

NATO's Defense Dividend

By [Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#)

February 24, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

On a hillside overlooking the Turkish city of Gaziantep, Patriot missile launchers are keeping watch under NATO command and control. This is just one of six Patriot batteries from three Allied countries — Germany, the Netherlands and the U.S. — protecting millions of people along Turkey's southeastern border with Syria. The deployment shows NATO's enduring commitment to its core task: safeguarding its members' security. It also shows that when a crisis erupts, there is no substitute for effective deterrence and defense.

Virtually every day brings fresh evidence that an arc of crisis — from terrorism and weapons proliferation to cyberattacks and piracy — is spreading from the Middle East and the Sahel to Central Asia. These risks will not disappear while NATO members focus on fixing their finances. The fact is that our way of life is predicated on security and stability, without which investment withers, employment collapses and economies shrink.

In these tough economic times, we are all acutely aware that security comes at a price. But we must not forget that the cost of insecurity is unacceptable. Defense is our essential insurance policy in a complex and unpredictable world.

Conflicts take a terrible human toll, while restoring peace and supporting reconstruction is extremely expensive. For example, the total cost of the Balkan wars of the 1990s is estimated at \$150 billion. Today, NATO continues to maintain a safe and secure environment for all of Kosovo's people, and it is helping the entire region progress along the path of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Another example is piracy, which can threaten vital trade and energy routes. The overall cost of piracy off the coast of Somalia in 2011 was estimated at \$7 billion. But with concerted international efforts, including patrols by NATO ships, pirate attacks have dropped sharply. Although the situation remains precarious, for the past eight months pirates off the Horn of Africa have been unsuccessful in their attacks against merchant vessels.

Finally, we have seen cyberattacks not just swamping websites but targeting entire countries, such as NATO ally Estonia in 2007. The country's presidency, parliament, government ministries, political parties, news organizations, banks and communications companies were all hit. In fact, everything on which a modern democracy and knowledge-based economy relies was attacked. Today, as part of our continuing drive to improve the security of our members' networks, Estonia's capital, Tallinn, hosts a NATO cyberdefense center of excellence.

These examples show that hard power and soft power go together. To be effective, we need both. When dealing with international security challenges, diplomacy remains the primary tool, but by investing in defense, we can back up our statements with military strength. It is also an investment in our most innovative and technologically advanced industries.

Indeed, research programs led by defense industries have already changed our lives, giving us the jet engine, the Internet and satellite navigation. In the future, technology developed for military aerial surveillance could have major civilian benefits — for example, helping to control traffic and reduce road congestion and assisting in the dispatch of rescue teams and humanitarian assistance.

Expertise in the defense sector has been built up over generations. Like any other high-tech industry, it is constantly evolving. If we cut defense spending too much for too long, we will sacrifice that hard-won expertise, which will be impossible to regenerate quickly when we need it most.

A strong defense also helps to ensure that the benefits of security are shared across countries. NATO itself embodies that goal. Our 28 allies have more security together than they could achieve on their own. While this helps them to defend their own interests more effectively, it also allows them to play a much more active role in international crisis management, such as the protection of civilians in Libya in 2011. So defense investment is also investment in security and stability, in diplomacy and cooperation and in technology and innovation. It is an investment in a safer and more prosperous future for our own countries and for the rest of the world.

Even though defense budgets are under pressure in this time of austerity, it is essential that NATO members hold the line on defense spending and be prepared to increase it when their economies recover. The decisions that we make today on defense will have a profound impact on our children's security tomorrow.

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