Report

The Essence of NATO Crisis: The Problem of Sharing the Collective Burden

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Abstract- The issue of burden sharing in collective defense in the past and present has been the fundamental reason of the rivalries in NATO between Americans and Europeans. Fair burden-sharing focused on preventing the Communist expansion throughout the Cold War. After the Cold War focus of discussions shifted toward providing money and troops for the crisis management, security building, peace support operations, and war against terrorism. This article argues that burden sharing problem in NATO has two major dimensions; (1) every member country struggles to shift some of the burden it carries to others, (2) decisions are made according to the extent of the contribution to the alliance. Since the United States is undoubtedly the major contributor by far, American efforts of shifting some burden to other members and European reaction to American hegemony in the decision making processes are two major elements engendering crises in the organization. These two major consequences of burden sharing rivalries are affected by both international and domestic constraints as well as personalities.

Keywords- NATO, Burden-sharing, Burden-shifting, Decision-making

1. Introduction

The burden-sharing rivalries have been at the core of the most of the NATO crisis throughout the alliance history. This article argues that burden sharing problem has two major dimensions; (1) every country struggles to shift some of the burden it carried to other members because of domestic politics and economic pressures, (2) decisions are made according to the extent of the contribution to the alliance, which is also interpreted by a political process within NATO, within domestic politics and the mechanism of the international system. Since the United States is undoubtedly the major contributor by far, American efforts of shifting some burden to other members by persuading them to give more, and European reaction to American hegemony in the decision making processes are two major elements that may potentially incite crises in the organization. These two major consequences of burden sharing rivalries are affected by both international and domestic constraints as well as personalities. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010)

NATO countries are in a dilemma between meeting their responsibilities and commitments by spending on defense to increase deterrence capacity of the organization, and satisfying the social needs of their citizens in a modern welfare state.(Thies, 2003) Two policy actions are implemented by members of the organization in order to balance the needs for a welfare state without impairing the collective defense capabilities; persuading other members to contribute more for the collective defense, and enhancing political and military integration in the alliance for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Endeavors of implementing these policies and means of performing them has brought about many discords throughout the alliance history. American efforts to rearm West Germany and rally support for fighting against terrorism in Afghanistan were studied in this paper as two major examples of burden-sharing and shifting strategy. NATO countries also have taken initiatives in order to relieve some burden of the collective defense, such as; dialogue and cooperation with the communist bloc, reducing the arms, enlargement process and smart

defense concept all of which are not included in this article.

The second fundamental reason for crisis among NATO members is American leverage to influence decision-making processes in the organization, and European uneasiness about it. (Menon, 2000) American hegemony referred to influencing policies within the alliance in the Cold War international environment, whereas in the post-Cold War setting American hegemony has become more relevant about taking unilateral actions to shape the world as it envisages. On the other hand, American supremacy in the decision-making processes has been criticized by its European partners throughout the alliance history and has brought out many crises, like; France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated command structure and harsh reaction to unilateral American decision to invade Iraq.

2. Burden Shifting Efforts in the Organization

The struggle for shifting the bigger part of the burdens was started in the talks for the signing the treaty. The United States would assume the greatest responsibilities and commitments to balance against the Soviets, but it wanted to ensure to lessen it through shifting some to its European allies. (Elrod, 1989) Initially, Americans considered the weakness of their Europeans partners as the main reason for their limited support to the alliance thus they encouraged them to integrate both politically, economically and militarily to contribute more effectively to the collective security of Europe. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010) Although the economic and military impotence accounted for their smaller contribution in some degree, the domestic pressures of welfare state were the fundamental reason that withheld the decision-makers of the democratic European countries for sharing the bigger part of the burden. (Thies, 2003) Throughout the Cold War, Americans incited Europeans to increase their support for collective defense of Western Bloc, while after the Cold war they demanded more support for peace operations and fighting with terrorism. However, Europeans' contribution to the alliance always depended on the domestic circumstances rather than the international conjuncture.

2.1. Burden Shifting Strategies of NATO countries

One of the main incentives for countries to be in the alliances is their desire to allocate more resources for social purposes at the expense of defense expenditures. Democratic states in the collective security organizations are in a dilemma between meeting their responsibilities and commitments by spending on defense to increase deterrence capacity of the organization, and satisfying the social needs of their people in a modern welfare state. (Anessa L. Kimball, 2010) Given that, average voter cares more about his income and the government funded social benefits like health, education and welfare programs, the political leaders in democratic countries have tendency to limit their spending on defense in favor of funding the prosperity of their people due to their concerns about the next election. On the other hand, national security also matters for everyone. The constituencies are inclined to support leaders who make their country safer and stronger. (Thies, 2003)

Concerns about increasing social spending were not less significant than Soviet threat for the designer of the Washington treaty. After the Cold War, costs of implementing policies for diverse threat perceptions are in contest with social needs of constituencies. There are two possible policy actions to avoid trade-offs between the requirements of external security and the welfare state; persuading other members to contribute more for the collective defense, and enhancing political and military integration in the alliance for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

2.1.1 Persuading Other Members to Increase Their Contribution to the Collective Defense

Persuading other allies to increase their spending on the collective effort while limiting their own contributions is a typical burden-shifting strategy of NATO members which affected mostly by their different perceptions of burden-sharing.

Olson's alliance theory asserts that the largest member of any organization should contribute more than other members. (Zeckhauser, 1966) Abiding by this main rule of alliance theory, Europeans claim that contributions of each member should be proportionate to the resources they have. Therefore, the share of the United States, as the richest member is fair and should be maintained.(Thies, 2003) On the other hand, Americans criticize the Europeans not only about their inability to use available resources effectively through economic and military integration but also for wasting the American funds which allotted them to improve the alliance's defensive capabilities. Decision-makers in Washington always criticize their allies for prioritizing needs of welfare states rather than spending on collective defense. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010)

Alliance theory also contends that since it has more political interests to protect, the largest and richest ally values the existence of the organization most. (Zeckhauser, 1966) Europeans argue that the United States is protecting their global interest more effectively by means of NATO's political power and the vast geography which presents strategic opportunities to them. It would be almost impossible for Americans to pursue global politics if they were restricted to American continent. Moreover, the United States has gained many commercial privileges as a result of its leadership role in the Western alliance. (Chalmers, 2001) On the other hand, Americans believe that global interests of the United States have assisted the Western security, as well as the interests of their European partners. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010)

Next, Europeans emphasize the benefits of Americans acquired through selling arms and military equipment to their allies in Europe, while Americans consider the trade as a medium which is enabling Europeans to modernize their militaries and enhance their military capabilities. (Elrod, 1989)

To sum up, Europeans hold that the American share of the burden is just according to resources and relevant to worldwide political objectives. On the other hand, Americans claims that their global commitments and responsibilities serve also the interests of their European partners and do not justify their rejection of sharing the collective burden.

2.1.2 Enhancing Political and Military Integration in the Alliance for Greater Efficiency and Effectiveness

Enhancing political and military integration was another strategy of the decision-makers in the NATO countries to adjust collective goals of the organization and national goals of each member country. Political and military integration of NATO countries harnesses national rivalries and reduces each member's spending for deterrence. However, the integration process also correlates with the increased efforts of maneuvering for burden-shifting. (Thies, 2003) Although both Europeans and Americans were supporting the greater integration when they were negotiating over the terms of the NATO treaty, their concerns, which have not been changed much throughout the Alliance history, were different.

In the Cold War, Europeans considered the United States as an only balancing force for Soviet threat and as an agency for economic and military recovery and development of Europe as a continent. (Gordon, 1956) On the other hand, the United States viewed Europeans as partners which gave contribution to the alliance's defense capabilities. After the Cold War, Europeans viewed the United States as the driving force for implementing peace-keeping and peace- building operations in which otherwise they should have to be involved due to philanthropic pressures from their electorates. The United States on the other hand, regard Europeans as political and military supporters for their initiatives they had to undertake as a consequence of its global leadership role. (Thies, 2003)

Additionally, standardization of weapons and equipment is an important element of political and military integration in order to be more effective without making much effort. Moreover, it reduces the costs of weapons and equipment dramatically through specialization of countries. (Gordon, 1956) Both Americans and Europeans espoused the standardization of weapons and equipment in order to achieve greater military effectiveness and efficiency. However their main concerns were again different. The United States's main concern has always been keeping critical decision-making positions to maintain its leadership status while Europeans have wanted to benefit from American military capabilities to improve their own militaries through the standardization process. (Ian Q.R. Thomas, 1997)

2.1.3 NATO Crisis Stemming from American Efforts to Shift the Burden to its European Partners

Sharing the collective burden of the alliance has been a constant source of struggle between the United States and its European allies since the foundation of the organization. In Cold War, Americans strived to persuade their partners to give more to collective effort defense for heighten the deterrence capability of NATO against the Eastern Bloc as well as for relieving American responsibilities in the Europe. (Elrod, 1989) Supporting German rearmament was American reaction to Europeans' limited contribution to collective action. This strategic step also relieved some of American burden in Europe. Fair burden-sharing discussions have focused on supplying money and troops for the crisis management, security building, peace-keeping operations, and war against terrorism after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. American intervention to Afghanistan after 9/11 terrorist attacks presented typical burden-shifting efforts of Americans and its refusal by their European partners in the new world order. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010)

2.2. American Efforts to Rearm the West Germany to Relieve the Burden

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In 1950s, the United States had concerns about both the unequal distribution of the burden among allies and insufficiency of Allied troops against the Soviet conventional forces. (Jordan, 2000) The German rearmament could give invaluable contribution to defense of Europe, and also could enable Americans to decrease their military existence in the continent. (Thies, 2003) The United States and Europeans had different threat perceptions and security priorities in signing the Washington Treaty. The United State focused on balancing the Soviet Union in the Europe whereas its partners in Europe were more concerned about preventing Germany to acquire military capabilities to threaten peace. Different threat perceptions of allies and their diverse viewpoints about the role of western Germany for deterrence bring about dissimilar policy preferences. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010)

The British and French reluctance to increase the number of troops as well as Germany's geography, manpower and industrial capabilities were the main factors prompting the decision-makers in the Washington to support German rearmament. The United States viewed German contribution to defense of Europe essential whereas French was anxious about it. On the other hand, the Europeans, especially the French, viewed the rearmament process as the first step of permitting Germany to become a major rival in the continent. (Gheciu, 2005)

The Korean War demonstrated the size of the communist threat and the urgency of taking collective action to resist it. Although the disagreements were coped with mutual concessions for common good of the allies, the discord over the issue of the German rearmament represented the first substantial examples of bargaining and burden-shifting maneuvers in the organization. (Jordan, 2000)

2.2.1 American Struggle to Get Allies' Support in Fighting Against Terrorism

American struggle to persuade its allies to assist them in fighting with the terrorism, and stabilizing and reconstructing Afghanistan, and habitual European unwillingness to shoulder the burden that America wants to shirk demonstrates that the burden-sharing rivalries are still in the heart of NATO crisis in the post-Cold War period. Immediately after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States was broadly supported by its European partners and as well as the international community in fighting with the Al-Qaeda terrorist network and its harboring Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, the United States' initiating a controversial war against the Saddam regime in 2003, disrupted the solidarity and harmony among the allies. (Ellen Hallams And Benjamin Schreer, 2012)

Taking into account the gap between American and European military capabilities and probable coordination problems between partners, political and military decision-makers in Washington allowed their allies to take minor roles in the initial phases of Afghanistan operations. This also enabled them to be completely unengaged in the decision-making processes. (Gordon P. H., 2002) However, Europeans surprisingly would accept to assume more responsibility due to great public support for shouldering American cause. (Gonzalez-Pelaez, 2005)

After the accomplishment of the first phase, stabilization and reconstruction of the country has begun. The new phase of the Afghan mission has significantly changed the expectations and perceptions of both the decision makers and ordinary people in the alliance. Especially, after US decision to shift priorities from Afghanistan to Iraq increased European reluctance of sharing the burden in Afghanistan. Persuading their citizens about sending troops to Afghanistan to fill the power vacuum as a result of unilateral American undertaking in Iraq was even a more demanding task for European leaders. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010) The burden-sharing disagreements are still going on among allies over the issue of Afghanistan. American decision to reduce the forces and withdrawing from Afghanistan in 2014 is largely caused by its frustration on inability of shifting the burdens to its partners.

3. American Hegemony in the Alliance

3.1 Decision Making Process in the Alliance

Although theoretically NATO decisions are made by consensus after discussions and consultations among the allies, as a consequence of carrying the big part of the burden, Americans have leverage on any policy action that the organization undertakes. On the other hand, American supremacy in the decision-making processes has been criticized by its European partners throughout the alliance history, which brings out many disagreements. (Menon, 2000) A political process within the organization, domestic concerns of each member country and the mechanism of international system have determined the extent of the leadership role of the United States in implementing policies, and

the magnitude of the reaction of its partners against its domination.

The organizational structure of NATO enables the United States to exert its influence in decision-making processes in the alliance. As it is explained in Article 4, consultation among the member countries is the main medium for making decisions and taking policy actions. (Treaty, 1949) Since the United States has leverage power over all the other members, whether it is related with economic, political or security concerns, it can easily influence their policy preferences using sticks and carrots. (Ian Q.R. Thomas, 1997)

Domestic pressures in democratic NATO countries compel politicians to react against American hegemony if their national priorities like security and independence are at stake. To begin with, maintaining the independence in political and military affairs has been the fundamental domestic concern that has elicited backlash against hegemonic American behaviors. De Gaulle considered the continuous presence of allied military forces on its country as an infringement of full French sovereignty.(Menon, 2000) Besides, countries are never able to feel secure themselves, if their security is dependent on other countries. Security of NATO countries almost completely depended on the American nuclear capabilities. (Jordan, 2000)

3.2. NATO Crisis as a Reaction to American Supremacy in the Alliance

American dominance in the decision-making processes has been criticized by its European partners throughout the alliance history. The United States hegemony referred to influencing policies within the alliance in the Cold War international environment, whereas in the post-Cold War period American hegemony has become more focused on taking unilateral actions to shape the world as it envisages. American supremacy in the policy decisions and the European reaction to its sole leadership role in the Alliance has brought about many NATO crises, such as; France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated command structure in the Cold War and harsh reaction to unilateral American decision to invade Iraq in the new international environment.

3.2.1 French Withdrawal from NATO's Integrated Military Command Structure

French withdrawal from integrated military structure, which stemmed from the French pursuit of full sovereignty, its concerns about national security in the face of nuclear war and its quest for having an influential role in the international system has been the major NATO crisis in the Cold War. Security

dependence on American nuclear capabilities and the perceptions about Anglo-Saxon predominance in the alliance were considered as impediments to achieve both national independence and international influence. (Menon, 2000)

To begin with, domestic pressures at home as well as his personality impelled De Gaulle to withdraw his country from integrated military structures of NATO as a reaction to American domination in the political processes of the organization. French displeasure about American hegemony in decision-making processes started in the first years of the alliance. According to French view, political processes in the organization served well to bolster American superpower position. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010) Although discussion and consultation channels to reach a consensus among members seemed agreeable for the spirit of the Washington Treaty, the United States could easily influence other NATO members' preferences in the process. Moreover, by the late 1950s, Americans started to increase their influence in the alliance through adopting "a flexible response strategy". The concept necessitated "tight control of nuclear forces so as to ensure that their response was measured." (Ian Q.R. Thomas, 1997) French viewed that the flexible response concept and debates over a multilateral force aimed to make the host nations more dependent on the owner of the nuclear weapons. De Gaulle was frustrated about the fact that French President could not have any control over usage of nuclear weapons deployed on its own country. (Jordan, 2000)

Next, French had doubts about the reliability of the United States in the face of a nuclear war which compelled them to strive for acquiring nuclear capabilities for securing their country with their own military capabilities. (Menon, 2000) The experiences of Indochina, Algeria and the Suez demonstrated that Americans did not assist their allies unless their own interests were threatened. Although the United States had responsibilities and commitments according to the Washington Treaty, the United States could prioritize its own survival in the face of total nuclear war. French were well aware that the country could be secure only if they could gain nuclear capabilities. (Elrod, 1989) The flexible response strategy, the deployment of IRBMs, the discussions about a multilateral force and an Atlantic nuclear force as well as the Detente convinced French decision-makers to take bold steps to have national nuclear deterrence capability. (Menon, 2000)

Next, dependence on American nuclear capabilities was an impediment to French pursuit to have a leading

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role in international affairs. De Gaulle believed that nuclear dependence on Americans inhibited political and military independence of France. Only the nuclear deterrence would accomplish the French pursuit to be grandeur. (Menon, 2000)

3.2.2 Unilateral American Intervention to Iraq

Unilateral American intervention in Iraq without getting consent of its allies as well as international community represented a post-Cold War example of American hegemonic behavior. The major changes in the international system, in Europe and the domestic politics in the United States shaped both the patterns of the American hegemonic behavior and the intensity of the European reaction. (Gonzalez-Pelaez, 2005)

American and European interdependence for collective defense against Soviet threat loosened after the collapse of the communist bloc which profoundly affected the relations between allies. The world became a unipolar system after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the United States curbed its motives to behave unilaterally under the Clinton administration, 9/11 terrorist attacks and Bush administration's neo-conservative attitudes instigated American unilateralism in international affairs. NATO and the international community supported American cause of fighting against terrorism in Afghanistan but intervention in Iraq was perceived as a hegemonic behavior of the United States taking advantage of the international environment. (Talbott, 2002)

Moreover, terrorist attacks on the September 11, 2001 also had a great impact on American hegemonic behavior. American nation was deeply affected by the unprecedented terrorist attacks of 9/11. Although immediate reaction of intervening in Afghanistan to put an end to Taliban regime was relatively successful, the mission for eliminating the presence of Al-Qaeda terrorists and capturing the responsible terrorists for the disaster could not be accomplished. The Bush Administration assessed that the invasion of Iraq would serve not only taking preemptive action against possible terrorist attacks designed in Baghdad in the future, but also divert public attention to the endeavor of war against terrorists and their protectors. (Stanley R. Sloan, 2010)

On the other hand, Europeans also utilized the international environment to strongly oppose American unilateral action in Iraq. The major threat binding Europeans to the United States was over, and they could be able to take important steps towards economic and political integration. The strong reaction to the hegemony of the United States might have served to

developing collective defense policies among the Europeans if British had not adhered to its Anglo-Saxon alliance in the crisis of Iraq. However, the possibility of French and German cooperation against American hegemony would have impaired the alliance more dramatically if the second Bush administration had not taken important steps for reconciliation. (Gonzalez-Pelaez, 2005)

4. Conclusion

In the final analysis, despite many challenges and continuous change in the international system, NATO could be able to survive many crises. Its permanence has depended on the members' beliefs about its advantages to their own interests. (Zeckhauser, 1966) Although the United States has carried the weight since its foundation, the organization served its global objectives as well. However, its inability to shift the burden to other members has frustrated Americans more than any other time in the alliance history.

According to Olson's alliance theory model, hegemons have tendency to curtail their contribution to an organization as their economic preponderance diminish. Hegemon also no longer tolerates to be exploited by smaller members of an organization. (Elrod, 1989) The intervention in Libya without American leadership and hesitancy to intervene in Syria may account for changing American policies about carrying the bulk of the burden. American decision to reduce the forces and withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014 is also largely caused by its frustration over inability of shifting the burden to its partners.

In the prosperous national environment, it was easier for U.S. administrations to resist domestic pressures when taking initiatives in the world affairs as a global leader. The economic challenges at home seem to hinder Washington to take initiative in current global crises. Although the collapse of the organization is not likely in near future, NATO's traditional weight may not be felt in the international system; if American's old European partners and new allies do not make necessary contribution. The international crisis in Ukraine has many similarities with confrontations between Eastern and Western bloc in the Cold War. Apparently, political decisions and actions of the United States, European Union and NATO, whether unilateral or multilateral, will determine NATO's future role in the new world order.

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