

United States-NATO Ties Under President Trump: An Assessment.

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Abstract

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a military alliance between the United States of America and its transatlantic partners. The alliance treaty was signed in Washington DC on 4th June 1949. Atlantic Charter is a Cold War instrument charged with; deterring and containing Soviet Union's threat, curbing revival of militarism in continental Europe, and political integration of Europe. NATO's quintessential proviso is ARTICLE 5 which piqued; assault on one is assault on all. America's financial and personnel investment outweighs those of partners put together. This paper assesses the relationship between the U.S. and NATO under President Trump. It discovered that Trump interpreted the disparity in financing NATO as a deliberate act of cheating by America's transatlantic allies. It equally observed that sequel to this development, Trump unprecedentedly and unilaterally directed allies to honour NATO's 2014 resolution of committing 2% of their individual nation's GDP to defence or risk America's military support should adversaries assault. His 'order' shocked European allies because no U.S. leader or institution viewed NATO as an economic exploiter or doubted its quintessentiality to achieving the country's strategic and economic interests globally. The paper uncovers that NATO needs fundamental reforms to effectively counter novel threats emanating from the cyberspace and that enlarging the organization's membership to include all former Iron Curtains of Eastern Europe and Republics of its former topmost adversary the Soviet Union should be a strategic objective to be perpetually pursued. It concludes that the Atlantic Alliance needs to establish military bases in all continents of the world because of the non-combat or traditional duties it has been performing globally since the end of the Cold War.

Keywords: Security, Economy, Budget, Reforms, Cyberspace.

Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) elsewhere referred to as Atlantic Charter was established by the U.S. and Western Europe capitalist countries on 4th June 1945 in Washington DC. NATO was the first grand post Second World War military alliance headed by a Superpower, a Nuclear arsenal owner, technologically most advanced, and economically strongest nation. NATO was originally founded by twelve states viz the U.S., Canada, United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Norway. Afterward, Greece and Turkey joined the organization in 1952, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in 1955, and Spain in 1982.



After the collapsed of the Union of Soviet Socialists Republic(USSR) and ultimate end of the ideological confrontation codenamed Cold War, the organisation's membership ballooned. Fear of possible re-emergence and re-invasion by Russia (the successor of the Soviet Union) masterminded their quest for membership of Atlantic Charter. The first group of Eastern Europe countries called Iron Curtains by analysts that gained full membership in 1999 were; Poland and Czech Republic. The second cluster that followed were Romania, Slovenia, and the three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 2014. Finally, the last and latest joiners were Croatia and Albania in 2017(Stienberg and Gordon, 2017).

NATO is a Cold War military instrument of a block of capitalist nations and Second World War allies charged with a principal schedule and two subsidiary responsibilities: 1) curbing and deterring Union of Socialists Soviet Republics (USSR/Soviet Union); 2) checkmating revival of national militarism; and 3) promote political integration of Europe(Masters,2019). The organisation has persistently and consistently glued its attention on these objectives for over seven decades despite the balkernisation of its principal and ideological adversary Soviet Communists in early 90s.

According to Palmer(2009) Atlantic Charter has undergone rudimentary philosophical transformations in order to appropriately and timely ameliorate novel transnational challenges that emanated during and after the ideological war between the capitalist West and Socialists East. Every facet of the organisation experienced dozens of transformations. One of such pragmatic reforms was alliance's 2011 commitment to dealing with all stages of crisis—before, during and after; through diplomacy, peacemaking and post conflict stabilization of countries across all regions of the globe. Reforms will continue to be a basic feature of NATO for some unforeseeable time.

Since Atlantic Charter's establishment over seven decades ago, the U.S. is shouldering over 73% of organisation's financial obligations and the only member committing over 3% of its GDP in defense (NATO, 2019). Similarly, the U.S. is its highest troops and arsenals contributing member. This is palpable because of two impeccable and irrefutable variables: 1) at the time that the alliance came to force, the U.S. was economically stronger or had a GDP than its entire partners put together; and 2) the Cold War just started, because America was the supreme leader of the capitalist world it contributed more troops than the rest(O'Donnel, 2012).

When the organisation's 'greatest threat' disappeared i.e. the balkernisation of the Soviet Union in early 90s, strategic and tactical experts in Europe and America and futurologists predicted liquidation of Atlantic Charter. But transnational calamities like climate change, terrorism, global pandemics, rise of far-right nationalism, mass migration, support for democratic principles worldwide, and civil wars in many enclaves of the globe supplanted lethalistic threats of the Soviets and their vicious Red Army that were stationed from Moscow to every European nation, down to Eastern part of Berlin city in Germany (Burns, 2019).

Transnational post Cold War challenges that engineered enlargement of mission scope added additional financial burden on NATO. This sharply contradicted unempirical expectations and projections that the end of the hostile era characterised with multiple proxy wars and arms race will downsize NATO's financial commitments. After some moments, exact opposite was discovered. Characteristically, the U.S. kept upping their financial contributions in tandem with prepondering exigencies of post-cold war period (Bergman and Cicarilla, 2021)



A study of member's financial attitude indicated that only the U.S. adopted a dynamic financial disposition. Other members maintained a static power that do not take cognisance of the reality on ground. In 2004 and 2010 members imposed a mandatory 2% investment of their GDP in defence budgets. So far, only U.K. and one Baltic state has fulfilled that obligation. Their conscious or unconscious inability to abide by their resolution informed the Republican Party's candidate and later President Trump to; threaten non observance of ARTICLE 5 in moments of crisis and possible pulling out of the alliance. His parochial decision abandoned any other variable, and dwelled on comparing financial figures America is committing to NATO. Attempts by alliance partners, U.S. Congress and defence experts to make him take a broader look of the matter was fruitless. He reiterated his controversial positions on NATO while on campaign trail in 2020. His defeat on 3rd November 2020 by a candidate that believes in the objectives of NATO and how the organisation is critical to achieving their foreign policy goals turned a new chapter in the U.S.-NATO relationship. However, this development has brought one glaring issue to the fore and that is the fact that America's Atlantic Charter partners will hardly give the type of trust they gave them before Trump became president.

Theoretical Framework

The work adopted the realist theory as its tool of analysis and investigation. Realist theory is one of the leading and most contentious theory in the field of international relations. Pundits postulated that it is the most essential and appropriate theory to use while studying relations amongst nations. According to Antune and Camisao (2018) realist theory has five basic pillars namely that states are main actors, secondly that national interest guide actions of states; and that decision makers are rational persona; others are the fact that the international scene is anarchic; and finally that morality is irrelevant.

Realism is one of the most basic theories in international relations that explain the motivation of states in the pursuit of power in the global arena. Realism further advances the notion of self-interest upon which all states operate as the greatest factor which causes nations to diverge from morally guided behavior. Realist theory draws its roots from the writings of Nicolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Thucydides and Sun Tzu. However, the actual theory of realism didn't come about until World War II. These ancient writers that related the same ideas as modern realism have been adopted as the "founding fathers" of this theory, but Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr are considered most instrumental in establishing the tenets of classical realism theory in the modern era (Mearsheimer, 2014). All realist postulations of scholars and philosophers agreed that interest and survival are the basic dictums guiding and driving relationships between nations.

NATO's Operations

Atlantic Charter has embarked on numerous operations since inception over seven decades ago. Surprisingly majority of the operations occurred at a time the principal adversary (Soviet Union) is long gone and disintegrated into twelve autonomous republics. And when its opposite military alliance (WARSAW PACT) has ceased to exist. NATO's operations have been compartmentalised into two: combat and non combat operations. Combat operations are campaigns involving use of military to fight state and non state adversaries in its original area of coverage (Europe and North America) or any part of the world. Non combat missions are those embarked upon to render humanitarian assistance

to countries plagued by apocalyptic disasters like earthquake, epidemics, uncoordinated migrations, peacekeeping, training, and capacity building.

Majority of Atlantic Charter's operations were outside its original objective of aiding members in moments of aggression by the dreaded Soviets or any of their WARSWA PACT allies in Europe or North America. The missions were peacekeeping, training of security personnel, response to disasters and pandemics, enforcement of UN resolution, safeguarding high seas etc. They were/are operations outside Europe and North America---areas NATO resolved to centre their defensive operations in. One curious development is that throughout the Cold War, NATO never triggered article five that is the bedrock of the charter. Neither the principal adversary (Soviet Union) nor its allies gave NATO the reason to invoke the article that committed members to collective defence in instances where one of the signatories comes under attack. Skirmishes between parties professing opposing ideologies occurred in former colonial territories, areas outside NATO's coverage.

NATO invoked article five once since coming to force in 1949. Coincidentally the article was triggered in support of the strongest leader of the alliance the U.S. That was precipitated by the deadly 9/11 attacks by Osama bin Laden's terrorists organisation called al-Qaeda in 2001 in New York and other cities. The act is the only post Second World War attack by a foreign or non state actor in the U.S. After the attacks NATO embarked on massive patrol of U.S.'s airspace. And joined the military operation staged to uproot al-Qaeda in their safe haven and sack their host, the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

The following are some of NATO's most outstanding operations succinctly outlined by Frantzen (2005) and NATO's bulletin of 22nd April 2021:

- (1) Operation Anchor Guard 10th August 1990 to 9th March 1991- support for Turkey during the Gulf War.
- (2) Operation Ace Guard ,3rd January 1991 to 8th March 1991(Ace Mobile Air) to defend Turkey.
- (3) Operation Allied Goodwill (i& ii) 4th to 9th February and 27th to 24th March 1992— humanitarian assistance to Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States.
- (4) Operation Agile Genie 1st to 19th May 1992 during a standoff between Libya and Europe because of Lockerbie passenger aircraft mishap.
- (5) African Union mission in Sudan (AMIS)—air transport from the UN mission, training and support of 250 personnel in charge of the mission in Dafur.
- (6) Airlift of 3500 tons of supplies, deployment of doctors, and specialised equipment to Pakistan in October of 2005 an earthquake hit the country.
- (7) Operation deny fly – a support for UN protection force Bosnia- Herzegovina.
- (8) Resolute Support - a non-combat mission providing training, assistance, advice to Afghan security and institutions. The mission had 16000 personnel from members and

partners. This mission was influenced by UN resolution 2189. This was followed by International Security Assistance Force from 2002 to 2014.

- (9) Kosovo Force (KFOR) the force first went to the country in 1999 to end humanitarian disaster. This action was backed by the UNSC resolution 1244 after their self-rule.
- (10) Operations Active Endeavour- an operation launched to dictate and deter terrorism in the Mediterranean.
- (11) Operation Sea Guardians- this is a marine situational awareness, counter terrorism and capacity building.
- (12) Operations Air Policing- this operation commenced after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.
- (13) Operation Unified Protector - this is an operation staged to enforce UNSC resolution 1973 that seeks to protect civilians, apply no-fly embargo in Libya.
- (14) Refugee crisis management- an operation to help manage unprecedented surge of refugees in Greece and Turkey.

United States –NATO Ruckus

Relations between Atlantic Charter and Trump by extension the U.S. nosedived principally because the organization's strongest actor narrowed its attention to defence spending of coalition partners' economic contributions to the running affairs of the alliance since its formation in 1949. There is no doubt, there is a monumental spending gulf between the U.S. and its transatlantic partners. American's defence spending and commitment to the organisation is over 70%.

Trump's statements as a candidate in 2016 and statements after assumption of office settled the assumption that economic contributions to NATO was his major factor responsible for his negative disposition on the transatlantic partnership. On 28th June 2018 Trump tweeted that, "the U.S. pays close to the entire cost of NATO, protecting many of these same countries that rip us off on trade(they pay only a fraction of the cost and laugh) (Trump, 2018).

Similarly, President Trump's cabinet members and senior security aides have made public statements suggesting that their main concern was economic contributions of their country to NATO's activities. His two defence secretaries Jim Mattis and Mark Espers made statements that confirmed this premise. In February 2017, Secretary Mittis said "if your nations do not want to see America moderate its commitments to this alliance, each of your capitals needs to show support for our common defence". While his successor Esper in a discussion with Atlantic Council said the 2% is a gold standard. Furthermore, the National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien complicated positions of his fellow officials by saying the 2% defence spending is a "Bench Mark"(Mehnta and Larter,2020).

Beyond the economic factor, hordes of experts opined that the U.S.-NATO stormy relationship when Trump was president was precipitated by his poor understanding of the dynamics of alliance and why it was established ab initio. The leadership of the U.S.

abandoned other factors that are often considered while weighing positive or negative effects of an organization, especially a military alliance formed to protect an ideology, defend freedom and deter threats from a superpower with deadly nukes.

While the ruckus glows the legislative arm (House of Representatives and the Senate) are very supportive of NATO. Jordan et al (2020) report in The Washington Post of 3rd April titled “Congress has NATO's back despite Trump's unilateralism” captured Congress’s support to NATO. Similarly, in 2017 the GOP controlled capitol passed a resolution reaffirming the American's believe in Article 5 of the organisation.

Belkin(2020) narrated the support NATO is getting from DEM and GOP in his report captioned “NATO: Hey Issues Following 2019 Leader's Meeting” in a Congressional Research Service R46066. The report said 87% of GOP and 94% of DEM support increase in American’s commitment to NATO or keeping existing status.

Additionally, there is a gargantuan support for NATO from conservative and liberal foreign policy experts and institutions. They are unanimous on its sustainability and strengthening. They have a firm notion that NATO played a key role to victory of western liberal ideas during the cold war. And they are optimistic that the organisation will play a critical role in post cold war era that is full of transnational calamities.

Top military brass are supportive of American's ties with NATO. Their stance emanated from their experiences in the theatre of war and other military activities across the globe. They quite appreciate the trouble of operating without support of allies in far climes of the world. Their experience and knowledge shaped their position and support for NATO. A rough survey of major institutions in America, stakeholders in defence and foreign policy and the general public suggest that there is a strong support for NATO in America. The only disgruntled bunch is President Trump and his team who do not have a clear and deep understanding of the philosophy of NATO and its desirability in a post Cold War international system.

Beyond the Money

President Trump has major character of reducing everything to economic benefits. Even on that, he narrows it further to immediate trickle downs. That reflected in policies like NAFTA, relationship with Saudi Arabia, WHO, Paris climate protocol etc. He consciously or otherwise failed to appreciate the fact that, not all foreign policy decisions are premised on financial benefits.

America benefited and is still benefiting from NATO in sundry ways. It is doubtful if America would have gotten the benefits without the contribution of its transatlantic partners. Allies support and contributions was crucial to the victory of capitalism during the cold war. Triumph of capitalism and defeat of socialism is seen as American victory not that of allies. It gave America the position of a sole superpower for over two decades. Within this period America did not only dictate the rule of international system but enforced it without a challenge.

Binnendik (2019) posited that NATO gave America the strength to promote liberal international order. This made democracy a global political dress code and liberal economic philosophy a must adhered to dictum. This also further enhanced America's economic interest across the globe. Ford and Goldier (2019) piqued that the U.S. is benefiting from cooperation in enforcement of sanctions. NATO allies always cooperate in observing and enforcing sanctions triggered by the U.S. state and non state actors. They do that even on occasions

where the dispute has no direct bearing with them. In some instances, such sanctions are injurious to their national interest.

A good example of allies bearing the burden of sanction is observing sanctions on Russia and Iran. These two countries are a major source of gas to Europe, especially Russia. Each time the U.S. pulled the sanction trigger, her transatlantic partners enforces it. If Europe is to calculate economic damages U.S. sanctions are inflicting on them, it's far above what America is contributing to NATO.

Garamone (2018) postulated that there are 28 NATO bases in Europe. The bases are giving the U.S. clear strategic and tactical advantages in their operation theatres in the Middle East and Africa. The bases also provide medical facilities for injured combatants in Afghanistan and Iran. Without these bases, it is near impossible to successfully execute military campaigns in Africa and the Middle East. If the operations can be done, the cost will be quite unimaginable.

NATO provide a platform for the U.S. to embark on scientific research and innovations. These efforts birthed numerous weapons that gave the U.S. an advantage over the former USSR. For example, France and U.K. contributes 30% of NATO's nuclear ballistic missiles submarine (Garamone,2018). Joint military exercises and drills is another area that the U.S. is benefiting from. These exercises help in shaping the focus and preparedness of U.S. armed forces. The drills accord American forces opportunity to test their skills in the field and make amendments in tandem with what they observed in the field. The benefit from this is far beyond what the U.S. think it is sinking in the organisation.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce 2020 annual survey of jobs, trade and investment between the U.S. and Europe put the volume of trade between them at 6.2 trillion dollars. The investments created 16 million good paying jobs. The U.S. has a total of 17 trillion dollars' corporate investments, globally, 60% of it is in Europe. Their cordial relationship and shared values has insulated this big investment and provided a smooth operating ground in tandem with liberal economic policies. These investments are America's biggest and most stable investments outside their shores.

America is benefiting from NATO through members' commitment to handling global refugee crisis. Their partners are investing heavily on this and other developmental issues around the world. The quantum of resources Germany and some countries that Trump complained about is far beyond what the U.S. is committing on refugees and other transnational calamities(Burns,2019).Europe is also contributing more than the U.S. on problems related to climate change, cyber security, peacekeeping, and mass migration. Efforts of NATO allies on this is outstanding and contributing to global peace and in multiple ways. The U.S. is indirectly benefiting from this because without allies' involvement, at some point the U.S. will be at the receiving end (EU, 2016).

The U.S. is the only country that article 5 of the organisation was ever triggered to protect and support. This came after Al-Qaeda bombed twin towers in New York on 11th September 2001. When that terror was unleashed, NATO gave air defence to the U.S. And followed the U.S. in Afghanistan when they declared war on the Taliban –who provided safe haven for Al-Qaeda and its leadership. NATO members contributed troops and resources and stayed with the U.S. for over two decades that the campaign lasted(Heinz,2004).

NATO allies also backed the U.S. when the country went on its second Iraqi war which turned the multi ethnic and religious country to a failed state. Allies stayed with the U.S. even when the campaign became senseless and hopeless. They lost soldiers and

resources in Iraq. Even when it was discovered that the mission was premised on deceit and inordinate ambition, they stayed in Iraq(Garamone,2021).

NATO members are one of the highest patronisers or purchasers of American manufactured military arsenals. Their patronage constitutes a very big chunk of America's annual sales of weapons in the world. Since they are economically stable, payment of their purchase are done as at when due. This is not like selling to countries fighting civil wars or engaged in inter state conflicts. All purchases were deals signed, sealed and delivered in time(Mauro,2019)

The Way Forward

The end of the ideological war between the West and the East that masterminded formation of Atlantic Charter after the Second World War did not render it absolute and ineffectual. NATO is still a critical and quintessential actor in contemporary world system-will continue to be for an unforeseeable moment. To adequately and properly fit into post cold war period and its Transnational quandaries, NATO must undergo total overhaul. The transformation process must encompass philosophical and structural changes. The changes will rearrange and redirect affairs of the Atlantic Charter. Once that is done, the organisation will not be caught in a web of philosophical and legal contradictions.

The first step should be expanding the scope of their areas of coverage in order to capture Transnational palavers like natural disasters, climate change, pandemics, advancement of liberal ideas refugees, terrorism, sea piracy, genocide, democracy and gross human rights violations. Delving into these areas will ameliorate most of the Transnational calamities before they graduate to uncontrollable proportions.

NATO must mutually and peacefully settle issues of its quest to expand into former Soviet Republics with Russia. Finding a common group will eradicate pressure that its new members are facing from Russia. The pressure the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are facing from Russia is too much for small and fragile states. Russia has a legitimate security reason to fear NATO's aggressive expansion and the fact that Soviet Union no longer exist calls for suspicion in Moscow. So long as that suspicion exists, Russia will continue to resist and threaten neighbours willing to join the alliance. Aside physical threatening, they can use their energy power to disrupt economy of these countries. Unfortunately, most of them completely rely on Russia for energy supply.

Additionally, Russia will use its ethnic nationalities who are sizeable in most of their former Soviet Republic to steer baseless and senseless conflicts. In extreme instances, they can instigate a movement to breakaway from such countries. Ukraine and Georgia are victims of this Russian inspired irredentism throughout the former Soviet Republics. Breaking away of Crimea from Ukraine and activities of the rebels in some parts of the country clearly demonstrated Russia's capacity to brew brouhaha in all former Soviet's republics.

NATO members should be faithful to their 2014 resolution to up their defense budget to 2% of its annual GDP. Increasing their defence budgets to the percentage they resolved will terminate the feeling by some U.S. pseudo conservatives and unilateralists that NATO is exploiting and over- withdrawing from their pool of goodwill. In addition to quieting dissenting voices, it will grow their military industrial complexes and upgrade their barn arsenals.

Atlantic Charter should establish bases in each of the continent in the globe. This will ease execution of military campaigns that will arise consequent to Transnational snags that

were out of their original mandate and vision. Having forces in other continents will also ease difficulties in operational logistics and expedite actions.

NATO should carefully and strategically permit all countries in Eastern Europe (former iron curtains) to join the alliance. This will accord them a strategic opportunity to station forces in most of the former Soviet Republics. Having forces with awesome and sophisticated U.S. made arsenals stationed in such countries will force Russia to moderate its disruptive activities along their shared borders with former client Republics and areas liberated by the Red Army in the Second World War.

Lastly Atlantic Charter should increase its investment on cyber security because it is vivid that the adversary has opened a fresh front of warfare that was not anticipated when the alliance was form over seven decades ago. The foe recently hacked a major U.S. fuel supply pipeline called Colonial Pipelines, that criminal and aggressive action disrupted economic activities of many states in the U.S. Between 2016 to 2019 soldiers of disinformation used the cyberspace to disrupt elections through spreading of propaganda that gave far right political platforms and political actors an advantage over moderate and pro EU elements.

Atlantic Charter should establish a cyberspace unit that will tackle this growing threat because it is more dangerous than physical attacks. This brand of warfare is capable of not only dislocating economic activities but capable of destroying critical infrastructures and cherished liberal ideas that is the philosophical base of alliance members.

Conclusion

The U.S. must reconcile itself with the reality that military alliances are not economic clubs. It should also know that each dollar invested in NATO produces economic benefits in ancillary sectors. Atlantic Charter members must also appreciate the fact that they need to begin to prepare for their individual security because there is no guarantee that another isolationist or go-it-alone U.S. president will not emerge and take more extreme and parochial steps of disrupting solidarity and setting of the organisation. NATO should reassess and amend its mandate in order to capture new transnational challenges that emerged after the collapsed of the ideological war between the West and the East.

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