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## Realpolitik and European Militaries

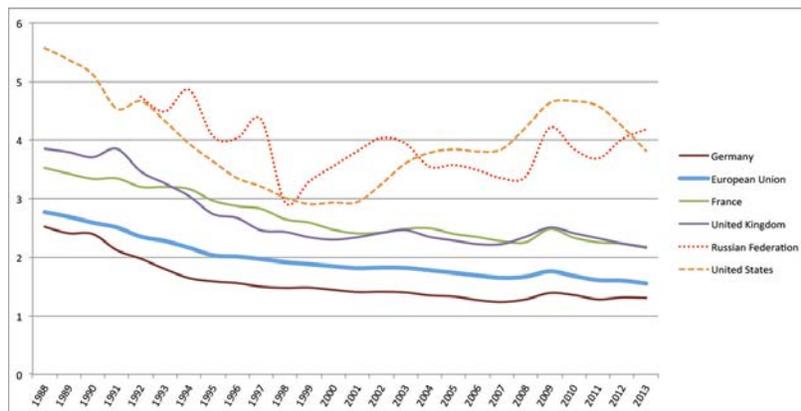
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*EuroPoint:* Amid America’s military rebalance to Asia, how ready is Europe to fend itself from Russia?

Europeans grew accustomed with America’s military protection after WWII. While Europe enjoyed the benefits of NATO membership, the US footed most of the bill – around 73% (once all the peace-keeping mission are accounted for). The post Cold-War decline in military spending by EU member states has accelerated in the past austerity years.

NATO protocol mandates member states to spend 2% of their GDP on defense. Out of 22 EU countries with NATO membership, only Estonia meets that requirement. Even the UK slashed its defense spending, and 2015 is the first year that Britain will not meet the agreed 2%. This is in spite of the rise of interceptions of Russian military jets carrying nuclear missiles over the British Isles.



Military Spending since the End of the Cold War © EuroPoint 2015

The Obama administration began in 2012 the “Pivot to East Asia,” a strategic reallocation of diplomatic and military resources away from Europe and the Middle East. In this context, Europe is left alone to defend its Eastern border with Russia. In February in Minsk, Europeans were left alone for the first time to negotiate with Putin. They were unable to stop him from attacking [Debaltseve](#).

Do Europeans have sufficient capabilities to stand on their own against Russia’s power play?

A few embarrassing incidents made a mockery of some European national armies. Rubber boats were at the forefront of Sweden’s hunt for a suspected Russian submarine in November 2014. This was no isolated incident: after the Cold War, the Royal Swedish Navy shrunk its Anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operation fleet from 34 surface combatants to 9, from 12 attack submarines to 5, and completely scrapped its ASW helicopter fleet. Denmark completely scrapped its submarine force in the early 2000s.

German soldiers in the rapid response force used [painted broomsticks](#) at a joint NATO exercise last year due to equipment shortages. Troops from the Panzergrenadierbataillon 371 were missing 31% of their machine guns, 41% of their handguns, more than 75% of their night-vision goggles, and were using [civilian vans](#) as stand-in personnel carriers. In a separate incident, a unit of the German Special Forces had to pull out from a NATO exercise because there was no operational helicopter available.

A Defense Ministry spokesman told the German ARD channel that the “German army operates with 75% of material under current regulations.” German defense minister Ursula von der Leyen admitted that Germany was not able not fulfill its NATO obligations because of military shortages.

The German defense budget was €800m less in 2014 than in 2013. “The weaknesses in defense, due to the austerity politics of 2009, are damaging Germany, ” explains Jan Techau, former German Defense Ministry analyst and current director of Carnegie Endowment in Brussels.



EUROCORPS Soldiers in Alsace © European Union 2014 Source EP

### Reshaping Military Alliances

Sweden and Finland announced in February a military cooperation pact to [go to war together](#) in the event of an attack. Neither of them are NATO members. A recent poll showed that for the first time in history, more Swedes are in favor of joining NATO than against. Finnish President Sauli Niinistö announced in March 2015 that NATO membership was an “available option” for his country as well.

Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands signed an agreement on [sharing surveillance and protection of their airspaces](#), a premiere in EU’s history. The common missions will start in 2017.

The countries closest to Russia are boosting their defense capabilities. Romania will increase its military spending to 2% of GDP by 2017, albeit borrowing money from the EU to do so. Latvia and Lithuania will reach the 2% target by 2020. Germany will also ramp up defense spending in 2016, as agreed by the SPD and CDU/CSU coalition partners.

EU defense ministers agreed in February to revise the European Security Strategy and develop an adequate plan to respond to the “modern-day reality and modern threats,” more specifically, the “hybrid warfare as confirmed by the Russian policy in Ukraine.”

Yet until the EU defenses are revamped, European diplomacy has little choice other than continuing the realpolitik of appeasing Russia.