Vago Muradian: Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, that’s just released a fascinating report, “Pulling their Weight: The Data on NATO Responsibility Sharing,” that tries to bring some intellectual rigor to the increasingly rancorous debate about alliance burden sharing and the staggering costs of rebuilding atrophied but expensive capabilities as the Western alliance tries to better stand up to Russia, support Ukraine, and also play a role in helping deter China.

I’m Vago Muradian, editor of the Defense and Aerospace Report, and it’s my honor to moderate this conversation today with two of the august authors of this fascinating paper, to get – as I said, to bring some rigor to the discussion. Dr. Kathleen McInnis is the director of the Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative here at CSIS, and also one of the big NATO brains. Kathleen, welcome. And Dan Fata, who is a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Europe and NATO during the Bush administration, who has also had a long career in industry and advisory. Two of your group, Dr. Ben Jensen, who is from Marine Corps University, and Jose Macias were unfortunately unable to attend today.

What I find fascinating about this discussion is burden sharing, you know, squabbles go back to the earliest days of the alliance. Harry Truman was complaining about Europeans that aren’t spending enough money. This was consistent throughout the Cold War. And indeed, past administrations of both parties have complained. George W. Bush’s administration was complaining even as allies and partners were helping in Afghanistan and Iraq. Barack Obama was complaining. And then most pronouncedly – though the tone of this discussion did change during the Trump administration, where we found a lot more rancor that was directed to our allies and partners.

And now, as a presidential candidate, Donald Trump is saying that there should be some form of litmus test, something that was introduced at that point if you’re not paying enough. And for those who don’t “pay their dues,” as he’s put it, which is a misleading statement, that allies – that he would welcome Russian attacks on those guys who don’t spend enough. Then there were a lot of discussions about what constitutes, you know, the actual 2 percent goal, which was a 2014 thing, as some people will remember, at Newport. And we needed to say something, and the answer was let’s all commit to 2 percent, with 20 percent for investment.

Kathleen, allies and partners are spending more money. There’s a little bit of debate about whether infrastructure spending should be part of that. And we’ll discuss that in a minute. From your standpoint, where are our allies in terms of what they’re spending? And what do critics get wrong about this entire burden sharing debate, which, as you said, is a better bar discussion among academics than with the American public?
Kathleen McInnis: (Laughs.) Well, so I’m going to start with the second part of the question first, right? What are we getting wrong about the burden sharing debate? And I think, critically, one of the common misperceptions about NATO burden sharing is that it’s somehow a payment to the United States for protection, like a protection money scheme kind of thing.

Mr. Muradian: Afghanistan as well, and many other operations all around the world.

Dr. McInnis: Absolutely, 100 percent. So and the other piece of this that is kind of strategically weird is that we’re so focused on 2 percent. And it is true, if you don’t invest you’re not going to have outputs, the kinds of capabilities you need on defense. This is true. However, our publics when they think about what the need is, it’s necessarily only military and defense capabilities. Our publics want safety and security. And you need safety and security for not only public expectations, but also when you think about things like deterrence. You need a resilient infrastructure, to be able to deter Russia. You need a broader suite of national security capabilities. So that led us to writing this report. OK, if we need this broader set of capabilities – I mean, we’ve been focusing on 2 percent. What are allies actually spending on the broader stuff? Now, it’s really hard to put this data together, for a variety of reasons. But if I could pull up graph number one.

Mr. Muradian: It’s terrific that we’re going to have show and tell, but to your point it’s beyond – it’s beyond the dollars that are being spent, especially when the United States is now fueling uncertainty among allies and partners, right? That’s not a good way of going about this either, right, to have an explorative kind of approach.

Dr. McInnis: Right. How do we – how do we build the kinds of strategic relationships necessary, or maintain the kinds of relationships necessary, to deter China if we have that transactional approach to our alliances? So anyway, so we decided, actually, let’s start looking at the data and seeing what allies are actually spending on the broader set of national security capabilities? To include things like pivoting away from Russian energy sources. And it was a very interesting discussion. Again, this is from 2022 because that’s the latest set of data that we could get for public order and safety. And I think future iterations of this study will be getting to more and more granularity. There’s some things that aren’t captured in this.

But first, rough order of magnitude swag. This is what the different nations have been spending on the broader suite of national security capabilities. So defense spending, public order and safety, assistance to Ukraine, and then this energy pivoting. And we see things like Lithuania spent almost 8 percent of its GDP on what we would call national security in 2022. So let’s go to the
next chart, chart number two. And so anybody who worked NATO ISAF operations – (laughter) – there was this thing at the end –

Mr. Muradian: I want to call foul on that. You don’t point to somebody and laugh about that. (Laughter.)

Dr. McInnis: So yeah, we – Dan and I worked on it together. There was this thing called the ISAF placemat that was published every month. And it sort of showed which allies had which number troops where in Afghanistan. And so we decided to actually start, you know, taking that – the data from the first graph and map it onto a placemat and really see where we are. And dark green on here is those allies that are spending more than 4 percent of their GDP on what we would call national security spending. The lighter green is between 3 and 4 percent. And then orange is between 2 and 3 percent. Blue is Iceland, because they don’t have a defense – they’ve got a civil defense force, but not a military. And then the purple is we just couldn't capture the data for Montenegro and North Macedonia. But we wanted to start get this picture out to show –

Mr. Muradian: Well, I’d invite Russia to attack both of those at this point. No, I’m just kidding.

Dr. McInnis: No. (Laughs.) Bad idea. Bad idea. Yeah. So what we see is actually if we’re – if it’s all about, you know, 2 percent of GDP and what our country is actually spending, it’s actually a fairly optimistic picture that’s not captured in the public debate, and that we wanted to start showing. And, again, I see this study – this is the first cut at something. What’s not what’s not reflected in here is things like cybersecurity infrastructure spending, dual use rail gages, public-private partnerships for deterrence purposes, those kinds of things. And we’d like to get into more detail next time. But as we’re getting into summit season and thinking about these kinds of burden-sharing, responsibility-sharing – we call it responsibility sharing – this is the initial cut. And it’s not as bad as you think.

Daniel Fata: Can I just add on to this? I think multiple things were important here. One is we need to get away from this term burden sharing to responsibility sharing. Because not everybody can share the burdens equally. You know, you look at your Luxembourgs and others, they don’t have enough absorptive capacity at 2 percent to be able to fully share the burdens. But they can be doing other things. So there needs to be flexibility in how we think about this. And also, in nothing that we describe here do we reduce or take away from needing to meet the NATO minimum of 2 percent on defense.

When Kathleen first showed me this – and great job to Ben and Jose for all the work that they did as part of the Futures Lab here – what struck me was three things. One, it provides a more complete picture of what’s being done
by the individual allies. And you can get a more collective snapshot. Second, it really does push back. Look at these numbers here. It does push back on the narrative that NATO allies aren’t doing enough. And, third, by understanding where the monies are being spent per country, it gives us the ability to figure out where there are still gaps, and what can be emulated in other countries. And so I think that’s important.

My final point here is this whole 2 percent debate, look, guilty as charged. I was part of it under Secretaries Rumsfeld and Gates. And it starts with when the new allies came in as part of their agreement they had to spend 2 percent, and they rapidly stopped meeting 2 percent once they got in the alliance. So that generated something. Then you have Afghanistan. And, again, I wrote the speeches and the talking points for Gates and Rumsfeld that you guys need to be spending more, you have too many caveats in Afghanistan.

It would only be sort of after I left the Pentagon and continued to stay in touch with Secretary Gates that I said to him at one point – I said, you know, sir, it finally dawned on me why the caveats were there. And it’s not that those allies didn’t want to participate in certain parts of the mission. It’s they had underinvested for so long that they were actually dangerous to the mission. And so you would see this build up in ’09 and ’10 of better forces going to Afghanistan and more money being spent, which would, ultimately, I think, lay the platform for ’14. How do we keep that going?

Mr. Muradian: Let me ask you about that under-structure investment, right? We found in 2014 we didn’t have the rail lines that were able to carry heavy cargo, for example, like armored vehicles. We didn’t have the rail stock. There were no induction ports anymore, as we used to have in Denmark and elsewhere across the alliance. And so all of our allies and partners have been focusing on that back-shop capability that is foundational to the alliance. How do you need to change the discussion?

Because when you would talk to senior Trump officials, they would say, well, that doesn’t constitute defense spending, right? What we’re looking for is 2 percent. And an underlying message, which was sort of revealed when I was on a trip to Denmark, actually, was, well, not only do you have to spend 2 percent, you have to buy weapons from us. And then it’s up to us whether or not we do come to your defense at that point, for a variety of other unclear factors. Which kind of went over a little bit like a lead balloon among senior officials at the time.

From your standpoint, as somebody who’s been engaging in this debate for a long time as well as a policymaker who was bringing out the brass knuckles and beating them up, how does the nature of this discussion have to change to take that? Because there’s this sense that if you look at it from an
integrated perspective, you're somehow backsliding, right? You're giving them out. Which isn't really the case.

Mr. Fata: No, it’s not that the case. And, you know, Kathleen and I were joking about this. There’s going to be plenty of people that after this session ends will be saying, well, you calculated wrong, or you did this wrong, or you did that wrong. In many ways, that's not the audience we're trying to appeal to. We're trying to appeal to your parliamentarians, your lawmakers, your administration officials on both sides, as to needing to understand that building and investing in resiliency – ports, rails, cyber, airports, electric grids, alternative fuels – that's all part of what was established in 1949 under the Washington Treaty.

Most folks who know anything about NATO focus on Article Five, attack on one is attack on all. Most folks don’t pay attention to Article Three, which is you have to be prepared. And so for a long time we collectively – and so it’s all members of the alliance – have only focused on the 2 percent, the hard stuff. But there is a requirement from the beginning. You have to have resiliency. You have to have the infrastructure to be able to support either allies coming to your defense or the ability for you to be able to hold off an attack. And so what existed in 1949, I would argue, still exists more now. There’s a lot of dynamism.

As a friend told me as I drove in here, he said, Dan, you know, the world is ruthless and you need allies in a ruthless world. And I think partly what we just need to be saying to our fellow American lawmakers, and colleagues, and others is, look, we need allies. NATO stands for No Alternative Treaty Organization. There is nothing else like there out that. And the more we beat up on them or say they’re not pulling the weight – their weight, the more we risk losing this. Kathleen mentioned the 75th anniversary of NATO coming up. I would love for us to think about what NATO at 100 looks like. And how do you keep this? At the end of the day, NATO is only useful if it’s agile, credible, and usable. It has to have all that stuff. In order to have that, you need the military side, but you need the resilient, the infrastructure, and everything that goes along with it.

My last point. Look at Pearl Harbor today. Nineteen potential berths. You can – only four are usable on only one is a munitions load out. I mean, we have our own problems. We can be beating up on our allies all the time, but we have our own problems that we have to address too.

Mr. Muradian: Well, we’ve under invested, right? Go back and ask every INDOPACOM commander, that’s one of their priorities. And it always slides down on the list because we find a whole bunch of other things to spend money on. I find it interesting that the only time – Article Five was designed for the United States to come to NATO’s assistance. And the only time it was invoked was
after 9/11, when Europe came to our assistance. And one of the points our allies and partners would make is we consumed a generation-plus of modernization in order to be able to support you in both of these endeavors that consumed vast amounts of resources.

I’m going to give you a chance to weigh in, and then ask you what has become, to me, I think, a sort of a pseudo-intellectual discussion about the alliance. But go ahead, if you have any point you wanted to make.

Dr. McInnis: Oh, no, I was just going to build on what Dan was saying about, you know, we need the alliance to be credible, right? And credibility is not just military capability. It’s also political cohesion. And going back to what – the point you were raising of whether or not this dilutes the focus if you – if you open the aperture. And that’s one of the reasons that we haven’t been willing to open up the box of what’s being spent, the NATO planning, that black box.

Look, we are at great risk now of cutting off our nose to spite our face. The alliance is – by focusing on 2 percent, by making alliance participation a transactional discussion about euros and dollars, we are at risk of just completely losing this this thing that has mattered so much to U.S. strategic interests and global security more broadly. The discussion has become a political poison pill. We have to start getting ourselves away from this if we are going to see NATO at 100.

Mr. Muradian: But how do we do that, all right? As somebody who’s followed this debate for a long time, it has gotten particularly toxic since 2015. And for the first time the former president made statements that senior members of his party did not countermand immediately, which suggests a sea change. And so it means that whatever the position of the party was is something that is now in flux. Your party, as Republicans, would have been internationalist, focused on allies and partners.

I mean, we’re increasingly – is the pseudo-intellectual debate – is, well, you know, it’s time that we pull the plug on Ukraine. You know, it’s not about Russia. Everything is about China. We have to really focus on China. We’re doing everybody a favor by cutting off and moving on. And, you know, Ukraine really doesn’t fall into any category. Whereas I’m one of the people, and I think everybody – many people would agree, there is a connection to supporting Ukraine and better deterring China, for example.

Dr. McInnis: I mean, the Taiwanese, for example.

Mr. Muradian: For example. What’s sort of the bigger global way of looking at this on why this support is necessary, but more important – and, Dan, maybe you can start us off, how do you appeal to those who don’t want to help Ukraine, and now are increasingly saying, well, you know, to help – we’re going to free
resources to spend on China. Which, you know, I mean, there’s that tendency in the department anyway, right? It’s like, we need to be focused. How do you – how do you do this? How do you argue this? And I want to get your take also on this.

Mr. Fata: Yeah. I mean, it’s been nothing but disappointing to watch this debate about whether NATO is worth investing in, whether we’re going to be there for them. I would probably take exception to something you said, where Trump came out, some parties – some members of the party delayed. But it appears to be – and I’m paraphrasing – it appears to be just accepted now. I don’t believe it’s accepted. And I believe, unfortunately, that it’s just the louder voices are being the ones that are heard, and the ones the media are covering, and not your average House member, or your average senator – or even your just average citizen. I don’t believe that they think NATO isn’t worth investing.

Now, the Europeans are deathly afraid. I still go to Europe. I have friends that are over there that I talk to all the time. And they’re afraid that the United States, whether it’s Republican or Democrat, is no longer predictable and no longer will potentially be there. They’ve got – obviously, they were bothered by President Trump’s remarks during his first – during his presidential term. What happened with the Afghanistan withdrawal, and not being notified. That sort of put the Europeans back on their heels like, hmm, maybe we do need to have some kind of strategic autonomy to be able to act if the U.S. isn’t going to be there.

Dr. McInnis: Oh, just, you know, the argument that if we – when we invest in Ukraine that we’re taking away our focus or diluting our focus on China. I would just offer that we are in an actual – there’s an actual shooting war happening in Ukraine right now. And so the – yes, we have to be able to pay attention to the long game. But there is a close fight that’s happening right now that threatens to expand to NATO countries if the line is not held in Ukraine. In that circumstance, we are likely in an enormous world of strategic hurt. Let’s play this out a little bit, right?

Just think about the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and the – when the war was kicked up a notch, shall we say, in 2022, how Ukrainian grain shortages sent ripple effects across the global economy. Europe is one of America’s largest trading partners. What kinds of economic shock waves are going to be sent if Russia does decide to take a bite at the NATO apple? He’s said since 2007 that that’s what he’s intending to do.

Mr. Muradian: He told us he was going to attack Ukraine, and we didn’t really listen to him either, twice.
Dr. McInnis: Right? So, I mean, he’s already articulated the playbook. He’s already articulated what he plans to do. Can you imagine the cost of the American taxpayer of that kind of global economic shock? It is not just in our normative moral, feel-good interest to be supporting NATO and to be holding the line with Ukraine. It’s actually in our no-kidding, pocketbook, financial interest. And if American voters are exposed to the kinds of economic shocks that we would likely see if we withdraw from NATO, I mean, I would imagine the political leadership will have hell to pay.

Mr. Muradian: And are you one of the people who, as a strategist, you’re sending the wrong signals to the Chinese, and the Chinese end up miscalculating over Taiwan, for example, in the wake of that?

Dr. McInnis: Yes.

Mr. Fata: Yes. (Laughter.)

Mr. Muradian: And that’s – no, I’m kidding.

Mr. Fata: And I’ll tell you one other thing. So absent the former president bashing NATO like this, I’m not sure the rest of those that either are part of the echo chamber or that have their grievances would be as vocal and would be as threatening as to say that we may withdraw from NATO. There’s always been the group that says, is Europe pulling their own weight? And what we’re trying to show is that they are being responsible. Are they doing exactly the way we would like that? No. But we also got to understand their uniqueness.

I also believe that at the end of the day the former president, he likes to raise issues where he picks up that there’s a grievance – a grievance amongst the public, a grievance amongst either members of Congress. And so because he finds issues that resonate. I don’t believe the former president will withdraw us from NATO if he is to be reelected. I don’t – I think that would be, to use Kathleen’s term, such a strategic shock that I don’t think – I don’t think he would – he and his team would want that.

That doesn’t mean though that they – and I fully anticipate something like this happening, like we did with South Korea and Japan in asking for base renegotiations and things, I think he’s going to want to potentially threaten to withdrawal unless something happens in return. And that may just be a better cost sharing of things or maybe we get NATO allies to agree to 2.25 percent, or something. But I believe he’s doing it for the purpose of trying to show that if I’m reelected, I will change things.

Mr. Muradian: But don’t you, I mean, the president of the United States also has a lot of powers in an alliance context, right, that go well beyond withdrawing, right?
And I know there’s legislation and law on the books, actually, that U.S. monies cannot be used to do that. But he can reduce troop presence in Europe rather dramatically. Article Five, everybody has to vote on Article Five. You have to do something. You don’t have to necessarily provide troops, right? So you could decide to demure from the troop part of it, but I’ll give you intelligence support, or what have you. You have to do something in some capacity, but it doesn’t say exactly what you have to do, right?

So from that standpoint, can’t you actually – and in the last administration you had Jim Mattis and Mark Esper who slow rolled withdrawal of troops from Europe purposefully, you know, to buy time. Presumably the next time there will be no Mattis or Esper who say, OK, this is a really a bad idea. I mean, can you end up doing a lot of damage, irrespective of pulling out of NATO?

Dr. McInnis:
Sure. Sorry, I was sort of thinking about the civilian-military relations dynamics of that, and just how problematic that situation was from a civ-mil perspective. Sure, the damage is being done right now, right? Again, credibility is a political determination as much as military capability. And so the fact that we’re having these discussions about whether or not the United States will be there in this kind of way suggests that if we want to keep the alliance we need to have a significant course correction to the discussion that’s taking place right now. This is one way of doing it. It’s not the only way.

But we – those individuals – those observers who agree with the argument that NATO has enduring strategic utility for the United States need to start making the case much more powerfully, and finding the ways to show the case, and show that the picture is not as grim as it has been painted out to be for decades. And oh, by the way, we need our allies. Everything’s better with friends, right? You can get more done. There’s so many global strategic challenges that you need allies and partners to contend with. And absent NATO, things become much harder. Those who agree with that set of arguments need to start making the case.

Mr. Muradian:
Does Congress, when they were returning from recess, we took two bites of this. One was an insistence that we need a border deal in order to clear this. It was an unprecedented border deal, looking at it through the history of border deals in the United States on a bipartisan basis. Would have really moved the ball forward in a direction that one party actually might have liked less than the other party would have liked in terms of some foundational tenets. It was vetoed. Then a clean $95 billion package was approved by the Senate. The House did not take it up, has gone on recess.

When we get back, Dan and Kathleen, do lawmakers – I mean, does this emotional argument work? This aid package should have been approved
four or five months ago because Ukraine is now paying the price. And as we prepare to convene for the 75th anniversary of the alliance’s birthday, on the way to 100, it’s not going to be a positive scene to be greeted literally every other day with another Avdiivka-style retreat or route. Does this move the needle at all, especially since the speaker was meeting with the former president and sort of mirroring a lot of the rhetoric?

Mr. Fata: Yeah, look, I think, unfortunately, because of the Navalny death –

Mr. Muradian: Assassination, let’s put it, killing at the least.

Mr. Fata: At the least, yeah. Tragic. Navalny’s – I mean, some of the Putin just actions and comments, what’s happening on the ground in Ukraine, the former – our former president’s comments, I think that has – my sense, and in talking with folks, it’s motivated the non-extreme parts of both parties to get this done, on the 95 billion (dollars) on Ukraine, Taiwan, and Israel. So I actually do have a pretty good sense of optimism that maybe not before the end of – end of February, but probably sometime before the middle of March, that I think we’re going to see something actually get passed to provide support.

I think there’s a growing sense that we can’t let – we can’t walk away from Ukraine. I think we have to help Ukraine. If we can’t help them win – which we should be helping them win. Not get to a tie. We should be helping Ukraine win. So I think there also needs to be a change in that strategy. But we at least have got to help Ukraine get into the best battlefield position for whatever an ultimate settlement or agreement will be.

Mr. Muradian: And, of course, the assassination of the Russian defector in Spain, right? I mean, I find the impunity with which Putin is acting, right? I mean, you kill Navalny right before Munich gathers, and then at the end of it you kill a Russian defector. It’s a nice way to bookend things. Your sense on whether or not it’s going to pass? And then I’ve got one more question for you.

Dr. McInnis: My analysis comports with Dan’s on Hill dynamics. I would just also underscore, that strategic sense that there’s no resetting with Russia now, right? We are in a new world. And it is – it is truly this competition between democracies and authoritarian actors. And Russia trying to rewrite the rules through military force, China seeming to try to do so through different versions of coercion. Ultimately, they’re different playbooks but with the same goal. And we have to start fighting back in all – in a whole-of-government, you know, of which military is one part, kind of way if we are going to prevail in this.

Like, when you think about what’s at stake. I mean, all these things are such abstractions. Like rules-based world order, what does that mean? OK, when I was in Ukraine in August I was in Irpin, where I heard the story of the
Russian soldiers who raped children to death in front of their parents and then murdered their parents. That was one of tens of thousands of stories. That is what we are talking about. That is the world that we are trying to prevent us from living in. So let’s act accordingly.

Mr. Muradian: Both emotional and also sensible case. I would like to believe that it would be that direct that people get it. Russia has been at war with the West now for 20 years. And it’s – and, you know, and even after, right, we were celebrating the second anniversary. It’s actually the 10th anniversary of the first attack on Ukraine. And I find it astonishing that people are both, A, still surprised by that. And we also say Russia doesn’t have allies. It actually has very powerful allies – in China, in Iran, in North Korea – that are providing it bullets, unmanned systems, as well as the electronics that make their – and our – we’re not being tough enough on some of our allies, whether it’s Turkey or any one of a number of other countries, that are, you know, basically a back channel to, you know, whether it’s to move fuel around or electronics.

Dan, you had experience at Lockheed Martin after you left government, and then you were also with the Cohen Group. One of the things – America’s allies and – you know, Europe is a massive U.S. arms market. And a lot of allies and partners said, hey, American equipment is really, really good. And they allowed their own industries to atrophy because basically they’ve depended on us to fill that, much to the frustration in France who’s always said: Hey, we as Europeans really do need to maintain capability, as much of it in France as possible, but still maintain a European capability. Those voices are back now making the argument that we have to develop our own combat aircraft, we have to develop our own missiles, and we really need to do this so that a Dan or Kathleen in the future does not, you know, apply U.S. International Traffic in Arms Regulations and say, whoa, you know, you can re-export this to somebody I don’t want you to export it to.

In the end, and it’s their money. They’re investing it. Just like we look at this as a great investment, right? Something of the 95 billion (dollars), some of them – you know, 90 percent of it basically stays in the United States in terms of what that investment is, and in terms of weaponry. Is this already going to result in an entire new generation of systems that may be integrated, may be interoperable, but actually have far fewer American content in it than otherwise would have been before we started this sort of very transactional approach?

Mr. Fata: So you ask questions like I do, multiple layers, lots of stuff to go into.

Mr. Muradian: I’m sorry for too many layers. I apologize for that.

Mr. Fata: Too long to be able to respond to.
Mr. Muradian: But I thought I could layer-cake this. (Laughter.)

Mr. Fata: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. So to get to the last part of your question, I don't see a great drifting away from purchasing American arms. I think there's multiple reasons. One is Europe still lacks the capability – the industrial capability to do anything massively at scale. And so you've seen over the past couple of years a lot of partnering with U.S. companies. So Boeing, Saab, Lockheed, working with a variety of different European companies. So they're just – there is just sort of – in the short term, there's this physical aspect, there isn't enough production capacity.

Two, the European Commission still has rules on the book that prevent banks – European banks from providing loans to governments to purchase arms, right? And so –

Mr. Muradian: Which is just absurd.

Mr. Fata: Which is absurd. And so until you get that addressed, that's a problem. And so I think what you're going to see, particularly Central and Eastern Europeans, they will want to buy American whenever they can. And they will buck the European Commission. The Poles made a big purchase, as you know, last year, because the American capacity to be able to produce some armored personnel carriers and things just wasn't there.

So they went to South Korea and got some very interesting terms. I think that may become a reality, where Europe – potentially some of your Central and Eastern Europeans. And in Kathleen's chart, you see the spend that those – the frontline states are doing. They may have no alternative to buy – they may only be able to buy from either non-European or non-U.S. in the short term, because that's the only place where production is happening.

But I do believe – and I was at an event with the one of the – with the assistant secretary of state for pol-mil the other day. And there was a big discussion amongst us about coproduction, license manufacturing with our Asian and European allies. And my point there, which I will say again here, is: If we're going to go down this path where the U.S. and Europe are going to coproduce, codevelop, co-manufacture – license and manufacture stuff, let those conversations happen between the companies first without the government having a say as to, OK, we want you to talk, here are your profit margins, and here's what you can and can't do.

Let companies – let business figure that out first, then come to the government and say: Here's where we need to make sure you're OK with this. And so in that scenario, then I see a lot of connectivity between the U.S. and Europe in continuing to buy from each other. But I don't see – just with
the American industrial capacity, I don’t see America not being the primary arms provider for Europe for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Muradian: Do you fear a decoupling? Or does pragmatic reasons keep this all on track? Because I don’t have a single Tempest, Global Combat Aircraft, or SCAF discussion that does not go out of its way to say: We really have to minimize any American participation in this, both to rebuild our industries but also we can’t trust these bozos on the other side of the Atlantic.

Dr. McInnis: You know, I was just reminded, like, when I first entered the field, back in the days of yore, Bill Cohen was the Secretary of Defense. And I remember listening to his speech on the ESDP, the European pillar at the time, and there needed – it was like, no decoupling, no duplication. And there was another D. It was a three Ds kind of thing. And so we’re—(laughs)—it’s just interesting that we’re sort of still there. I mean, I think those principles still apply, right? You know, we need to ensure that our forces are interoperable with each other. And I think you’re right. Having businesses come together and defining how the collaboration could work and then bringing government in is probably the – certainly a less painful way of doing things. (Laughs.)

Mr. Fata: And it keeps the bond. Look, as I said to you before, at the end of the day I don’t think the former president ultimately is going to pull us out of NATO. He may make noise. It’ll be unsettling. The enemies will be watching. But I think he understands the economic ties between the U.S. and Europe. I think he understands the military bonds that are there. I think he understands at the end of the day, if there’s going to be someone that’s going to rally to America’s cause, like you pointed out after 9/11, it’s going to be the Europeans. And I think keeping the arms trade – that’s a term I hate – but keeping the arms trade going, the defense sales going between us, is a key aspect that he wouldn’t want to lose.

Mr. Muradian: From your mouth to God’s ears, as the expression goes, Dan. Last question. Seventy-fifth anniversary. You said we’re going to be dancing at the alliance’s 100th anniversary. You know, ideally, yes. But how does the nature of the discussion more broadly have to change, right? I mean, once upon a time this was more sort of front of mind. Now, Americans are becoming more concerned about both Russia and China. (Laughs.) Nothing like your adversary making your case for you. I mean, how does this – the discussion need to change? Is it an education issue? Is it a dialogue issue? Is that we’re having this discussion amongst ourselves in one of the most prominent think tanks in Washington is NATO-ites and national security people?

I mean, how does this discussion more broadly, have to change? I know that Michele Flournoy had talked about it. I think Bob Work has talked about this, John Hamre, the august head of CSIS and former deputy defense secretary.
Has been, like, look, how do you make the case to the American people, ultimately? How do you make the case to make Americans actually go, hey, wait a minute, this is important, when they’re more interested in student loan relief, they’re more interested in inflation, or the price of gasoline?

Mr. Fata: The border. The border – or the border?

Mr. Muradian: Or, the border. Yeah, all of which I think is important, right?

Dr. McInnis: Yeah, we got to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. (Laughter.)

Mr. Muradian: Well, thank you, Lyndon Johnson.

Dr. McInnis: You’re welcome. No, look, I think it’s all of the above, right? And I think that, you know, what is principally missing from a lot of these discussions is that, you know, this is – we like to focus on technology, and widgets, in those sorts of things. It’s humans. Humans make alliances work. Humans, people, give support to an alliance or not. And we need to start connecting with people. How many STAFFDELs do we have going over to Ukraine? Not many. How many STAFFDELs do we have going over to Europe? When you look at the – one of the unintended consequences of reducing our posture in Europe from 400,000 at its height, and change, in the Cold War, to, what, 80-90,000 – whatever it is –

Mr. Fata: We’re still at about 120,000, but we had dipped to about 80,000.

Dr. McInnis: Yeah, that’s right. And one of the consequences is that we don’t have families and servicemembers rotating in and out all the time. The message that – the connections – the human connection of the transatlantic alliance has been let atrophy. So we’ve got to find more creative solutions to building those human connections, I think. And we also have to be much more honest with ourselves in having discussions about really hard issues like burden sharing, or responsibility sharing. And let’s take these things forward with a much more honest, I would say, and authentic way,

Mr. Muradian: Dan.

Mr. Fata: There’s no reason to be bashing on the alliance as it being ineffective. It hasn’t demonstrated that. It’s important to make sure that our leaders, our publics, exude this sense, this feeling of confidence that NATO is credible. Otherwise, why should we have it? And so I’m a big believer is it is credible and the U.S. has to be the leader of it. Kathleen and I have often talked about ways in which to make this story, this concept relevant to at least Americans and American lawmakers. What consistently works? TV, right? And it’s not just having a journalist do a short piece on 60 Minutes. It’s actually what we’ve seen great success, whether it be shows about Homeland or other
things, when a viewer can now understand, oh, this seems more relevant and I see how this thing works.

And it may just be for a couple years there needs to be some kind of really big public awareness that involves TV and other things to make the case. I just worry that no matter who wins in 2024, the Europeans will still be questioning whether we are predictable and consistent. And that’s whether the former president is back in the White House or the current president remains in the White House, but there’s a Republican-controlled Congress that four or five members who just disagree with the premise can gum everything up.

And that sends a very bad message to the enemy. And hopefully, I would like to think, our American citizens realize that’s not the country I want. And I’ve heard great things about this NATO, and we haven’t had to fight in Europe in 75 years. You know, we need to make sure this is relevant. So that’s part of how we have to work at it to change the mindset and get it back to at least neutral, ideally being advocates for the alliance. But at least, get the venom out of it.

Mr. Muradian: The number-one obligation of leadership is communication and responsible communication. So you’re not going to get the venom out of it until people get the venom out of it, right? And if they keep injecting venom into it, it’s going to be a poisonous discussion. Do you have a last word, Madame Doctor?

Dr. McInnis: Thank you for this discussion and this opportunity to really tease out some of these core issues, the things that have been leading up to the conversation and the discourse we’re having today. And how do we – how do we protect this alliance that has mattered so much to American security, so much American strategy, so much the American taxpayer? How do we keep it going until 100? That’s the question that’s before us as strategists, as policymakers. And it’s time to get to work.

Mr. Fata: And we have five months until the summit to get that answer out.

Dr. McInnis: Mmm hmm.

Mr. Muradian: Well –

Mr. Fata: Otherwise, it’s a birthday party.

Mr. Muradian: Otherwise, it’s a birthday party. And, you know, indeed, you have to keep it going and make sure that it’s an anniversary. Dr. Kathleen McInnis, director of the Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Senior Advisor Dan Feta, thanks very much.
Honor and a pleasure. And a reminder to the audience to go to CSIS.org to get this report. I’m Mago Muradian and of the Defense and Aerospace Report. Honored to be here. Thanks very much and look forward to continuing the discussion.

Mr. Fata: Thanks, Vago.

Dr. McInnis: Thank you.

(END.)