allies. Citing NATO's problems in Afghanistan in terms of lagging military capabilities, he announced he would 'rally our NATO allies to contribute more troops to collective security operations and to invest more in reconstruction and stabilization capabilities'.[21] Shortly after the new administration was installed, senior US officials reconfirmed this approach. For example, as early as February 2009 Vice-President Joseph Biden warned NATO allies that in return for the 'new tone' adopted by the Obama administration, the US would expect more from its partners.[22]

Obama's aim to encourage or even enforce greater burden-sharing on the part of European allies was in one sense a natural manifestation of the administration's broader strategic approach. As Daniel Drezner has recently argued, the current US government has pursued two grand strategies: one of 'multilateral retrenchment', which aims at minimizing US overseas commitments and shifting burdens more onto allies and partners; and one of 'counterpunching', which strives to reassert

[19] James M. Lindsay, 'George W. Bush, Barack Obama and the future of US global leadership', *International Affairs* 87: 4, July 2011, pp. 768–71.
[20] Typical examples of this view are Fareed Zakaria, *The post-American world* (New York: Norton, 2008), and Kishore Mahbubani, *The new Asian hemisphere: the irresistible shift of global power to the east* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).
[21] Barack Obama, 'Renewing American leadership', *Foreign Affairs* 86: 4, 2007, p. 12.
[22] 'Remarks by Vice President Biden at 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy', 7 Feb. 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/RemarksbyVicePresidentBidenat45thMunichConferenceonSecurityPolicy/, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

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America's position and aims to reassure allies and partners.[23] While he sees the latter approach as having replaced the former, this article argues that the two coexist. While the grand strategy of multilateral retrenchment applies to regions of lesser importance to US strategic interests, the 'counterpunching' approach is at play in regions of growing strategic importance, particularly the Asia–Pacific region.

The Obama administration came into office with a clear sense of the shifting balance of international politics towards the Asia–Pacific. The rise of China poses a major challenge to US primacy in Asia, with allies and partners in the region increasingly concerned about US security commitments.[24] Senior US officials have accordingly made it very clear that America will stand up to China's challenge to US leadership in the region. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted in November 2011 that the 'future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the center of the action'.[25] In the same month, President Obama underscored the strategic importance of the Asia–Pacific for US strategic interests, reassuring Asian allies that impending cuts in the US defence budget would not impact negatively on the US strategic posture in the region, which would in fact be strengthened.[26] Conversely, for the US, 'Europe is no longer an object of security concern as it was during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath'.[27] Instead, the US expects that the Europeans will shoulder more of the burden, particularly in their own strategic backyard. Thus, 'the US will not hesitate to lead "wars of necessity" in defence of European allies. But it will not take the lead in "wars of choice" in or around Europe.'[28] As will be discussed below, this logic dominated Obama's approach to the NATO operation in Libya.

However, despite Obama's call on the Europeans to revitalize the transatlantic security relationship, little actually changed in the run-up to the intervention in Libya. While European allies welcomed Obama's new style, they were less willing to provide the kinds of military capabilities to the campaign in Afghanistan that the US administration had hoped for. As well as placing a greater emphasis on the civilian capabilities and resources European allies could contribute, Obama's new Afghanistan strategy of 2009 was also based on a short-term increase in combat troops and a more offensive military strategy to break the insurgency's momentum.[29] Although European governments supported this new direction politically,

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[23] Daniel W. Drezner, 'Does Obama have a grand strategy? Why we need doctrines in uncertain times', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 4, 2011, p. 58.

[24] Aaron L. Friedberg, *A contest for supremacy: China, America, and the struggle for mastery in Asia* (New York: Norton, 2011).

[25] Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific century', *Foreign Policy*, no. 189, Nov. 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

[26] The White House, 'Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament', Canberra, 17 Nov. 2011, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

[27] Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney, *Towards a post-American Europe: a power audit of US–EU relations* (Cambridge: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2009), p. 11.

[28] Tomas Valasek, 'What Libya says about the future of the transatlantic alliance' (London: Centre for European Reform Essays, July 2011), p. 2. See http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/essay_libya_july11-146.pdf.

[29] The White House, 'Remarks by the President in address to the nation on the way forward in Afghanistan and

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many responded with only modest troop increases, prompting one commentator to suggest that the administration's message had been 'lost in translation'.[30] This European reticence was attributable in part to the realization that the President was reluctant to commit significant long-term resources to the conflict for domestic reasons.[31] Aware that Obama's aim was to get out as quickly as possible, rendering his Afghanistan 'strategy' little more than an 'alibi' for a short-term exit,[32] European allies quickly seized the opportunity to prepare for their own 'exit' soon after 2014, since most of their domestic audiences now favoured withdrawal from what had become a very unpopular conflict.[33]

Obama also failed in his efforts to persuade European allies to spend more on defence. While the US had significantly increased defence spending since 2001, in most European states defence expenditure had actually declined over these years. Also, in the absence of a perceived existential military threat, and despite several initiatives such as the NRF, European governments had only modestly improved their expeditionary capabilities.[34] The result was that by early 2010 the prospect of a more equitable burden-sharing within the alliance seemed further away than ever, prompting scathing criticism from Gates. In a speech to NATO ministers in February 2010 he lamented the 'demilitarization of Europe', suggesting that it had become 'an impediment to achieving real security and lasting peace in the 21st century'. Citing continuing funding and capability shortfalls, Gates left no one in any doubt as to the administration's frustration.[35] It was thus against a backdrop of growing frustration and tensions that the alliance commenced Operation Unified Protector in Libya in March 2011.

The Libya campaign: a new role model?

The crisis in Libya represented a good opportunity for a rebalancing of burden-sharing within the alliance. It took place within Europe's immediate neighbourhood and the US had only minimal interests at stake. Initially, US prevarication over what role to play in the crisis caught some European allies and international observers by surprise. However, as the situation on the ground deteriorated and Britain and France called for the imposition of a no-fly zone, Obama began pushing for a broader UN Security Council resolution that would authorize military force against Qadhafi's forces. The result was Operation Odyssey Dawn, a series of air

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Pakistan', West Point, 1 Dec. 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

[30] Will Englund, 'Obama's lukewarm start with Europe', *National Journal*, 13 March 2010, http://www.nationaljournal.com/njmagazine/nj_20100313_6226.php, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

[31] See Bob Woodward, *Obama's wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

[32] Hew Strachan, 'Strategy or alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the operational level of war', *Survival* 52: 5, 2010, pp. 157–82.

[33] Richard Auxier, 'Few in NATO support call for additional forces in Afghanistan', Pew Research Center, 31 Aug. 2009, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1325/little-support-in-nato-for-afghanistan-troop-increases, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

[34] Anand Menon, 'European defence policy from Lisbon to Libya', *Survival* 53: 3, 2011, pp. 75–90.

[35] Ian Traynor, '"Pacification" of Europe is threat to security, US tells Nato', *Guardian*, 23 Feb. 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/23/pacification-europe-security-threat-us-nato, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

strikes commencing on 19 March, carried out by the US, UK and France but under US strategic command.

On 28 March Obama announced that the US would 'focus our unique capabilities on the front end of the operation and . . . transfer responsibility to our allies and partners'. After the first phase of operations, the US would move to a 'supporting role' to ensure that 'the risk and cost of this operation—to our military and to American taxpayers—will be reduced significantly'. He also stressed that 'real leadership created the conditions and coalitions for others to step up as well; to work with allies and partners so that they can bear their share of the burden and pay their share of the costs'.[36] The US approach to the campaign therefore reflected America's logic of a new transatlantic burden-sharing model in the light of a changed grand strategy. That is, the limited nature of US interests 'dictat[ed] a constrained U.S. response . . . the United States did what it had to (a U.S.-led campaign relying on air strikes) when it had to (preventing Qaddafi's forces from overrunning Benghazi), but then increasingly turned over responsibility to NATO and Arab allies in its "lead from behind" approach'.[37]

On 31 March, Washington transferred command and control to NATO. Although it continued to play a central role by providing critical military enablers such as in-flight refuelling and reconnaissance, a handful of European allies led by France and Britain, and supported by NATO partner countries, provided the bulk of the combat sorties. The US even withheld military capabilities such as the A-10 Thunderbolt II or AC-130 Spectre gunships which could have made a critical operational impact by providing close air support for ground troops and conducting precision attacks against ground targets. This reflected a new understanding of the US commitment to NATO operations of lesser strategic relevance in an age of resource constraints and shifting strategic priorities: 'Despite its established history of leading "coalitions of the willing", with commitments elsewhere and resource challenges of its own, the Libya campaign was a clear example of the US seeking to play a different role.'[38]

Some analysts have described this arrangement as proof of a 'new European–US military relationship'.[39] The Obama administration seemed to share this assessment. In the words of a senior US official at NATO, Operation Unified Protector 'was the kind of multilateral, affordable, effective endeavour that any foreign policy initiative aspires to'.[40] But was the Libya operation really a good model for future NATO burden-sharing in operations? A closer look at key strategic and operational aspects of the campaign leads to a more cautious conclusion.

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[36] The White House, 'Remarks by the President in address to the nation on Libya', 28 March 2011, http://www. whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/28/remarks-president-address-nation-libya, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.
[37] Clark A. Murdock and Becca Smith, 'The Libyan intervention: a study in U.S. grand strategy', in Craig Cohen and Josiane Gabel, eds, *Global forecast 2011: international security in times of uncertainty* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies), p. 62.
[38] Royal United Services Institute, *Accidental heroes: Britain, France and the Libya operation* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2011), p. 9.
[39] See e.g. Valasek, 'What Libya says', p. 2.
[40] Quoted in Mark Landler, 'For Obama, some vindication of approach to war', *New York Times*, 21 Oct. 2011, p. A16.

On the positive side, the operation has 'given the lie to the argument that the alliance has no place in the strategic realities of the post-Cold War world'.[41] NATO achieved its mission objectives at a time when it was severely stretched by commitments in Afghanistan. The mission also demonstrated that key European allies such as France and Britain were willing to 'step up' and take on a greater share of the burden. In this context, 'Libya shows Americans that Europe and Canada are not denuded, post-modern pacifists. In this battle, Europeans took the lead, demonstrating that they can and will use force when they have the political will to do so.'[42] The mission also demonstrated the efficacy of NATO's command and control structure, which was flexible enough to accommodate a range of non-NATO contributors. Finally, the Libya campaign showed the utility of the alliance's partnerships, with Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Jordan and Sweden playing key operational roles.

However, caution against too much optimism seems prudent. At the political level, one can argue that the Libya operation, far from being an exemplary model of a new burden-sharing model within the alliance, actually served to confirm NATO's trend towards becoming a more fragmented alliance, with member states increasingly taking an '*à la carte* approach to their alliance responsibilities'.[43] In recent years, the alliance has displayed characteristics of a 'multi-tier NATO', with different members holding different views on the alliance's strategic priorities.[44] This fragmentation has an impact upon NATO operations, with member states splitting into four main groups: 'those which have the right troops and weapons and view the given mission as central to their security; those with the right means but which take part out of solidarity; those which have real military forces but choose not to take part because they disagree with the mission; and those which simply do not have many meaningful forces to contribute'.[45]

The Libya operation displayed these very characteristics: (1) the UK and France pushed for a military operation which they saw as critical to European security; (2) the US did not regard the conflict as affecting its core national interest but still provided some limited leadership and participation; (3) Poland and Germany openly criticized the operation and did not take part; and (4) some members, as Gates pointed out in his June 2011 speech,[46] simply could not participate because they lacked the necessary capabilities for such operations. In the end, only 14 out of 28 members contributed military assets and only six European nations (Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Norway and Denmark) contributed to the strike mission— and one of those (Norway) pulled out of the air strikes during the campaign. The withdrawal of US strike aircraft and Washington's decision to 'take a back seat'

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[41] James Joyner, 'Back in the saddle: how Libya helped NATO get its groove back', Foreignpolicy.com, 15 April 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/15/back_in_the_saddle, accessed 15 Dec. 2011.
[42] Damon M. Wilson, 'Learning from Libya: the right lessons for NATO', Atlantic Council, 2011, p. 2, http://www.acus.org/files/publication_pdfs/403/090111_ACUS_LearningLibya_Wilson.PDF, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.
[43] 'A troubling victory', *The Economist*, 3 Sept. 2011.
[44] Timo Noetzel and Benjamin Schreer, 'Does a multi-tier NATO matter? The Atlantic alliance and the process of strategic change', *International Affairs* 85: 2, March 2009, pp. 211–26.
[45] Valasek, 'What Libya says'.
[46] US Department of Defense, 'The security and defense agenda (future of NATO)'.

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prompted domestic criticism that America was 'eschewing its indispensable role of leadership'.[47] Others criticized the US for doing precisely what it had so often criticized European allies for doing, 'help[ing] to legitimize the corrosive practice of allies picking and choosing what they will and won't do as part of NATO operations'.[48]

NATO also struggled in the beginning to secure leadership of the operation. After the commencement of military operations, France tried to block NATO involvement, arguing that this would alienate Arab countries. Turkey for some time blocked moves to give the alliance command and control responsibilities, out of anger at not having been invited to Paris for a meeting on the crisis. There were major rifts between Germany and its allies over Berlin's refusal to participate.[49] Thus, for the 'first ten days this was a loosely coordinated series of national operations. Only . . . after a lot of political wrangling did NATO take command of the operation.'[50] According to one NATO official, not enough energy was expended on getting key nations on board, and in this context Libya 'can't be a model for future operations'.[51]

Furthermore, European leadership was subject to significant operational limitations. The campaign as a whole remained heavily dependent on the US to provide Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. In particular, European nations had to rely on US joint surveillance target attack radar system (JSTARS) and airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft; and the US flew around 30 of the 40 air-refuelling tankers. The Pentagon estimated that Europeans owed $222 million for US assistance, with the total cost of operations for the US reaching $896 million.[52] In sum, 'Europe's military capabilities fell far short of what was needed, even for such a limited fight.'[53] Italy even had to withdraw its carrier *Garibaldi* in the midst of the operation because of budgetary pressure.[54] It should be noted, too, that the operational demands of the Libya campaign were relatively low. The Libyan armed forces were no match for superior NATO air power and rebel forces on the ground, which were assisted by elements of coalition special forces. In more challenging operations the European allies might simply be incapable of taking the lead, even if they wanted to. Even the most militarily capable European allies, the UK and France, were strained against weak Libyan forces.[55]

In sum, it is not at all clear that the specific characteristics of the Libya campaign—a low-intensity, air-to-ground campaign with a limited set of objectives—

[47] 'Mr Gates's sermon', *Washington Post*, 14 June 2011, p. A18.
[48] Wilson, 'Learning from Libya', p. 3.
[49] Daniel Dombey and Peter Spiegel, 'Rift over command of Libya campaign', *Financial Times*, 21 March 2011.
[50] RUSI, *Accidental heroes*, p. 5.
[51] Author's interview with NATO official, NATO HQ, Brussels, 27 Oct. 2011.
[52] 'Early military lessons from Libya', *IISS Strategic Comments* 17, Sept. 2011.
[53] 'NATO's teachable moment', *New York Times*, 29 Aug. 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/opinion/natos-teachable-moment.html, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.
[54] 'Italy removes aircraft carrier from Libya campaign', *DefenseNews*, 7 July 2011, http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=7030819, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.
[55] See e.g. 'Future RAF missions under threat if Libyan intervention continues', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 June 2011. France also withdrew its aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* during the operation for maintenance reasons.

should serve as a benchmark for the future of NATO's burden-sharing. One could even argue that the 'military operation itself created an image of NATO's limitations rather than its power'.[56] Nevertheless, the US administration seems to have concluded that this model could be reapplied in the future. A senior US official at NATO argued that the 'enabling' model of US leadership has its merits: 'the US enabled the operation to take place using the instruments of NATO . . . We like the enabling model . . . each will contribute what they can to make it work . . . what is different is that we are no longer going to say we are going to lead and everyone will follow.'[57] Looking through the prism of Washington's shifting grand strategic design, outlined above, it seems likely that the 'enabling model' will become the preferred option for US administrations. The unresolved question, however, is whether this approach is sustainable within the context of a fragmented alliance and limited European leadership capacity.

Conclusion: towards a 'post-American' alliance?

Despite its limitations, the Libya operation will probably intensify the pressure on NATO to find a more sustainable burden-sharing arrangement. It is abundantly clear that the US is serious about forging a new model of burden-sharing. While the US is not 'turning away' from Europe, Europe is now a region of diminished strategic priority in the context of shifting patterns of world order. American administrations will also struggle domestically to justify underwriting European security to the same degree as previously. Faced with severe budget pressures, US politicians will find it harder to sustain support among the electorate for funding alliance operations. Projected US defence cuts of up to $1 trillion over the coming decade will inevitably lead to greater expectations of their European allies. For many members of the US Congress this implies a new approach to transatlantic leadership: 'We're entering a different era now, a more globally competitive era. And so we need to find opportunities to partner with others as opposed to always leading in every area.'[58]

Finally, generational change among the US political elite will have an impact on how American decision-makers look at the alliance. While many of those within the administration working on NATO policy represent continuity with previous administrations, there is also a new generation for whom the old transatlantic ties are simply less relevant. As a senior NATO official concedes, 'the younger decision makers in Washington and those who influence the decision makers don't have that NATO engagement, that strong attachment to the US in Europe in their DNA in the same way that the last generation did'.[59] US strategic doyen Henry Kissinger also sees a less Europhile generation of US leaders.[60] Moreover, NATO now has

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[56] Michael Clarke, *Curious victory for NATO in Libya* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2011), http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4E53CF030EB3B/, accessed 8 Feb. 2012.
[57] Author interview with US official, NATO HQ, Brussels, 27 Oct. 2011.
[58] Author interview with US congressman, Longworth House Office Building, Washington DC, 15 Oct. 2011.
[59] Author interview with NATO official, SHAPE, Mons, 15 July 2011.
[60] See interview with Henry Kissinger in 'Ich weiß nicht wie—aber die Europäer werden es schaffen', *Frankfurter*

an image problem in Washington. As the former US ambassador to NATO Kurt Volker has pointed out, when US policy elites speak about 'NATO' these days they are really speaking about the 'Europeans'—as if the US was no longer part of the alliance.[61]

For NATO, this generates a new sense of unease and insecurity. European allies are forced to confront the reality that a more mature and equitable relationship is essential if NATO is to remain a viable institution. To be sure, there is no generic model for future NATO burden-sharing in an alliance that is structurally more fragmented than ever. However, given the trends outlined above, European allies should assume greater 'ownership' of the alliance. They will need to become more pivotal players through greater defence collaboration and the development of alliance-wide and niche capabilities which will allow them to take the lead in future operations of the kind recently undertaken in Libya where the US will play an 'enabling' role. In much larger operations, Washington will continue to lead but will ask European allies to contribute important niche capabilities. In a sense, NATO needs to become a more 'post-American alliance', in which both European members and NATO partners take greater responsibility. Such a process would reflect the more general trend in transatlantic relations where European nations 'address transatlantic relations with a clearer eye and a harder head'.[62] To be sure, such a move towards a 'post-American' NATO does not, in any way, degrade US leadership within the alliance. But for the US a more 'Europeanized' alliance centred on enhanced burden-sharing and partnering makes sense in the context of its changing strategic priorities.

Of course, several obstacles would need to be overcome in order to arrive at such a new burden-sharing consensus. The key question is whether European allies will actually be able to deliver the necessary improved defence capabilities. There are reasons to remain sceptical about this. Defence downsizing across Europe casts doubt over most European allies' ability and/or willingness to invest in the kinds of capabilities the US would like to see. In fact, European allies seem to have embarked on a 'grand strategy of strategic restraint' which sees a lesser need for major defence investments to protect against the most likely threats to their interests. Highly likely, US complaints about European 'free-riding' will therefore fall on deaf ears with most European allies.[63] In fact, the current European economic crisis might make it even harder for European NATO members, including Britain and France, to spend more on defence even if some of them wanted to. In the wake of the global financial crisis, European NATO allies' defence expenditure is forecast to decline by 2.9 per cent (after adjusting for inflation) between 2010 and 2015. Even more worrying, the big three European NATO players are expected

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Allgemeine Zeitung, 23 Nov. 2011, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/f-a-z-gespraech-henry-kissinger-ich-weiss-nicht-wie-aber-die-europaeer-werden-es-schaffen-11538427.html, accessed 6 Feb. 2012.

61 Kurt Volker, 'Don't call it a comeback: four reasons why Libya doesn't equal success for NATO', *Foreign Policy*, no. 187, Aug. 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/08/23/dont_call_it_a_comeback, accessed 15 Dec. 2011.

62 Shapiro and Witney, 'Towards a post-American Europe', p. 14.

63 Christopher J. Fettweis, 'Free riding or restraint? Examining European grand strategy', *Comparative Strategy* 30: 4, 2011, pp. 316–32.

to reduce their defence expenditure during that period: Britain by 14 per cent, France by 2 per cent and Germany by as much as 21 per cent.[64] The real danger is that European allies will perceive the shrinking US defence budget as an invitation to spend even less on their own armed forces.

This trend might make it even harder for NATO to agree on a new burden-sharing model, particularly since NATO Secretary General Rasmussen's proposed solution of 'smart defence' will face limitations, if current practice is any guide to future developments. Despite widely recognized inefficiency in European capability development and repeated calls for 'sharing and pooling', it seems that even in the current era of financial austerity European governments are reluctant to engage in a much more systemic, multinational way of doing things.[65] To give a couple of practical examples: it took two years to get an agreement to deploy AWACS to Afghanistan, while the problems in generating agreement over an alliance-wide Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system has further exposed the limits of pooling and sharing. As Leon Panetta recently noted, not only is AGS crucial for improving the alliance's ISR capabilities, it is also 'a crucial symbol of alliance collaboration . . . Unless it is implemented successfully, the drive for similar, cost-effective, multinational approaches to capability development would be seriously undermined.'[66]

Further, there is a real risk of disintegration among European allies themselves, which could in turn fragment the alliance even further. As a RUSI report has pointed out: 'If future NATO operations are likely to be as ambiguous and vulnerable as [the Libya campaign], [with] success in this case principally dependent on the determination of France and Britain to act militarily, then bilateral and trilateral defence relations between the key European players may loom much larger in the future than their commitment to NATO, as such.'[67]

The Libya operation might therefore actually have fuelled the burden-sharing dispute among European allies, with lead nations feeling let down by those who did not contribute or participate. As Ben Barry has observed, the risk is that Libya 'will exacerbate existing military tensions within the alliance between nations who feel that they have shouldered more than their fair burden in Afghanistan and Libya, and others that have been far less willing to accept military and political risk'.[68]

Nevertheless, allies recognize that multinational cooperation and partnering are essential components of a new burden-sharing arrangement. Not only have countries such as Germany learned the political costs of choosing to remain on the sidelines,[69] many also acknowledge the need for a rebalancing within the

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[64] Stephen Fidler and Alistair Macdonald, 'Europeans retreat on defense spending', *Wall Street Journal*, 24 Aug. 2011.
[65] See Tomas Valasek, *Surviving austerity: the case for a new approach to EU military collaboration* (London: Centre for European Reform, April 2011).
[66] US Department of Defense, 'Carnegie Europe (NATO)', as delivered by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta, Brussels, 5 Oct. 2011, http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1618, accessed 15 Oct. 2011.
[67] RUSI, *Accidental heroes*, p. 13.
[68] Ben Barry, 'Libya's lessons', *Survival* 53: 5, 2011, p. 11.
[69] Author interview with German official, NATO HQ, 27 Oct. 2011.

alliance. In the end, any move towards a 'post-American' alliance and more equitable burden-sharing will require a change in mindset on the part of both the US and its allies. US leadership of NATO is culturally and structurally deeply embedded within the alliance. It is firmly anchored through its occupation of the SACEUR position at SHAPE, the wider US influence that permeates NATO's integrated military command, and the Allied Command Transformation based in Norfolk, Virginia. NATO also continues to provide the US with a significant degree of legitimacy that is of immense value, and many officials in Washington—and indeed Brussels—still regard the US as the 'indispensable' nation within the alliance. However, as noted above, while the new burden-sharing model does not mean a denial of US leadership of NATO—either by the US or by other allies—it does require a different kind of leadership. So long as the US continues to play a dominant leadership role in the alliance, it will reduce the incentives for European allies to step up their efforts. The strong words and warnings of Gates and Panetta, and the early signs of a greater European willingness to play a more active role, must therefore be backed up by a deeper-seated change in mindset as well as concrete actions and commitments. Only then will future alliance leaders be able to make the transition to a 'post-American' alliance and a more sustainable burden-sharing arrangement.