Introduction

In June 2011, outgoing Secretary of Defence Robert Gates warned that if a more balanced architecture was not achieved within the transatlantic security relationship, NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) would face a ‘dim’ and ‘dismal’ future. Gates sent a strong warning that the American military commitment to Europe should not be taken for granted. Yet the ‘burden-sharing’ problem is neither new nor solely the fault of the European NATO members. A central problem has been in Washington, where for decades inequity of military contributions was tolerated if it sustained American primacy in Europe. This status quo no longer reflects American national security or economic priorities – and it has a major impact on how Americans are beginning to think about the utility of military intervention.

This chapter examines determinants of military capabilities within NATO as a tool of American power during the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. Brief overviews of the cases of Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya demonstrate how incentive structures have led to a steep decline in the utility of NATO’s existing value as a tool of military intervention for the United States. The chapter concludes with reflection on how NATO might be made stronger via the ‘lead from behind’ concept, articulated by the United States in the 2011 Libya war, which can be a baseline for a radical realignment in the political economy of transatlantic security.
Structural conditions and burden-sharing outcomes

Americans today are weary of military interventions. While the recent Afghanistan and Iraq wars have taken their toll, the reality is that America has been in a near constant tempo of military operations of some sort since the end of the Cold War. Starting in 1989 in Panama – then through Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Iraq no-fly zones and dual containment of Iraq and Iran, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Afghanistan surges, and a war in Libya – this operational tempo has taken a toll both on the American military and on the American public’s willingness to sustain military interventions – especially at a time of fiscal crisis. They do not oppose it if missions are clear and success attainable. Crucially, however, Americans also increasingly expect allies that can afford to, not to sit on sidelines and avoid contributing to military interventions. Thus, while there was some outcry against the way the US ‘led from behind’ in the Libya war, it is now seen as an acceptable model of military intervention. In terms of NATO, nearly 70 years after the Second World War and over 20 years since the end of the Cold War, these pressures are producing a major shift in thinking towards America’s role in NATO. Today, a rebalancing is being sought in the transatlantic relationship – as codified in the new American defence guidance published in January 2012 by the US Department of Defense (Department of Defense, 2012).

Public opinion is a good indicator of deepening fissures and frustrations among the American public and across the Atlantic which is creating deepening fissures in the NATO alliance over military intervention. The Pew Global Attitudes survey, for example, reported on transatlantic perspectives on military intervention in late 2011 (Pew Research Center, 2011). The survey shows that 75 per cent of Americans agree that it is ‘sometimes necessary to use military force to maintain order in the world’ – while European attitudes decline from Britain’s 70 per cent, France’s 62 per cent, Spain’s 62 per cent and Germany’s very low 50 per cent. This is significant as these are the largest and most capable military powers in Europe, and if the United States is to find substantive coalition partners in Europe, it would have to come from these states.

The transatlantic alliance is also split over the need for institutional legitimacy for military intervention – generally seen as attained via a United Nations (UN) mandate. Americans are split on this issue with 45 per cent saying it is necessary and 46 per cent arguing it only complicates military operations. In Germany, 76 per cent want the UN mandate