



Children hold Canadian flags and flowers during a Remembrance Day Ceremony in St-Ghislain, Belgium on November 11, 2018.

Photo: Sergeant Vincent Carboneau, Canadian Forces Combat Camera

NATO Burden-Sharing: A Belgian Perspective

SENIOR CAPTAIN PIETER BALCAEN

Senior Captain Dr. Pieter Balcaen is an officer in the Belgian military, conducting research in the field of defense-economics. He's a 2025 non-resident Fellow at the Irregular Warfare Initiative and a Senior Associate Fellow at the Egmont Institute, Brussels. The ideas expressed in this article are entirely his own and do not reflect the official points of view of the Belgian military.

With Donald Trump's re-election as US President, the longstanding debate over burden-sharing has regained prominence, sparking renewed discussions about fair contributions to the alliance and shared international responsibilities. Even before taking office, Donald Trump had already signalled a tough stance against NATO member states that were not devoting 2% of their GDP to defence expenditures, causing concern among several (mainly European) NATO members. Moreover, these discussions have become more intense than ever, fuelled by a series of significant developments on the global geopolitical stage. First, we are observing pessimistic evolutions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, partly due to

NATO's difficulties in maintaining a high tempo of support in terms of ammunition and equipment. Over recent months, a large number of high-level officials (including intelligence officials, chiefs of defence and defence ministers) warned of a rising Russian threat towards the West, with the Baltic states becoming a possible new target in the coming years.¹ Second, there is a general perception of an increasingly unstable and insecure world, stirred by recent events such as the escalations in the Middle East.

The growing perception of insecurity has heightened pressure to increase defence spending—not only in the United States, but also among Eastern European countries most directly exposed to the potential threat posed by Russia.² These calls have been echoed within NATO, with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte championing higher spending targets. Ultimately, those proposals were adopted at the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague. The new target—set at 5% of GDP, comprising 3.5% for core defence spending and 1.5% for broader security efforts—marks a significant departure from the previous 2%. This development occurs at a time when several NATO members have yet to meet the longstanding 2% of GDP defence spending target, Belgium being a notable example. Despite efforts to boost its military spending, Belgium still ranked fourth-lowest among NATO members in 2024, with an estimated defence expenditure of just 1.3% of GDP. Belgium's ambition was further increased by the newly government formed in early 2025. Although the new government was initially aiming to reach the 2% target in 2029 (an acceleration compared to the originally proposed 2035), growing transatlantic pressures led it to announce that it would meet the target in 2025.³ However, while many NATO members regard the new 5% of GDP defence spending target as essential for ensuring security on the European continent, the call for increased military expenditures has already sparked public debate. Those concerns were brought to the forefront at the 2025 NATO Summit, where Belgium announced that it would be unable to meet the higher target in the short term. Instead, Belgium will maintain its defence spending at 2% of GDP until 2033, with increases planned only thereafter.⁴ This lag compared to other NATO members is intriguing, as Belgium is quite a prosperous country⁵ that, moreover, hosts the NATO HQ.

This article therefore presents Belgium as a case study and strives to answer two major questions: 1) What are the explanatory variables for Belgium's historically rather low defence expenditures compared to other NATO allies, resulting in its reputation of a free rider within NATO as an alliance? 2) How does Belgium contribute to the alliance (and how does its contribution compare to that of other members relative to the benefits it receives)? We provide answers to these questions by combining the author's institutional knowledge of the country with the rich defence economics literature on the demand for military expenditures and the burden-sharing debate. While most of this literature focuses on measuring the evolution and extent of free riding within an alliance, few case studies explore the perspective of individual member countries towards this alliance. Scholars often treat member states as homogeneous, neglecting the

significant differences within NATO, such as variations in political systems (e.g., presidential versus parliamentary) and civil-military relations.⁶

Hence, we believe that this country-specific perspective can contribute to a better awareness of the several challenges member states (in this case, Belgium) are confronted with, resulting in a better understanding of the (not necessarily monetary) contributions smaller states can make to the alliance.

1. Explanatory variables for Belgium's military spending and contributions to the alliance

Originating from the seminal model developed by Smith,⁷ the determinants of defence spending has become one of the main research lines in the defence economics literature. As summarized in a study by Odehnal and Neubauer,⁸ three broad classes of determinants can be identified: security, economic, and political variables. Studying these variables yields interesting insights that help to explain Belgium's prioritization of military expenditures.

1.1. Belgium's threat perception

The impact of the security environment is largely assessed by examining a member state's level of exposure to threats originating from Russia. (This focus makes sense, given that NATO's original mission during the Cold War was centred on containing the threat posed by the USSR.) Quantitative studies have translated this "Russian threat" in several ways, for example, by constructing variables measuring the distance between a nation's capital and Moscow or from the capital to the nearest Russian military base or sharing a land border with Russia.⁹ Recent studies confirm the significant impact of Russia's posture on a country's military expenditures. Tim Haesebrouck even finds that the threat emanating from Russia constitutes the most important factor.¹⁰ This also explains why defence expenditures in the Baltic countries and Poland increased sharply following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Taking these traditional variables into account, Belgium is, however, a country that is less exposed to a possible threat originating from Russia: there has never been an incursion of Soviet troops on our soil in the past, we do not share a border with Russia, and we have the geographic benefit of being located far from it (and its military bases), with several countries as a buffer in between. This also becomes part of the public narrative, in which the conflict at Europe's eastern borders is perceived as a remote problem.

“ However, the increasing prominence of such threats has not yet led to a meaningful shift in the budgets allocated to address them.”

Although Belgian politicians largely agree on the urgent need for Belgium to allocate more resources to defence, resulting in the 2025 decision to finally devote 2% of GDP to defence, Belgium remains one of the slowest responders to the events in Ukraine when it comes to increasing its defence budget.¹¹ However, two reflections come to mind when discussing Belgium's relatively low defence expenditures from a threat-based perspective. First, the Netherlands, another small country situated at a similar distance from Russia, responded much more decisively to the Russia-Ukraine war, raising its defence expenditures from 1.36% of GDP in 2021 to 2.05% of GDP in 2024. Denmark, similarly, increased its defence expenditures from 1.30% of GDP in 2021 to 2.36% of GDP in 2024.¹² Second, relying on distance and the presence of shared land borders as measures of a country's threat perception reflects a rather traditional approach, overlooking the broader spectrum of contemporary “hybrid” threats (such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and sabotage of critical infrastructure) that can target a country irrespective of its geographical proximity. The rise in hybrid attacks, coupled with Belgium's role as host to several high-value targets (including NATO headquarters, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, and various EU institutions) should logically compel the country to significantly bolster its efforts, in terms of both budget and capabilities, in order to address those threats. However, the increasing prominence of such threats has not yet led to a meaningful shift in the budgets allocated to address them.

1.2 Economic variables: Belgium's “guns versus butter” debate

A country's ability (as well as willingness) to increase its military expenditures obviously also depends upon its economic state and budgetary capacity. Whereas several studies look at the impact of a country's GDP on its military expenditures, a recent study found that a country's fiscal capacity outperformed more classical measurements of economic conditions (such as GDP forecasts) in explaining changes in European countries' defence spending efforts.¹³ Fiscal capacity is defined as the extent to which a government would need to adjust (either increase or decrease) total public expenditures to achieve a public debt-to-GDP ratio of 60% in the near term, aligning with the European Union (EU)'s directives on debt-to-GDP ratios. These findings

relate to the traditional “guns versus butter” debate. Indeed, as a country is faced with scarce resources and higher debt-to-GDP ratios, it needs to make a budgetary tradeoff by reducing security goods (i.e., military expenditures) or social spending that has a higher chance of improving electoral results. Recent studies (before the Russian invasion of Ukraine) have demonstrated that policy options which include the reduction of military spending are most preferred by the public.¹⁴ Analyzing Belgium's budgetary capacity reveals a dark picture. With a *government debt to GDP ratio* of 104.7% in 2024, Belgium is one of the worst students in the European class. Only Greece, Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal record worse results. This high debt is not an exceptional situation one which could be blamed on COVID and the energy crisis following the Russia-Ukraine conflict), as Belgium's government debt has always been relatively high: since 2000, it has generally fluctuated between 90% and 110% (with a low of 87% in 2007).¹⁵ A similar observation can be made regarding the *government budget deficit*. Compared with Belgium's deficit of 4.5% of GDP in 2024 (far beyond the 3% EU guideline), only Malta, France, and Slovakia are doing worse. Based upon European states' public debt data, Christie (2017)¹⁶ conducted an interesting simulation, assessing which member states have the capacity to reach the 2% goal over a mid-term horizon. Belgium was ranked in the group requiring complex and politically challenging responses to reach the 2% objective. These include a combination of unpopular measures such as higher taxation and lower non-defence (social) spending. To understand why these interventions are, however, difficult to implement, we need to better understand Belgium's political system.

1.3 Belgium's political apparatus

Belgium is an interesting case from a *political* point of view, for two reasons: its federal state structure and the historical changes in the federal government's composition over time. Following several state reforms, Belgium became a federal state, composed of communities and regions, with several competencies and powers assigned to these respective state structures. The main competencies administered at the federal state level are the military, the judicial system, social security (including pensions and unemployment compensation), foreign affairs and public health. Economic policy, employment, housing, and energy belong to the competencies of the regions, whereas education, culture, and languages are the responsibility of the communities. The competencies the federal government covers are a notable reflection of the aforementioned tradeoff between “guns” (i.e., military expenditures) and “butter” (in this case, social security and public health expenditures). Indeed, when prioritizing federal expenditures, the Belgian government must balance two distinct types of spending—spending aimed at enhancing the territory's defence against external threats and spending focused on social security and healthcare—all while taking electoral factors into account. To better understand which types of expenditures the

federal government prioritizes, we can look at the Classification of the Functions of Government data, in which government expenditures are classified based on the purpose for which the funds are used. Studying the functional groups of defence, social protection, and health yields interesting insights. In terms of defence expenditures, compared to other European states, Belgium ranks low, below the EU average. In the categories of social protection and health (measured in % of GDP), the result is reversed: this time Belgium is not only above the EU average, but at the top of the list.¹⁷

In addition to Belgium's specific state structure and the competences across the different levels, we also need to look at whether the evolution of the government's composition plays a role in explaining the rather low prioritization of military spending. A first finding from the literature shows that parliamentary systems (such as Belgium) on average have lower levels of military spending, compared to presidential democracies (such as the USA).¹⁸ Moreover, the composition of the government, in terms of the political parties' ideology, is also expected to play a role. Although the literature regarding the effect of ideology on military spending is not conclusive, there are studies that find support for ideology-induced military spending, with right-wing governments spending more on defence.¹⁹ We study the composition of the last six governments (going back to 2003) and compare this qualitative analysis with the results from the Comparative Political Data Set, which provides information on the types of government for 36 OECD and/or EU member countries.²⁰ This analysis shows that Belgium's coalition governments in the last 20 years were composed of four to seven parties, with a dominant presence of centre parties. These "centre coalitions" composed of multiple parties contribute to the explanation of why Belgium fails to make substantial changes in a number of important areas, including the reduction of the high public debt, the fiscal system, the high number of inactive persons in the labour market, and obviously also its low military expenditures compared to those of the other NATO members.

2. What does the Atlantic Alliance stand for?

The determinants of military spending discussed above, which stem from the literature, provide a lens through which we can understand the rather low historical political and public will to prioritize military expenditures. Although this does not paint a rosy picture, it absolutely does not imply a lack of Belgian interest in the alliance. Indeed, there is no doubt that Belgium exhibits an Atlanticist strategic culture. One unequivocal example of this Atlanticist culture is hosting the political and administrative centre of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). More importantly, we can state that Belgium has moved beyond its nadir of military spending. The previous Belgian minister of defence presented her ambitious "STAR plan" (Security/Service

- Technology - Ambition - Resilience) at the beginning of 2022, reflecting the strategic vision towards 2030. The plan includes the decision to re-increase the number of service members (to 29,000 by 2030, compared to slightly more than 25,000 in early 2023). This is to be achieved by rendering the military profession more attractive, by means of increased wages, more barracks close to home, and the increased importance of diversity within the armed forces. Other key developments include the acquisition of new equipment valued at over €10 billion, with a focus on dual capabilities that can be deployed both abroad and during domestic crises, as well as the growing importance of collaborations with partner countries.

The assessed worsening situation at the Ukraine-Russia front and the associated fear that Russia could expand its revisionist ambitions to the Baltic states have brought security closer to the fore of the Belgian political and public debate. As mentioned in the introduction, this has led the new government to substantially accelerate its efforts to meet the 2% of GDP spending target in 2025, instead of the initial ambition of 2035. These high ambitions have been formalized in the new Strategic Vision 2026-2034, unveiled by the Minister of Defence in June 2025. The plan aims to further strengthen Belgium's military capabilities through measures such as the acquisition of additional F35 fighter jets, a third frigate, air-defence systems, and new vehicles to fully replace the aging fleet of the Belgian Motorized Brigade. While it is encouraging that Belgium is increasing its military expenditures, it is equally important to examine how the Belgian military seeks to optimize its contributions to the alliance within the limits of politically determined budgets. This issue is explored further in the following paragraph.

3. Sharing the burden: Belgium's contributions to NATO beyond the 2%

As highlighted in the previous paragraphs, Belgium faces significant criticism for historically failing to meet the 2% of GDP defence spending benchmark. The 2% metric has, however, been subject to criticism. For example, it does not consider the stock of military capabilities a country already has available. Moreover, as the metric is a percentage of a country's GDP, the evolution of a country's efforts is not only affected by its military expenditures, but also by its economic conditions. A recessionary period can result in a perception of increased defence burden, even if a country does not increase its military expenditures.²¹ Therefore, rather than looking at this measure of inputs, it is more important to look at a country's security outputs, i.e., the other "2 C's" of burden-sharing: capabilities and contributions. We provide an overview of some of the ways in which Belgium strives to increase its contributions to the alliance, which are not directly observable by solely looking at the military expenditures as a percentage of GDP: 1) by looking at the metric troop contributions; 2) by demonstrating the multilateral cooperations with

its neighbouring countries with the aim of creating economies of scale; and 3) by highlighting the geographical importance of Belgium to the alliance.

3.1 Belgium's troop contributions to military operations

The output metric “troop contributions” is often used in the literature to shift the debate from an input to an output perspective. Whereas Belgium is ranked at the bottom of the alliance in terms of defence expenditures, it performs better in terms of participating in operational deployments. It is listed in the second quartile of states participating in the ISAF Mission in Afghanistan for the period 2002-2005 and in the third quartile for the ISAF (until 2014) and subsequent Resolute Support missions (as of 2015) in Afghanistan. It is ranked in the second quartile for its contributions to the NATO missions in Kosovo over the period 2002-2017, for its share in UN Peacekeeping Missions over the period 2002-2017, and for the participation in the Global Coalition against IS (2016).²² Specifically looking at the threat originating from Russia, Bogers and Beeres (2024) analyzed NATO members' burden-sharing after 2014 by looking at the contributions to Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) and Baltic Air Policing (BAP).²³ They find that Belgium ranked 8th in relative troop contributions (calculated by dividing the EFP contribution by the number of active army troops of the relevant country) to EFP over the period 2017-2021. In 2022, it even ranked 3rd in relative troop contributions to EFP. The contributions to BAP reveal an even more surprising finding: with its eight rotations executed during the period 2014-2021, Belgium is ranked first.²⁴

“As a country that invests heavily in the education of its military personnel, Belgium regularly strives to make a strong contribution by filling in key leader positions.”

Whereas most of the literature uses quantitative metrics to measure a country's output (such as the number of troops deployed), few examples of qualitative contributions exist. As a country that invests heavily in the education of its military personnel, Belgium regularly strives to make a strong contribution by filling in key leader positions. Some recent examples are the force commanders of the EUTM training mission Mali, General Peter De Vogelaere (2016-2017) and General Bart Laurent

(2017-2018); the force commander of the UN mission MINUSMA Mali (2017-2018); and, more recently, the European maritime awareness mission in the strait of Hormuz with the goal of protecting maritime flows (Admiral Tanguy Botman [2022], Admiral Renaud Flamant [2023], Admiral Hans Huygens [2023-2024] and Admiral Gilles Colmant [2024]).

Although these indicators are not perfect (given that deployments and missions might vary in terms of risk and difficulty), they show that the Belgian military strives to compensate for its shortcomings regarding the variable “cash” by contributing troops. Although we used only a few examples to demonstrate Belgium's operational output, these cases are a concrete reflection of some recent findings of Becker and his colleagues.²⁵ They point out that allies might selectively free ride by postponing long-term investments in equipment while seeking to maintain a higher operational tempo in support of major allies' out-of-area operations (e.g., Afghanistan).

3.2 Economies of scale through collaborations with partner countries

When a military is constrained by lower military expenditures, it can increase its capabilities by pursuing economies of scale stemming from collaborations with other partner states. Belgium does so in numerous domains: the purchase of new equipment; the education of troops; research and development; operational collaborations (e.g., by forming joint units); and lastly by hosting a NATO Centre of Excellence.

First, Belgium strives to allocate funds in a more synchronized and efficient way by participating in projects in the context of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). PESCO constitutes one of the building blocks of the EU defence policy, allowing better cooperation in the domain of defence and security between the EU member states. This framework allows EU member states to, among other things, jointly develop and finance capability development. Belgium participates in several projects (in the land, maritime, cyber, and space domains)²⁶ and is taking the lead in the “Maritime autonomous systems for mine countermeasures” project. In addition to PESCO, Belgium also contributes to projects within the framework of the European Defence Fund, which is designed to co-finance research and development projects. Over the period 2017-2022, 162 projects with a total value of €2.448 billion have been selected for EU co-financing. The Belgian defence industry has been an active partner in the EDF, participating in 65 of the 162 accepted projects. Given the complexity of these EU cooperation mechanisms (which could provide plenty of material for a dedicated article), the remainder of the section focuses on concrete examples of Belgian bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Belgian military will undergo a profound transformation by conducting a total re-equipment of its land forces, resulting from the strategic agreement it signed

in 2018 with France: The Capacité Motorisée (CaMo) project. This project includes the organization of mutual training, the development of a common doctrine, the shared will to conduct joint operations, and the use of near-identical equipment by Belgium and France. The latter will be achieved by purchasing 382 Griffon multi-role armoured vehicles and 60 Jaguar reconnaissance and combat armoured vehicles, for a total investment of €1.5 billion. The first vehicles are scheduled to arrive in 2025.²⁷

Besides collaborating with France, Belgium also signed a new cooperation agreement in 2023 with Luxembourg, including the establishment of a Belgium-Luxembourg reconnaissance battalion by 2030.²⁸ The Belgium-Luxembourg cooperation is not new, as the two countries share experiences in the domain of training (Luxembourg officers are educated in the Royal Military Academy, and the Luxembourg officers and NCOs take their field training in Belgium) and in the joint purchase and operational use of new cargo planes (i.e., the A400M).

Similar cooperative programs are underway with Belgium's northern neighbouring country, the Netherlands. Belgium and the Netherlands alternately control and monitor the airspace over the Benelux region. Both countries have two F16s on standby in turn to ensure air surveillance over their territory and that of Luxembourg. The cooperation between the Belgian and Dutch naval forces (called "BeNeSam") is also far advanced. The two countries share a bi-national headquarters (the Maritime Headquarters Benelux) in Den Helder. Moreover, both countries aim to achieve economies of scale through joint naval acquisition programs. Belgium will lead the procurement of new frigates, while the Netherlands will oversee the acquisition of new minehunters.²⁹

Belgium is also cooperating with the United Kingdom by becoming the first international participant in the MQ-9B Reaper drone International Cooperation program. Both countries signed a letter of intent in 2020 and are looking to work together in the domains of training, maintenance, logistics support and capability enhancement. Six other countries (Canada, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, and Norway) will take the role of observer in the program.³⁰

A final example of Belgium's ambitions to join efforts multilaterally is its hosting of a NATO Centre of Excellence (CoE), the Naval Mine Warfare CoE. The role of the NATO CoEs is to specialize in a specific domain in order to become a subject matter expert in it. Knowledge is distributed by means of analysis and lessons learned, education and training, concept development, experimentation, and doctrine development. The CoEs are not funded by NATO but are sponsored on a national or multi-national basis. Hence, as their functioning is calculated in national budgets and excluded from NATO burden negotiation, the CoEs facilitate burden-sharing beyond civilian and military budgets.³¹ Belgium is proud to host one of the 28 official CoEs, which was accredited in 2006.

3.3 Belgium's unique geographical location within the alliance

Although Belgium is considered a small partner in the alliance (in terms of both monetary contributions and the size of its military), we need to stress the important role it plays in the alliance as a result of its geographical location. The country serves as an important logistics hub containing major seaports of debarkation (Zeebrugge and Antwerp). Indeed, if a crisis should emerge, Belgium would assume the role of a logistics artery, accommodating the arrival and passage of military equipment and personnel across the continent to pre-position troops (as a deterrent) or to respond to aggression. This responsibility is defined in article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which focuses on resilience and civil preparedness. The 7th baseline requirement for national resilience stresses the importance of ensuring resilient transport systems, to guarantee a rapid transit of NATO forces across alliance territory.³² One way to assess the resilience of Belgium's military mobility involves the analysis of the United States Army Europe data,³³ which uses colours to rank European nations' mobility in several categories. Belgium receives the highest score (green) for the metrics "Sea Port of Debarkation," "Road System," and "Rail Head." It only needs to improve the military mobility ranking within the air domain, for which it currently receives a "grey" score. The latter indicates that the administrative process of receiving permission for overflight and landing is rather slow.

The geographical importance of Belgium is not limited to its role in the domain of military mobility. Belgium also hosts several command-and-control nodes of vital importance for the alliance, including the NATO HQ in Brussels, the Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers Europe in Mons, and several EU institutions and the Google data centre near Mons. These institutions undeniably bring economic benefits to Belgium, but we must keep in mind that the presence of these high-value targets also increases the probability of cyber-attacks or sabotage activities being perpetrated against them by NATO adversaries. The associated potential economic consequences of this exposure are often kept out of the debate and are not reflected in the traditional burden-sharing metrics such as the military expenditures as a percentage of GDP.³⁴

Conclusion

Although Belgium has recently made substantial efforts to meet the 2% defence spending target by 2025, well ahead of its earlier goal of 2035, it has historically been regarded as one of NATO's notable free riders. This article has provided possible explanations for this historically rather low degree of military spending by analyzing the determinants of military spending as identified by earlier research from a Belgian point of view. Belgium's fiscal capacity, as well as its threat perception and its political institutional architecture, serve as explanatory variables

for understanding the rather low political and public will for high military expenditures. Although Belgium may not be the strongest performer in terms of defence spending, it is still a firm adherent of the Atlanticist strategic culture. Following years of neglect, the downward trend of military spending cuts has finally been turned around, as nested within the new strategic vision for 2026-2034.

Without denying that much more budgetary effort remains to be made, this article highlights the importance of also considering more output-based metrics when assessing a country's contributions. The above-mentioned examples of other types of outputs and collaborations to pursue economies of scale demonstrate Belgium's loyalty towards the alliance.

Notes

- 1 Henry Foy, Guy Chazan, John Rathbone, and Richard Milne, "Why NATO members are sounding the alarm on Russia's aggressive posture," *Financial Times*, February 16, 2024. Online: <<https://www.ft.com/content/83f8a7e9-dd41-4976-be39-cfd2c9b3a899>>.
- 2 Nicolas Calmut, "Putin could attack NATO in '5 to 8 years,' German defense minister warns," *Politico*, January 19, 2024. Online: <<https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-russia-germany-boris-pistorius-nato/>>.
- 3 Michelle Haas and Tim Haesebrouck, "Leaving the Free-Rider Club: Lessons from Belgium," Network for strategic analysis, May 30, 2025. Online: <https://ras-nsa.ca/leaving-the-free-rider-club-lessons-from-belgium/>.
- 4 Nikolaus J. Kurmayer, "Belgium will hit 2% NATO defence spending target this year, says minister," *Euractiv*, April 27, 2025. Online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence/news/belgium-will-hit-2-nato-defence-spending-target-this-year-says-minister/>.
- 5 Belga News Agency, "Belgium heads to NATO summit with 34bn euro defence plan," June 24, 2025. Online: <<https://www.belganewsagency.eu/belgian-government-reaches-agreement-on-strategic-vision-for-defence>>.
- 6 It ranks within the first quartile in terms of GDP/capita. NATO, "Defense expenditures of NATO countries (2014-2023)," NATO, July 7, 2023. Online: <https://www.nato.int/nato_static_f12014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf>.
- 7 Anessa L. Kimball, *Beyond 2% - NATO partners, institutions & burden management* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).
- 8 Ron Smith, "Models of military expenditure," *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 4, no. 4 (1989), 345-359.
- 9 Jakub Odehnal and Jiri Neubauer, "Economic, Security, and Political Determinants of Military Spending in NATO Countries," *Defense and Peace Economics* 31, no. 4 (2020), 517-531.
- 10 Edward Hunter Christie, "The demand for military expenditures in Europe: the role of fiscal space in the context of a resurgent Russia," *Defense and Peace Economics* 30, no. 1 (2017), 72-84.
- 11 Tim Haesebrouck, "NATO burden sharing after the Wales summit: a generalized set qualitative analysis," *Defense and Peace Economics* 33, no. 6 (2022), 637-654.
- 12 Belgium increased its defence expenditures from 1.18% of GDP in 2022 to only 1.3% of GDP in 2024 (NATO, 2024).
- 13 NATO, "Defence expenditures and NATO's 2% guideline" (2024). Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm. Last accessed on June 18, 2024.
- 14 Edward Hunter Christie, "The demand for military expenditure in Europe: The role of fiscal space in the context of a resurgent Russia," *Defense and Peace Economics* 30, no. 1 (2019), 72-84.
- 15 Kirk Bansak, Michael M. Bechtel, and Yotam Margalit, "Why austerity? The mass politics of a contested policy," *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 2 (2021), 486-505. Evelyn Huebscher, Thomas Sattler, and Zbigniew Truchlewski, "Three worlds of austerity: voter congruence over fiscal trade-offs in Germany, Spain and the UK" *Socio-Economic Review* 21, no. 2 (2021), 959-983.
- 16 Federal Debt Agency, "Evolution of Belgium's government debt," Federal Debt Agency, January 31, 2024. Online: <<https://www.debtagency.be/nl/cijfers/nlensemble-des-pouvoirs-publics/datagovernment-debtdebttratio>>.
- 17 Edward Hunter Christie, "The demand for military expenditure in Europe: the role of fiscal space in the context of a resurgent Russia," *Defense and Peace Economics* 30, no. 1 (2019), 72-84.
- 18 Eurostat, "General government expenditures by function," March 8, 2024. Online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/>.
- 19 Daniel Albalade, Germà Bel, and Ferran Elias, "Institutional determinants of military spending," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 40, no. 2 (2012), 279-290.
- 20 For example, Vincenzo Bove, Georgios Efthymoulou, and Antonio Navas, "Political cycles in public expenditure: butter vs guns," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 45, no. 3 (2017), 582-604.
- 21 Klaus Armingeon, Sarah Engler, Lucas Leemann, and David Weisstanner, *Supplement to the Comparative Political Data Set - Government Composition 1960-2021* (Zurich/Lueneburg/Lucerne: University of Zurich, Leuphana University Lueneburg, and University of Lucerne, 2023).
- 22 Cind Du Bois, "Military spending and the burden sharing debate," in Anders McD Sookermary, ed., *Handbook of Military Sciences* (New York: Springer International Publishing), to be published in 2025.
- 23 Kathleen Hicks, Jeffrey Rathke, Seamus Daniels, Michael Matlaga, Laura Daniels, and Andrew Linder, *Countering dollars or measuring value* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018).
- 24 A mission that consists of protecting the airspace of the Baltic states against intruders.
- 25 Marion Bogers and Robert Beeres, "NATO Members' Burden Sharing Behaviour in the Aftermath of Russia's Annexation of Crimea 2014-2021," in M. Rothman, L. Peperkamp, and S. Rietjens, eds., *Reflections on the Russia-Ukraine War* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2024), 293-318.
- 26 Jordan Becker, Seth Benson, Paul Dunne, and Edmund Malesky, "Disaggregated defense spending: introduction to data," *Journal of Peace Research* 62, no. 3 (2024). Online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433231215785>.
- 27 Belgium contributes to the following PESCO projects: the European Secure Software-defined Radio (Cyber-C4ISR), the European Medical Command (Joint), the Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe (Joint), Military Mobility (Joint), Energy Operating Function (Joint), the EU Collaborative Warfare Capabilities (Joint), the Integrated Unmanned Ground Systems (Land), and the EU Beyond Line of Sight Land Battlefield Missile Systems (Land).
- 28 Belgian Defense, "CaMo: stand van zaken en vooruitzichten," March 26, 2024. Online: <<https://beldefnews.mil.be/camo-stand-van-zaken-en-vooruitzichten/>>.
- 29 Belgian Defense, "België en Luxemburg naar een gezamenlijk verkenningsbataljon," March 26, 2024. Online: <<https://beldefnews.mil.be/belgie-en-luxemburg-naar-een-gezamenlijk-verkenningsbataljon/>>.
- 30 Belgian Defense, "Nieuwe mijnenbestrijdingsvaartuigen voor Belgische en Nederlandse Marine," March 26, 2024. Online: <<https://www.mil.be/nl/evolutie-van-defensie/nieuwe-mijnenbestrijdingsvaartuigen-voor-belgische-en-nederlandse-marine/>>.
- 31 Tony Osborne, "Belgium Joins MQ-9B Operators Club," Aviation Week network, March 26, 2024. Online: <<https://aviationweek.com/defense-space/budget-policy-operations/belgium-joins-mq-9b-operators-club>>.
- 32 Anessa L. Kimball, *Beyond 2%: NATO partners, institutions & burden management* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).
- 33 NATO, "Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3," March 15, 2024. Online: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm>.
- 34 Kathleen Hicks, Jeffrey Rathke, Seamus Daniels, Michael Matlaga, Laura Daniels, and Andrew Linder, *Countering dollars or measuring value* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018).
- 35 For a broader debate, see Pieter Balcaen, Cind Du Bois, and Caroline Buts, "Sharing the burden of hybrid threats," *Defense and Peace Economics* 34, no. 2 (2023), 142-159.