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From Collective to Transactional Defense

Od kolektivní obrany ke kolektivní obraně s podmínkami

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Abstract: This article aims to highlight the most important changes within the transatlantic defense relations. The central argument is that NATO is gaining a conditional nature, transforming collective defense into a form of transactional defense. The study utilizes Paul Kennedy's notion of "*imperial overstretch*" to explain the strategic context of the transatlantic defense relations. After this, the analysis highlights how the transatlantic defense relations gained a transactional character that is resonating to this American "*imperial overstretch*". The second part of the study focuses on the latest developments concerning the US military presence in Europe and highlights their transactional character, thus enabling the emergence of transactional defense within NATO.

Abstrakt: Cílem tohoto článku je zdůraznit nejdůležitější změny v rámci transatlantických obranných vztahů. Ústředním argumentem je, že NATO získává podmíněnou povahu, transformuje kolektivní obranu na formu kolektivní obrany s podmínkami. Studie využívá pojetí „přetíženosti“ Paula Kennedyho, které vysvětluje strategický kontext transatlantických obranných vztahů. Analýza poté zdůrazňuje, jak transatlantické obranné vztahy získaly charakter založený na kalkulaci nákladů a přínosů namísto vztahu založeného na hodnotách, který rezonuje v tomto americkém pojetí „přetíženosti“. Druhá část studie se zaměřuje na nejnovější vývoj týkající se americké vojenské přítomnosti v Evropě a zdůrazňuje její podmíněný charakter, který umožnil vznik kolektivní obrany s podmínkami v rámci NATO.

Key words: Transatlantic Relations; Imperial Overstretch; Collective Defense; Transactional Defense; European Deterrence Initiative; Operation Atlantic Resolve.

Klíčová slova: Transatlantické vztahy; přetíženost; kolektivní obrana; kolektivní obrana s podmínkami; European Deterrence Initiative; operace Atlantic Resolve.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the transatlantic alliance is changing, but this process is not necessarily linked to the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States, but to the global power shift from the so-called “*West*” towards the “*East*”. This process forces Washington to adapt its commitments to a transforming global strategic environment. As a result of these tendencies, NATO is more and more gaining a conditional nature, transforming collective defense slowly into a form of transactional defense.

This article aims to highlight this process through the analysis of transatlantic defense relations. The study picks up Paul Kennedy’s notion of “*imperial overstretch*” to explain the major problems regarding US military commitments and the strategic necessities influencing the American-European partnership. It is this “*imperial overstretch*” that led to the emergence of a transactionalist attitude concerning the transatlantic defense relations. This process started to unfold already during the Obama administration and it has become more visible after the election of President Trump. The most important implication of these developments is that Washington’s long-term strategic interest is to decrease its military commitments in Europe, in order to reduce its “*imperial overstretch*”. On the other hand, the recent developments concerning the US redeployments in Europe are clearly following a transactionalist path in which Washington is rewarding those allies that are willing to play according to this transactionalist logic.

The rest of this study is constructed as follows. The first section creates the link between the notions of the “*imperial overstretch*” and transactionalist foreign policy in the context of transatlantic defense relations. The second section analyses the latest developments concerning the US military presence in Europe and highlights their transactional character, thus shifting the nature of collective defense towards transactional defense.

1 TRANSACTIONAL FOREIGN POLICY IN AN ERA OF IMPERIAL OVERSTRETCH

The notions of “*imperial overstretch*” and transactionalist foreign policy might appear first as remotely different concepts. The former is usually linked to Paul Kennedy’s book *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* from 1987, while the latter was picked up by the public discourse again recently due to the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States. The primary aim of this section is to establish a link between these two concepts in order to explain the most important strategic tendencies influencing the transatlantic defense relations.

Kennedy provided a new approach to modern history, putting the emphasis on the role of great powers. According to this interpretation, the rise and fall of great powers is a natural and recurring process, while global economic shifts can usually predict

major changes within global power relations.¹ The central aim of this article is not to undermine or to praise Kennedy's main thesis. Instead of this, I utilize Kennedy's one particular concept, the "*imperial overstretch*", to explain American foreign policy behavior towards Europe.

The "*imperial overstretch*" refers to a situation in which the sum of the given great power's interests and obligations is "*larger than the country's power to defend them all simultaneously*".² In other words, the country inherits several strategic commitments from the previous decades but it is not able anymore to fulfil them at the same time.³ For this reason, the strategic overstretch leads to the collapse of the great power and provides room for the transformation of global power dynamics. The "*imperial overstretch*" can be proved by "*excessive arms spending*" - a situation "*when a particular nation is allocating over the long term more than 10 percent (and in some cases - when it is structurally weak - more than 5 percent) of GNP to armaments, that is likely to limit its growth rate.*"⁴ Most importantly, Kennedy argued already in 1987 that the United States were facing an "*imperial overstretch*" and the biggest task for American decision-makers would be to recognize and slow down this tendency.

Kennedy's projection from 1987 did come true and it was not the United States but the Soviet Union which collapsed during the next few years.⁵ This, however, does not mean that the problem of American "*imperial overstretch*" disappeared. Contrary to this, the United States' "*imperial overstretch*" has become more and more visible in the last few decades, as the center of global economy started to move from the United States and, more broadly, from the so-called "*West*" towards the Asia-Pacific with the economic boom of China and its broader region. After 1979, China has become one of the fastest growing economies with an average 9.5 % GDP growth rate.⁶ For 2018, China is the world's largest economy in a purchasing power parity with a solid demographic basis and a stable outlook for the future.⁷ Due to the Chinese economic boom and its regional implications, East and South Asia has become and will remain the world's most dynamic region with the world's largest middle class.⁸ On the other hand, the West has entered into an era of economic challenges for the 2000s, which escalated in the 2008 financial crisis. More importantly, this contemporary economic shift initiated structural

1 KENNEDY, Paul: *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. 1987. Random House. ISBN 0-394-54674-1.

2 KENNEDY, Paul: *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. 1987. Random House. ISBN 0-394-54674-1. p. 515.

3 Ibid.

4 KENNEDY, Paul: *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. 1987. Random House. ISBN 0-394-54674-1. p. 609.

5 See for example: LUNDESTAD, Geir: 'Imperial Overstretch', Mikhail Gorbachev, and the End of the Cold War. *Cold War History*. Volume 1. Issue 1. 1-20.

6 MORRISON, Wayne M.: *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States*. [online] 2018. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf> [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

7 For the economic rise of China and the broader region see: [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]; World Bank Open Data - China [online] 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/china> [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]; OECD Development Center: *Economic Outlook for Southeast Asia, China and India 2018*. [online] 2018. https://www.oecd.org/dev/SAEQ2018_Preliminary_version.pdf [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

8 United Nations: *World Economic Situation and Prospects*. [online] 2018. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/WESP2018_Full_Web-1.pdf

changes within global power relations. The so-called *unipolar* moment, in which the United States was in the position of a global hegemon during first decade after the Cold War, came to an end and a new narrative of *multipolar world order* emerged. In this context, assertive, new powers - most importantly China - challenge the status quo: the old *Western* international structures are eroding, while new ones are on the rise.⁹ As a result of this process, not only the economic and the political weight of the Asia-Pacific has been increasing but global power has become more diffuse with the emergence of several different players above and below the state level.

Due to the increasing American "*imperial overstretch*", it has become more and more important to adapt US commitments to the relatively decreasing capabilities and resources. On a practical level, this strategic dilemma was picked up and openly articulated by the Obama administration. After the Bush administration's decision to increase the American global military presence through the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Obama administration had to face serious challenges to restructure Washington's global commitments. The most important point of this process was the so-called "*pivot*" or "*rebalance*" towards the Asia-Pacific region which was officially declared as a strategic priority for the United States in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance.¹⁰ This meant that the Asia-Pacific as well as the allies and partnerships in the region gained primary importance for the United States concerning the long-term American economic, political, and military interests. As a parallel process to "*rebalancing*", Washington started to withdraw its troops both from Afghanistan and Iraq, in order to recalibrate the American military presence towards more important regions (and primarily towards the Asia-Pacific).

While the administration tried to emphasize that the "*pivot*" does not refer to a turning away from Europe, the European allies realized that the continent lost its significance for Washington. On the one hand, the withdrawals from Afghanistan and Iraq put an end to the major joint military operations, while the relative stability of Europe made it possible to reduce significantly the American troop level on the continent. On the other hand, the rise of China increased both the political and military importance of allies in the Asia-Pacific region.¹¹ Up until this time, the Europeans saw themselves as the most

⁹ See for example the creation of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank.

¹⁰ Defense Strategic Guidance: Sustaining Global U.S. Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense. [online] Department of Defense. 2012. http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

¹¹ The US rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific had a visible impact on the American military presence in the region. This process led to increased troop presence in Australia, Guam and Hawaii, while Japan and South Korea remained the key pillars of the US force posture in the region. Moreover, Washington built close security relations with New Zealand, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand, while security relations are improving with Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. For the detailed process of troop and technology deployments, base reconstructions and security agreements, see the following publications: Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025 Capabilities, Presence, and Partnerships. Center for Strategic and International Studies. [online] Center for Strategic and International Studies. 2016. https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/160119_Green_AsiaPacificRebalance2025_Web_0.pdf [cit. 08. 09. 2018.]; WOOD, Dakota L.: 2018 Index of U.S. Military Strength. [online] The Heritage Foundation. 2018. https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2018_IndexOfUSMilitaryStrength-2.pdf [cit. 08. 09. 2018.]; Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Toward Asia. [online] Congressional Research Service. 2012. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf> [cit. 08. 09. 2018.]

important allies of the United States, but the “*rebalancing*” highlighted that this *primus inter pares* position faded away: Europe has become only one ally in Washington’s complex alliance system.

Additionally to this, the Obama administration started to demand more equal burden sharing within the alliance.¹² The most memorable moment of this attempt was when at that time the Secretary of Defense Robert Gates openly criticized those allies who were willing to contribute only the “*soft*” operations and transform NATO into a two-speed alliance.¹³ The reason of this criticism was the historical imbalance between the two sides of the Atlantic regarding their defense commitments. This problem became increasingly visible for the 2000s with the permanently decreasing European defense budgets, which also led to structural problems and erosion within European armed forces.¹⁴ The scarce defense budgets together with the dynamically changing security environment culminated in the so-called “*dual spiral of diminishing capabilities*” which affected both the economic and the political domains of the military.¹⁵

It was not only the criticism from Washington but also the 2014 Russian aggression in Ukraine, which led to structural changes within the alliance. Firstly, the crisis highlighted that the relative stability of Europe is vulnerable and the preservation of *hard* military capabilities is necessary if Europeans want to maintain their security. More importantly, this transformed into concrete NATO-level decisions regarding the improvement of territorial defense.¹⁶ In parallel to NATO measures, the Obama administration launched

¹² This does not mean that the burden sharing debate was started by the Obama administration. Contrary to this, the debate was already present in the Alliance during the Cold War. However, the open criticism from the Obama administration, together with the strategic rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific and the diminishing European military capabilities represented a clear shift within NATO.

¹³ GATES, Robert M.: Secretary of Defense Speech. The Security and Defense Agenda (The Future of NATO). [online] 2011. Brussels. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581> [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

¹⁴ This problem was extremely visible during the NATO’s Libya campaign that highlighted the shortages of European reconnaissance and aircraft capabilities. The permanent budgetary pressure on the European military sector led to significant troop reductions, erosion of military capabilities, postponement or complete abandonment of procurement programs and reduced R&D expenditures in almost every European country. For more details: The Impact of the Financial Crisis on European Defense. [online] 2011. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201106/20110623ATT22406/20110623ATT22406EN.pdf> [cit. 09. 09. 2018.]

¹⁵ CSIKI, Tamás: Breaking the Dual Spiral of Diminishing Capabilities. *Panorama of Global Security Environment*. 2015-2016. ISBN 978-80-972526-0-1. p. 102.

¹⁶ The NATO countermeasures were adopted during the 2014 Wales Summit and were further strengthened during the 2016 Warsaw Summit. The alliance adopted the Readiness Action Plan which led to several practical developments. Among several other measures, NATO created the Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics and Poland on a rotational basis and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force to increase the capabilities of the NATO Response Forces. The creation of the NATO Force Integration Units in Central and Eastern Europe aimed to help the rapid deployment of forces. Headquarters for the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin, Poland and the Multinational Division Southeast in Bucharest, Romania were also established. The American participation in these initiatives will be analyzed in the following section. The study does not aim to evaluate those NATO decisions which are beyond the scope of the American presence in Europe. For more details see: Wales Summit Declaration [online] 2014. https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm [cit. 05. 04. 2018.] and Warsaw Summit Communiqué [online] 2016. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm [cit. 05. 04. 2018.]

the Operation Atlantic Resolve and its financial pillar, the European Reassurance Initiative, the main aim of which was to demonstrate the American commitment to collective defense through the increase of US military presence (and its visibility) in Europe.

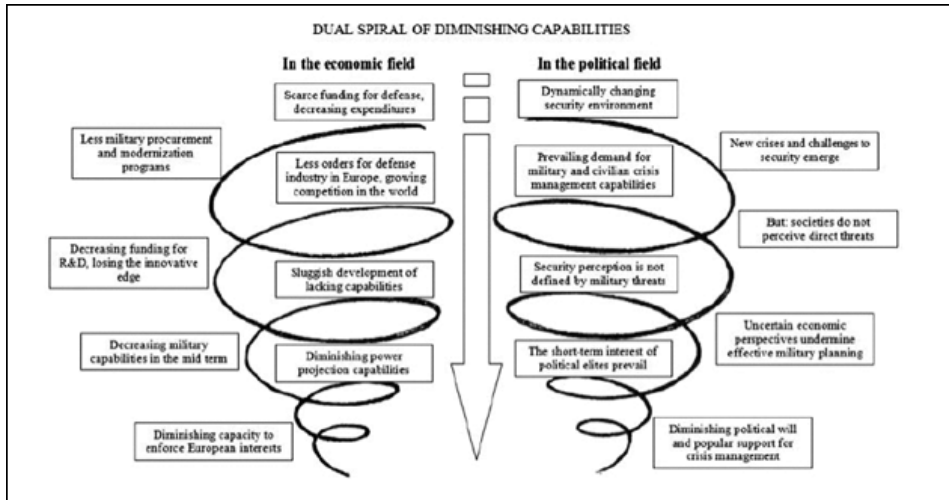


Figure 1: The Dual Spiral of Diminishing Capabilities.¹⁷

However, the conflict in Ukraine had little to do with the shift in global power relations and it did not change the long-term strategic interests of the United States, that is to reduce the American *“imperial overstretch”* and to adapt commitments to the changing security environment. This continuity of interest can be well captured through the analysis of the Trump administration’s foreign policy. The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) reflects the competitive world order, where China and Russia challenge *“American power, influence and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity”*.¹⁸ Similarly, the National Defense Strategy (NDS) stresses that the American *“competitive military advantage has been eroding.”*¹⁹ Both documents put the emphasis on the assertive and revisionist policies of China, which present the main threats for American interests. Although they do not reflect the Obama administration’s *“rebalancing”* policy, the geographic focus of the strategies clearly indicates the primary importance of China.

¹⁷ Source of the Table: CSIKI, Tamás: Breaking the Dual Spiral of Diminishing Capabilities. Panorama of Global Security Environment. 2015-2016. ISBN 978-80-972526-0-1. p. 102. Published with the permission of the author.

¹⁸ National Security Strategy of the United States of America [online] 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> [cit. 05. 08. 2018.] p. 2.

¹⁹ National Defense Strategy of the United States of America [online] 2018. <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf> [cit. 05. 08. 2018.] p. 1.

More importantly, both documents approach the American-European alliance system from a transactional approach putting emphasis on “*mutually beneficial*” cooperation. This can be seen again as the continuation and strengthening of the Obama administration’s policies towards European allies. The NSS emphasizes that the NATO needs all members to assume greater responsibility and declares that the US expects “*European allies to increase defense spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024, with 20 percent of this spending devoted to increasing military capabilities.*”²⁰ Similarly, the NDS states several times the importance of alliances as means to lighten the security burden of the US. However, the document also declares that Washington “*expects European allies to fulfill their commitments to increase their defense and modernization spending to bolster the alliance.*”²¹

All of these represent a shift within the alliance system towards a more transactional partnership.²² Transactional diplomacy - as Mariana Henke calls it - follows a *quid pro quo* logic.²³ This logic is built on the system of small deals and creates a zero-sum world, where the losses on one side are gains on the other side.²⁴ As Colin Kahl and Hal Brands argue, the Trumpian grand strategy represents an “*amoral transactionalism*” where these (small or big) deals gain central importance.²⁵ The notion of transactionalism decides on the nature of a given bilateral relationship, leading to a diminishing role of values.²⁶ Thus, even a country with completely different value system can become a stable partner, if it is willing to make deals that are serving the other country’s interests. Transactional foreign policy is not led by certain ideologies, as it has a “*case-by-case basis very much like a business transaction.*”²⁷ Transactionalism reduces foreign policy into the level of pure deal making, where the notion of “*good deal*” is defined by the President’s designation of “*what is in America’s interests.*”²⁸ Thus, it leads to bilateralism in foreign

20 National Security Strategy of the United States of America [online] 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> [cit. 05. 08. 2018.] p. 48.

21 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America [online] 2018. <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf> [cit. 05. 08. 2018.] p. 9.

22 CSIKI VARGA, Tamás: A Trump-stratégia nyomában - A 2017-es amerikai Nemzeti Biztonsági Stratégia értékelése. *Stratégiai Védelmi Kutatóközpont Elemzések*. 2018/4. p. 8.

23 HENKE, Marina: Trump’s Transactional Diplomacy: A Primer [online] Political Violence at a Glance. 2017. <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2017/02/08/trumps-transactional-diplomacy-a-primer/> [cit. 09. 09. 2018.]

24 Ibid.

25 KAHL, Colin and BRANDS, Hal: Trump’s Grand Strategic Train Wreck. [online] Foreign Policy. 2017. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/31/trumps-grand-strategic-train-wreck/> [cit. 09. 09. 2018.]

26 Ibid.

27 HADAR, Leon: The Limits of Trump’s Transactional Foreign Policy. [online] The National Interest. 2017. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-limits-trumps-transactional-foreign-policy-18898> [cit. 09. 09. 2018.]

28 AALTOLA, Mika; SALONIUS-PASTERNAK, Charly; KÄPYLÄ, Juha and SINKKONEN, Ville: Between Change and Continuity: Making Sense of America’s Evolving Global Engagement. *Publication series of the Government’s analysis, assessment and research activities* 3/2018. p. 43.

policy, where short term benefits are more important than long term interests.²⁹ Moreover, since transactionalism is often used in domestic politics as a reference point, it is not necessarily the given deal but the perception of the deal that matters at the end. As such, transactionalist foreign policy derives as a logical consequence from the American “*imperial overstretch*” in the sense that it aims to increase the burden on allies in order to adapt Washington’s relatively diminishing capabilities to the changing global strategic environment.

2 THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN EUROPE: ON THE WAY TOWARDS TRANSACTIONAL DEFENSE

While the first section aimed to emphasize the logical link between the concepts of “*imperial overstretch*” and transactionalism, the second part will shed light on its consequences on the transatlantic defense relations. The section provides an overview regarding the latest developments of the US military presence in Europe. On the one hand, this will demonstrate that the long-term strategic interest of Washington is to significantly decrease its European commitments due to its “*imperial overstretch*”. On the other hand, the developments will also highlight how the US troop deployments gained a transactional nature, as the winners of the US redeployments are those countries (most notably Poland and Romania) that are following the transactionalist logic of Washington. Thus, the process leads to the transformation of NATO’s collective defense into a form of transactional defense.

The end of the Cold War represented a turning point concerning American military presence in Europe. The continent’s relative stability made it possible to decrease significantly the US troop level and redeploy several units elsewhere around the globe. While there were more than 210,000 soldiers in Europe in 1990, this number was less than 125,000 already in 1992.³⁰ During the next decades, the international crisis management operations and military interventions (in Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan) slowed down the American withdrawal from Europe but they did not change the general tendencies. Due to the 2011 Budget Control Act, the V Corps, the 170th and the 172th Brigade Combat Teams (BCT - the Army’s basic deployable maneuver units) were deactivated.³¹ In the meantime, several infantry fighting vehicles and all battle tanks were withdrawn

²⁹ AALTOLA, Mika; SALONIUS-PASTERNAK, Charly; KÄPYLÄ, Juha and SINKKONEN, Ville: Between Change and Continuity: Making Sense of America’s Evolving Global Engagement. *Publication series of the Government’s analysis, assessment and research activities 3/2018*. p. 43.

³⁰ The Official Homepage of United States Army Europe: History [online] <http://www.eur.army.mil/organization/history.htm#cold> [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

³¹ COLE, Daniel: V Corps inactivates after nearly a century of service to U.S. Army. [online] U.S. Army. 2013. https://www.army.mil/article/105339/v_corps_inactivates_after_nearly_a_century_of_service_to_us_army [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

from the European continent.³² For 2014, the U.S. European Command could operate with approximately 62,000 soldiers. This number also included two BCTs: the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team in Italy and the 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Germany, each of them consisting of 4,000 to 5,000 troops.³³ Additionally to this, the number of American tactical nuclear weapons in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and the UK is estimated to be around 150 to 350.³⁴

As an answer to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the Obama administration announced the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) in 2014. The primary aim of ERI was to reassure the European allies and demonstrate the US commitments towards NATO as well as collective defense. Under the financial umbrella of ERI, the administration has also launched the Operation Atlantic Resolve (OAR) in order to “*deter Russia from regional hegemony*”.³⁵ During the next few years, the ERI budget increased significantly (Table 2.). In this process, an important shift came during the FY2017 when the ERI budget reached 3.4 billion dollars, which was more than four times higher than a year before. This increase put the whole project into a different dimension. An even higher ERI budget (4.7 billion dollars) was accepted for the FY2018, and another major increase is requested for the FY2019 (6.5 billion dollars), which means that the Trump administration follows the Obama administration’s policy direction. In the meantime, the project was renamed to European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) in order to put a stronger emphasis on the aspect of deterrence instead of assurance.

On a practical level, the most visible aspect of ERI and OAR was the increased presence of the US troops in Europe. This includes the deployment of one more Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) to the continent besides the already stationed two BCTs. The ABCT is deployed through a 9-month rotation. The ABCT includes approximately 3,000-4,000 personnel and their equipment (during the current rotation this means 87 tanks, 125 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 13 Bradley (Variant) Fire Support Team (BFIST) vehicles, 18 Paladins (395 tracked vehicles, 976 wheeled vehicles/equipment, 349 trailers).³⁶ Its headquarter is in Poland and the ABCT’s elements are distributed across the region (in

³² VANDIVER, John: US Army’s last tanks depart from Germany. [online] Stars and Stripes. 2013. <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-army-s-last-tanks-depart-from-germany-1.214977> [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

³³ Senate Committee on Armed Services: Statement of General Philip Breedlove Commander U.S. Forces Europe. [online] 2016. https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Breedlove_03-01-16.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.] p. 3. and CANCIAN, Mark F. and SAMP, Lisa Sawyer: The European Reassurance Initiative [online] 2016. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-reassurance-initiative-0> [cit. 05. 01. 2018.]

³⁴ CHALMERS, Malcolm and LUNN, Simon: NATO” Tactical Nuclear Dilemma. [online] Royal United Services Institute. 2010. https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201003_op_natos_tactical_nuclear_dilemma.pdf [cit. 05. 09. 2018.]

³⁵ US European Command: Operation Atlantic Resolve 2015. [online] 2015. https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2014/0514_atlanticresolve/docs/Operation_Atlantic_Resolve_Fact_Sheet_31_DEC_2015.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.]

³⁶ 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team - Fact Sheet [online] <http://www.eur.army.mil/organization/factsheets/default.htm#operations> [cit. 05. 01. 2018.]

Poland, Germany, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria).³⁷ Additionally to the ABCT, the increased presence also includes the deployment of a Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) on a rotational basis, with approximately 1,900 personnel, 53 Blackhawks, 12 Chinooks and 24 Apaches.³⁸ In order to increase the visibility of the US military presence in Europe, ERI provided significant funds for more than 100 multinational exercises during the last years across the NATO Eastern Flank, which also included major, joint exercises such as Saber Guardian with 25,000 participants.³⁹

Besides the increased troop presence and increased visibility, from FY2017 the major part of ERI budget is allocated to enhanced prepositioning. This means the building of a division-sized prepositioned set of equipment that is “*planned to contain two ABCTs (one of which is modernized), two Fires Brigades, air defense, engineer, movement control, sustainment and medical units.*”⁴⁰ The main aim of this concept is to reduce the deployment time and the demands on strategic transportation assets.⁴¹ The prepositioned equipment is currently distributed among Western-European bases (in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands).⁴² Moreover, the project also includes the procurement of JASSM-ER and Patriot Missile Segment Enhancement for prepositioning.⁴³

Importantly, ERI provides specific funding for regional allies for the infrastructure improvement. This means the development and modernization of several military bases across Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Iceland, and the Baltics. In this regard, the key priority for FY2018 will be to improve airfield infrastructures in Germany, Norway, Slovakia, and the UK as well as to enhance railroad, storage and cargo capacities across Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece.⁴⁴

³⁷ 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team - Fact Sheet [online] <http://www.eur.army.mil/organization/factsheets/default.htm#operations> [cit. 05. 01. 2018.]

³⁸ 1st Air Cavalry Brigade - Fact Sheet [online] http://www.eur.army.mil/organization/factsheets/Factsheet_1ACB.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.]

³⁹ ETL, Alex: With the Image of Deterrence: Operation Atlantic Resolve. *CSDS Viewpoints 2016/4*. p. 4.

⁴⁰ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller): European Deterrence Initiative – Department of Defense Budget. Fiscal Year 2019. [online] 2018. http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2019/fy2019_EDJ_JBook.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.] p. 11.

⁴¹ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller): European Deterrence Initiative – Department of Defense Budget. Fiscal Year 2019. [online] 2018. http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2019/fy2019_EDJ_JBook.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.] p. 11.

⁴² Army Prepositioned Stock - Fact Sheet [online] http://www.eur.army.mil/organization/factsheets/Factsheet_APS.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.]

⁴³ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller): European Deterrence Initiative – Department of Defense Budget. Fiscal Year 2019. [online] 2018. http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2019/fy2019_EDJ_JBook.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.] p. 13.

⁴⁴ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller): European Deterrence Initiative - Department of Defense Budget. Fiscal Year 2019. [online] 2018. http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2019/fy2019_EDJ_JBook.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.] p. 14-15.; MARMEI, Eric; WHITE, Gabriel: European Deterrence Initiative. Bolstering the Defense of the Baltic States. 2017. International Center for Defense and Security.

Figure 2: The budget of the European Reassurance/Deterrence Initiative (in millions of dollars)⁴⁵

	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019 (request)
Increased Presence	423.1	471.4	1049.8	1732.7	1874.7
Additional Bilateral and Multilateral Exercises	40.6	108.4	163.1	217.7	290.8
Enhanced Prepositioning	136.1	57.8	1903.9	2221.8	3235.4
Improved Infrastructure	196.5	89.1	217.4	337.8	828.2
Building Partnership Capacity	13.7	62.6	85.5	267.3	302.4
ERI Transfer Fund	175.0	-	-	-	-
Total	985.0	789.3	3419.7	4777.3	6531.4

Besides the increased presence within the framework of ERI/EDI, Washington also contributes to the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP). The EFP was adopted at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, and it operates currently with four rotational, multinational battalion-sized battlegroups (in Poland and in the Baltics). Out of these four, the US leads the battlegroup in Poland with approximately 795 American soldiers (while the total size of the battlegroup is 1117).⁴⁶ In contrast with the forces deployed in the framework of OAR, the EFP is under NATO command, through the Multinational Corps Northeast Headquarters in Szczecin, Poland.

Although ERI/EDI, OAR and the US participation in the NATO EFP have stopped the permanent decrease of US troop level in Europe, they do not represent the return of the United States to the European continent. Nor do they represent a significant shift concerning Washington's long-term strategic direction that is to reduce the American *"imperial overstretch"* and adapt the US capabilities to a transforming global environment. Instead of this, they can only slow down and mitigate the effect of this process. This is not to say that the American military presence will completely disappear from Europe. However, the current deployments are contradicting the long-term strategic interests of Washington and they can only be seen as temporary measures in a highly volatile strategic context.

⁴⁵ Sources of data: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller): European Deterrence Initiative - Department of Defense Budget. Fiscal Year 2019. [online] 2018. http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2019/fy2019_EDI_JBook.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.] and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller): Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, European Reassurance Initiative. [online] 2016. http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018_ERI_J-Book.pdf [cit. 05. 01. 2018.]

⁴⁶ The other three battlegroups are led by the UK, Germany and Canada. Source: NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence - Fact Sheet. [online] 2018. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_02/20180213_1802-factsheet-efp.pdf [cit. 01. 05. 2018.]

Importantly, the recent developments concerning the American military presence in Europe represent a clear shift towards transactionalism. In this regard, it is clear that the biggest winners of the American redeployment to Europe are Poland and, to a lesser extent, Romania. In other words, those countries were more willing to enter into negotiations and deals, based on transactionalist logic. With a permanent budgetary increase after 2011, Poland will hit the NATO's GDP 2 % target for 2018 and the country is also fulfilling the NATO 20 % guideline concerning the share of equipment expenditures.⁴⁷ Similarly to Poland, Romania will almost hit the NATO 2 % target in 2018 and Bucharest is also fulfilling its commitments regarding the share of equipment expenditure.⁴⁸ More importantly, from the perspective of the Trump administration, both Poland and Romania signed a contract to buy Patriot air and missile defense systems. The first phases of the projects are amounting around USD 4.75 billion in the case of Poland and USD 3.9 billion in the case of Romania.⁴⁹

Thus, Washington is rewarding those allies with the American redeployments that are more willing to follow the transactionalist logic dictated by the administration. This has broader implications, since in this transactionalist context, collective defense gains a conditional nature. Although the transatlantic partnership has never been unproblematic, prior to President Trump, the American demands were not seen as conditions for collective defense.⁵⁰ However, the fact that the President waited for 6 months before he endorsed Article 5 and collective defense, was a clear sign of this new, unprecedented conditionality within the Alliance. From this perspective, the alliance is not anymore based on shared values, but the allies are rather seen as "*force multipliers*."⁵¹ According to this transactional approach, there are several practical tools to measure the value of each ally. Within NATO, these include the level of political commitments, operational burden sharing, capability developments; national defense budgets, and defense procurements. All of these are manifestations of a transactional approach, in which collective defense is based on different conditions. Their aim is to measure whether the allies are security providers or security consumers/free-riders within the system, thus shifting the nature of the alliance towards more transactionalism in an era of "*imperial overstretch*".

⁴⁷ Defense Expenditures of NATO Countries (2011-2018). [online] NATO 2018. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_07/20180709_180710-pr2018-91-en.pdf [cit. 01. 09. 2018.]

⁴⁸ Defense Expenditures of NATO Countries (2011-2018). [online] NATO 2018. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_07/20180709_180710-pr2018-91-en.pdf [cit. 01. 09. 2018.]

⁴⁹ Patriot System in Poland. [online] Polityka Insight. 2018. https://www.politykainsight.pl/en/politics/politicsofmemory/_resource/multimediu/20142001 [cit. 01. 09. 2018.]; JUDSON, Jen: Romania signs deal to buy US missile defense system. [online] Defense News 2017. <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2017/11/30/its-official-romania-signs-deal-to-buy-us-missile-defense-system/> [cit. 01. 09. 2018.]

⁵⁰ AALTOLA, Mika; SALONIUS-PASTERNAK, Charly; KÄPYLÄ, Juha and SINKKONEN, Ville: Between Change and Continuity: Making Sense of America's Evolving Global Engagement. *Publication series of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities 3/2018*. p. 101.

⁵¹ AALTOLA, Mika; SALONIUS-PASTERNAK, Charly; KÄPYLÄ, Juha and SINKKONEN, Ville: Between Change and Continuity: Making Sense of America's Evolving Global Engagement. *Publication series of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities 3/2018*. p. 2.

CONCLUSION

Although the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States triggered a panic reaction among European allies, there is a visible strategic continuity between the Obama and Trump administrations concerning their transatlantic policies. On a practical level, this is fundamentally influenced by the adaptation of the US commitments (reducing Washington's "imperial overstretch") to a transforming global strategic environment. The recent changes concerning the American military deployments in Europe do not represent a turning point in this process. However, they do resonate to a transactionalist foreign policy that diminishes the role of value-based communities and frames the world according to the logic of losses and gains. While the future of NATO is not necessarily in danger, the nature of the transatlantic alliance is slowly shifting into a direction where collective defense gains a more and more transactional nature, creating new, internal challenges for the alliance.

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