

# The United States and NATO, a sound relationship?

A content analysis of US sentiments towards NATO in  
context of military contributions

# Abstract

NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is a defense coalition that for many years has served to protect the peace and security of many nations. Its capabilities as a collective alliance have predominantly been built on the contributions from its member states, among which the United States undoubtedly has been one of its most foundational components. On the basis of financial burden-sharing and conception of roles, the purpose of this study has been to examine domestic US sentiments and attitudes towards NATO in recent years. In a context of the distribution of contributions to NATO between 2013 and 2019, the paper has through a qualitative content analysis studied documents from the United States Congress to determine if there has been a change in the US outlook of NATO. By using the theoretical framework national role conceptions, it has concluded that their view of the alliance, its partnerships, and the engagements they embrace bilaterally have not experienced any greater changes. Consistent signs of appreciation, as well as similarities and recurrences in the type of roles they want to adopt through the institution, indicate that the United States still has trust in the alliance as well as commitment to its purposes.

*Keywords:* United States, NATO, burden-sharing, defense expenditures, contributions, role conceptions, US Congress

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Problem statement

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, has since its foundation in 1949 been based upon the notion of collective defense. The military alliance was created as a mutual assistance pact with the purpose of countering the threat of Soviet expansionism in post-war Europe. Solidarity, mutual assistance, and collective defense were fundamental concepts that the alliance was supposed to symbolize and represent collectively in the international arena. Along with the notion of collective defense, collective spending and the sharing of burdens has for many years been cornerstones of the alliance. Notions that, by mutual understanding, have worked to serve the interests of all member states and the alliance as a whole and as such, not been the responsibility of any single member. However, with the United States being a global superpower and one of the founders of NATO, it has shouldered a big burden in leading the organization, both ideologically and financially.<sup>1</sup> As a result of the US historically being one of the world's biggest spenders on military measures, they have also led the way in contributions to the alliance.<sup>2</sup> An aspect that has given rise to many debates about burden-sharing and the fair distribution of costs.

The question of burden-sharing within NATO has been at the center of a large amount of research literature in recent years. Hallams & Schreer,<sup>3</sup> Oma,<sup>4</sup> and Driver,<sup>5</sup> amongst others have lifted the continuing debate about NATO's burden-sharing arrangements. Debates that have hovered above NATO for a long time, ever since its foundation. Even though these discussions

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<sup>1</sup> Dahl, Ann-Sofie, NATO: Historien om en Försvarsallians i Förändring. Historiska Media, 2019, p. 14-16.

<sup>2</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Topics; Collective Defense-A cornerstone of the alliance, NATO website, (updated 2022-4-26), 2020-4-27.

<sup>3</sup> Hallams, Ellen & Schreer, Benjamin, "Towards a 'Post-American' Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing after Libya." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, vol. 88, no. 2, pp. 313-327, 2012, p. 314-315.

<sup>4</sup> Oma, Ida M, "Explaining States' Burden-Sharing Behavior within NATO." *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 562-573, 2012, p. 563.

<sup>5</sup> Driver, Darrell, "Burden Sharing and the Future of NATO: Wandering between Two Worlds." *Defense & Security Analysis*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 4-18, 2016, p. 5-7.

of burden-sharing have existed for several years, the debate has seen an upswing again during the presidency of Donald Trump. He has quite famously stated that he wants to see NATO's European members contributing more and not solely relying on US funding in running the alliance.<sup>6</sup> Comments that once again have brought attention to the distribution of contributions to NATO but more importantly, raised questions about the US relationship to the alliance and its undisputed role as the organization's most fundamental member. It is these two aspects this thesis aims to explore deeper, the distribution of contributions to NATO and the US relationship to the alliance, especially in terms of attitudes, sentiments, and perceptions.

## 1.2 Purpose and question formulation

The purpose of this paper is to, within a context of contributions to NATO, study if there has been a change in domestic US attitudes and sentiments towards NATO in recent years. With the use of a content analysis, the paper intends to study documents from the United States Congress to analyze how the US views their own conception of the alliance, its relationship to it, and which roles the two bodies embrace bilaterally. Structurally, the paper will first by a quantitative presentation provide an insight into NATO contributions in recent years, between 2013 and 2019. It will then, in context of those contributions analyze domestic US sentiments and with the use of the theoretical framework national role conceptions, examine whether there has been a shift in the US outlook of NATO. Not only regarding sentiments but also in terms of the roles and engagements the United States is involved in through NATO as an institution.

The question that will be examined is as follows:

- How have domestic US sentiments and conceptions about NATO and their role as an alliance changed in context of military contributions between 2013-2019?

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<sup>6</sup> Haltiwanger, John, Trump keeps criticizing NATO allies over spending. Here's how NATO's budget actually works, *Business Insider*, 2019-12-2.

## 2 Background information

The United States has been NATO's most important member ever since its foundation. It was one of the founding members which in 1949 in Washington DC, concluded that there needed to be some kind of new establishment other than the UN that could ensure peace and keep the Soviet Union at bay. With the United States being one of the main reasons behind the Allies victory in world war two, their dominant place in the international world order was even further cemented as they embraced the leading position in NATO as well. The defensive coalition was based upon (amongst other) a simple but very clear notion, explicitly stated in article 5 of NATO's charter, that an attack against one of the alliance's members, would be an attack against all.<sup>7</sup> A reflection of the significance of this notion and what it would symbolize not only for the alliance but for the US, in particular, was shown after the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11, as NATO members invoked article 5 and declared the attack an act of aggression against all alliance members. The only time in history the article has been invoked.<sup>8</sup> This event would in a symbolic sense come to reflect the integrity of the organization and also, signify the US as being one of the most principal components of the alliance.

However, to provide a more explicit insight into what the United States has meant for, and given to NATO, one has to outline what the distribution of contributions to NATO has looked like in recent years. Not only with regard to the purpose of the study, to have a context in which any eventual changes in the domestic US outlook of NATO can be understood. But also, to examine the essential meaning behind such opinions expressed by Donald Trump, that NATO allies must step up to the task and "even out" the economic burden carried by the US. The US has for many years been the organization's top contributor, however, it has also been the world's biggest spender by far on military measures in general.<sup>9</sup> To contextualize and give an insight into the level of contributions from member states in recent years, I will now go through some statistical data. Worth noting is that this information not is going to be analyzed per se, but merely act as context for the study of domestic US attitudes and sentiments towards NATO.

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<sup>7</sup> Dahl, 2019, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 126-127.

<sup>9</sup> SIPRI, "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2016", SIPRI fact sheet, April 2017, p. 1-2.

## 2.1 Distribution of contributions to NATO

Two statistical figures have been assembled based on information from a compendium produced by NATO. The compendium is a type of fact sheet which is published annually, showing financial, economic, and personnel data of allies in the form of graphs and tables. The fact sheet displays different budgetary numbers and expenditures for each member, as well as for the alliance as a whole. The timeframe for the compendiums is typically seven years, as is the one that has been the basis for the two figures used here. It covers the years between 2013 and 2019 (with numbers for 2019 being estimates).<sup>10</sup> A central part of the fact sheet (and of NATO contributions overall) is a defense spending guideline which was set by NATO in 2006, an expenditure target that simply called upon all member states to spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense.<sup>11</sup>

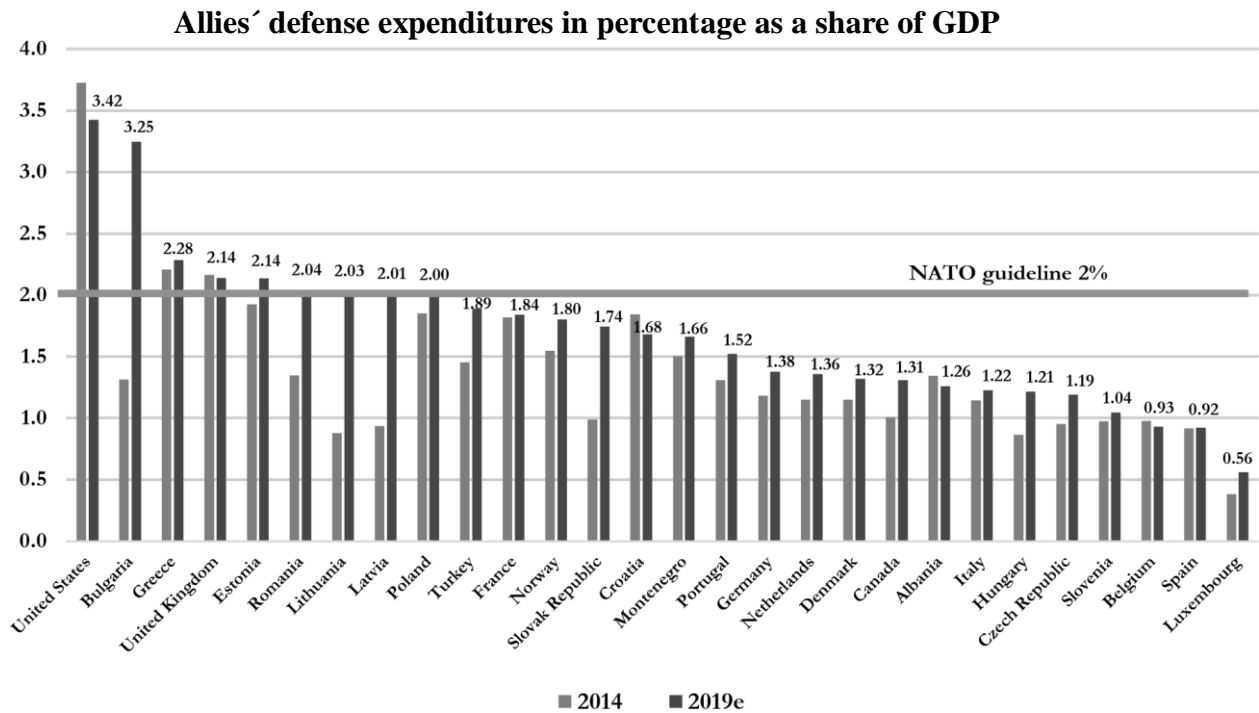
The two figures shown below are both based on the fact sheet, the first graph have been taken directly from the compendium since it informatively displays every ally's defense expenditures in percentage as a share of their own respective GDP. Numbers are shown from 2014 and 2019 parallel to the 2% spending guideline which all members are advised to meet. The second figure has been assembled based on statistics from the fact sheet, and it outlines members' individual defense expenditures as a percentage-share of the total defense expenditures of all NATO countries combined. The table displays figures for the eight highest spenders (with the highest expenditures), as well as NATO Europe and Canada combined as one group between the years 2013 and 2019. Numbers are (as in the fact sheet) based on constant 2015 prices and exchange rates.

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<sup>10</sup> NATO, "Defense Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013-2019)", Press Release, Communiqué de Presse, PR/CP(2019)123, November 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Funding NATO, Indirect funding of NATO, NATO website, (updated 28/4 2020).

2.1.1 Figure 1



(Defense expenditures of NATO countries 2013-2019, Graph 3, 2019, p.3)

Before examining what the graph displays, it is worth noting that Iceland and North Macedonia are not included, Iceland has no armed forces and North Macedonia joined NATO in 2020.<sup>12</sup> What the graph shows is that in 2014, only three members met or exceeded the 2% expenditure guideline, the US (3,73%), Greece (2,21%), and the UK (2,16%).<sup>13</sup> In 2019 (estimated), that number has risen to nine members, the US (3,42%), Bulgaria (3,25%), Greece (2,28%), UK (2,14%), Estonia (2,14%), Romania (2,04%), Lithuania (2,03%), Latvia (2,01%), and Poland (2,00%) now currently meet or exceed the 2% guideline in defense expenditures. Out of all member states in the graph (Iceland and North Macedonia not included), every ally has increased defense expenditures out of their respective GDP between 2014 and 2019, apart from the US, UK, Croatia, Albania, Belgium, and Spain. These six states have decreased national expenditures of GDP in the same period (Spain has remained at the same level). However, out of these members, only the US and the UK have met the 2% guideline at both time periods, 2014 and 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Defense expenditures of NATO countries 2013-2019, NATO fact sheet, 2019, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 9 (these numbers not shown in the graph above, included for further clarification).



## 2.1.2 Figure 2

<b>Defense expenditures per country in percentage, as individual shares of all NATO members' total expenditures combined (based on constant 2015 prices and exchange rates)</b>							
<b>Country</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019e</b>
United States	73%	73%	72%	71%	69%	69%	69%
UK	6,6%	6,7%	6,6%	6,8%	7%	7%	6,7%
France	4,7%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Germany	4,2%	4,3%	4,5%	4,5%	4,8%	4,8%	5%
Italy	2,4%	2,3%	2,2%	2,4%	2,5%	2,5%	2,4%
Canada	1,6%	1,7%	2,1%	2%	2,6%	2,3%	2,2%
Turkey	1,2%	1,3%	1,3%	1,4%	1,6%	1,9%	1,8%
Spain	1,1%	1,2%	1,2%	1,1%	1,3%	1,3%	1,3%
<b>Europe/Canada total</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>31%</b>

(Defense expenditures of NATO countries 2013-2019, Table 2, 2019, p.7)

To reiterate the meaning of this figure, it shows individual defense expenditures within NATO from the eight highest spenders as a percentage-share of the total defense expenditures of all NATO members combined, as well as the combined total of NATO Europe and Canada. Important to note is that these figures do not represent how much each ally spends on NATO, but rather how much each ally spends on defense measures in general as a percentage share of the entire defense expenditures of all member states put together. Firstly, what the numbers show is that the US roughly accounts for more than two thirds of the alliance's combined defense expenditures from 2013 to 2019. This is nothing groundbreaking since the United States has been the top spending nation on defense for several years, as stated before.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, NATO Europe and Canada put together have accounted for a third of combined defense expenditures. The most apparent change within this time period is that the US individual share of the combined total has decreased slightly, from 73% to 69%. While the combined share of Europe and Canada has gone up from 27% to approximately 31%. Looking at the individual percentage-shares of the other countries the changes have been slight, some allies have seen small increases while others either have remained at the same level or experienced occasional drops. However, this should be understood in parallel to that the combined general share of allies' expenditures (the US excluded) has increased. In sum, the major differences can be seen in the two "groupings", that US defense expenditures have decreased slightly while the combined expenditures of Europe and Canada have increased between 2013 and 2019.

<sup>14</sup> SIPRI, "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2016", SIPRI fact sheet, April 2017, p. 1-2.

## 3 Previous research and theory

### 3.1 Previous research

A large proportion of the research literature concerning NATO highlights aspects of burden-sharing. A feature that along with transatlantic relations, has embedded the alliance for a long time even though both in recent years have been at the center of scrutiny. A widespread perception of the transatlantic security relationship (between North America and Europe) is that it has experienced a shift with regard to imbalances in burden-sharing. Imbalances that have been around for a long time but that has seen increased concern for the last two decades.<sup>15</sup> Some scholars argue this is the result of a changing international system and recent critical developments in global politics such as the war on terror.<sup>16</sup> However, a changing world and unsustainable burden-sharing arrangements (especially in NATO) are mostly associated with overall military expenditures. Something that Todd Sandler and Hirofumi Shimizu discuss in an article concerning burden-sharing commitments in NATO. They argue that NATO on occasions has seen tendencies of exploitation among its member states where the richer allies have shouldered much of the responsibility when it comes to expenditures and burdens.<sup>17</sup> Something that has had implications for the internal cohesion of the alliance. Interesting reflections have also been brought up about differing strategic principles surrounding NATO as an institution. Jordan Becker and Edmund Malesky argue that allies which have embraced a (trans)atlanticist position in support of NATO have allocated more resources to the alliance as opposed to member states that have navigated more towards a “Europeanist” role.<sup>18</sup>

Transatlanticism is a recurring notion in a lot of the research surrounding NATO, especially considering it is the very foundational concept upon which the alliance was built, the cooperation between North America and Europe. Carl Cavanagh Hodge argues that even

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<sup>15</sup> Hallams & Schreer, 2012, p. 313-316.

<sup>16</sup> Oma, 2012, p. 570.

<sup>17</sup> Sandler, Todd & Shimizu, Hirofumi “NATO Burden Sharing 1999–2010: An Altered Alliance”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 43-60, 2014, p. 44-46.

<sup>18</sup> Becker, Jordan & Malesky, Edmund, “The Continent or the ‘Grand Large’? Strategic Culture and Operational Burden-Sharing in NATO”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 163–180, 2017, p. 163-164.

though US interaction and influence globally is part of a calculated grand strategy of the United States, Europe has to step in and be able to “fill the gaps” in transatlantic relations where such action is warranted and necessary.<sup>19</sup> Other scholars scrutinize to which degree NATO, even with the leadership of the United States, possess definite abilities to address challenges to security communities such as the Atlantic community, especially concerning measures beyond those of a military character.<sup>20</sup> Making future projections of NATO’s unity and internal structures may be difficult to do, but this is something Ann-Sophie Dahl reflects over in a book, covering the many changes NATO has gone through over the years. Of particular relevance for this paper, amongst other aspects, she discusses the current US administration with Donald Trump in the lead and its interactions with NATO.<sup>21</sup>

The aspects of burden-sharing and military expenditures, along with what Becker & Malesky discuss regarding the types of roles states fulfill parallel to NATO is of special relevance for this study. In particular, since this highlights how different adaptations of roles potentially can influence the level of commitment states have to the organization. This notion has not been covered to any larger extent in the research field regarding NATO, which makes it warranted to take such a perspective in this paper, especially theoretically. This study does not intend to fill a gap in the existing field, but more so provide an insight into aspects of roles and the conception of roles, in the context of NATO and burden-sharing, especially with regard to domestic US politics.

## 3.2 National role conceptions

Based on previous research and its general lack of interest discussing NATO in contexts of roles, the chosen theoretical framework for this study is the concept of national role conceptions, NRC’s. This concept was developed by K. J. Holsti in an article published in 1970 titled; “National Role Conceptions in the study of Foreign Policy”.<sup>22</sup> The basis of the framework primarily concerns how policymakers in states create and view the roles their nations fulfill and

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<sup>19</sup> Hodge, Carl Cavanagh, “Atlanticism and Pax Americana 1989-2004”, *International Journal*, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 151–170, 2004, p. 166-169.

<sup>20</sup> Drath, Viola Herms, “Toward a New Atlanticism”, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, vol. 28, no. 6, pp. 425–431, 2006, p. 428-429.

<sup>21</sup> Dahl, 2019, p. 201-213.

<sup>22</sup> K. J. Holsti, “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 233-309, 1970.

embrace in international relations and the international arena. In essence, in what ways state leaders' beliefs and images about their own nations help shape the identity which the state performs and acts in the international system. Policymakers' definitions of the commitments, decisions, and actions which are defined as suitable to their state, and which are projected and engaged with, in foreign policy.<sup>23</sup> The concept is derived from foreign policy analysis, however, its main origins should be attributed to the perspective of role theory.

Since Holsti established the model of NRC's it has been developed further and applied to several areas of research, mainly international relations and foreign policy analysis. Klaus Brummer & Cameron Thies employ Holsti's framework but argue that its conceptual reach needs to be broader. They lift the potential shortcoming of only focusing on the ruling elites in a state in determining how national role conceptions are identified. Attention must also be paid to the domestic political climate and the processes in which national roles are selected and decided upon. They argue that multi-party coalitions, oppositions, and political dynamics also must be taken into account.<sup>24</sup> Christian Cantir & Juliet Kaarbo similarly discuss NRC's within the same reasoning, especially concerning the selection of national roles in domestic contexts. They argue that the masses (as opposed to elites) can have an impact on the process of selection of national roles and that there always is contestation over which role conceptions a state should embrace and perform internationally. Foreign policy can both be contested vertically (between elites and masses), and horizontally (among elites) which in turn has implications for policymaking and behavior, upon which national roles subsequently are shaped.<sup>25</sup>

Both Brummer & Thies and Cantir & Kaarbo's articles provide a relevant addition to Holsti's original framework of NRC's. The ways both articles pay attention to extending the understanding of NRC's and how role conceptions emerge will be relevant for the way I intend to apply the concept in the analysis. Namely, that the levels of analysis not necessarily have to be fixed on the actual leaders in states. Even though Holsti uses the term policymakers quite broadly in his article, he exclusively focuses on analyzing statements from presidents, prime ministers, or foreign ministers.<sup>26</sup> I will by policymakers instead base my analysis on statements from US senators and members of the House of Representatives (defined further in the material

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 235/246.

<sup>24</sup> Brummer, Klaus & Cameron G. Thies, "The Contested Selection of National Role Conceptions", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 273–293, 2015, p. 273-275.

<sup>25</sup> Cantir, Cristian & Kaarbo, Juliet, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 5-24, 2012, p. 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Holsti, 1970, p. 256.

section). Thus adopting aspects of how and by whom national roles are shaped and in which contexts they are selected, as developed and brought up by Brummer & Thies and Cantir & Kaarbo.

Holsti's way of gathering national role conceptions is quite straightforward which is why I to some degree will use the same formula. He goes through statements from policymakers and interprets what kind of role conceptions they are indicating. He then makes a list of recurring themes that have been identified based on the frequency of different role conceptions which then are analyzed on the basis of a set of predetermined notions and projections. Since my study will be theory generating and have an inductive form of analysis (further explained in the method section) I will not base my analysis on predetermined projections. Instead, I will base my analysis of role conceptions on the context in which they are formulated and introduced. Holsti's theory predominantly centers around interpretation, which is also why my analysis to a great extent will be based on actually interpreting materials, in what kind of role conceptions they are being indicative of.

## 4 Research design and method

### 4.1 Qualitative content analysis

The method chosen for this study is content analysis, more specifically qualitative content analysis. A form of text analysis that aims to dissect and analyze the content in various forms of documentation. A method that either can be implemented qualitatively or quantitatively. It is the qualitative way that will be used in this essay since this form of analysis aims to explore and interpret the content in texts based on recurring themes and patterns.<sup>27</sup> It applies well to smaller sets of materials where you can focus your attention in a more detailed manner, as opposed to quantitative analysis which most often is used statistically or on larger sets of data. The analysis will also be done inductively, meaning that potential themes, patterns, or characterizations will be drawn from the materials themselves and not come from a predetermined outline.<sup>28</sup> Allowing for the analysis to go from the specific to the general when interpreting and making generalizations about the content of documents. As such, well fitted for the theoretical framework of this study since role conceptions mainly are about interpretation and making larger deductions from different kinds of statements.

The reason for the methodological choice of content analysis is because of the form of the primary materials. As touched upon in the previous section, the materials that will be analyzed are US congressional documents, consisting of congressional records and resolutions/bills (these are further explained in the following section). Documents that are intended to illuminate US attitudes and sentiments towards NATO, as well as its relationship to the alliance and the roles and engagements they are embracing. It is phrasings, statements, and wordings, in other words, the actual content of the congressional documents that is supposed to underline the study, which warrants the use of a content analysis.

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<sup>27</sup> Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina (red.), *Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, 3., [utök.] uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2012, p. 49-51.

<sup>28</sup> Elo, Satu & Kyngäs, Helvi, "The qualitative content analysis process", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), pp. 107-115, 2008, p. 108-109.

## 4.2 Material and delimitations

The primary materials for the study are congressional records and resolutions/bills from the United States Congress. These have been taken from the United States Congress archives website where every piece of proceeding and legislation is archived and open for access. The congressional records are transcripts from proceedings and debates either in the House of Representatives or the Senate where questions concerning NATO and its subsequent funding are discussed. The specific records are extracts from such proceedings in which NATO in particular is lifted by either a senator or a congressman/congresswoman. Four such extracts from records have been chosen on the basis of their relevance for the subject matter, as well as when they took place. I found NATO being mentioned in a variety of records, especially from 2016 and onwards, however, few of them were contextually relevant for the perspective of the study. The plan was to have the records somewhat correspond to the years covered in NATO's fact sheet, 2013-2019 (from the background section). However, since few records prior to 2016 consisted of any relevant content with regard to NATO or US-NATO relations, records were consequently chosen from 2016 and onwards. Types of records that have been overlooked are for example congress meetings where entirely different issues and subject matters are discussed and NATO only is mentioned briefly, or when Congress announces new appointments to NATO boards or assemblies, of which most only are a couple of short paragraphs. Hence, the range of records has been narrowed down to four extracts, one for each year from 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

To further complement the four congressional records, a selection of resolutions and bills have also been chosen for the analysis. These have also been taken from the US Congress archives and in total make up six documents, five resolutions and one bill. The legislations have either been proposed in the Senate or the House of Representatives and all have been drafted and signed by different sets of congressmen/congresswomen. In line with the same process of selecting the congressional records, they have been chosen based on their content and relevance for aspects regarding NATO funding and the US relations to the alliance. Resolutions not explicitly focused on the institution of NATO and its connection to the United States have similarly not been chosen. For instance, documents focused on international matters where NATO has been brought up momentarily or legislation that merely affirms or recognizes the accession of new member states. The samples of legislations were equally chosen to somewhat correspond to the years covered in the NATO statistical fact sheet, 2013-2019. Consequently,

one from 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The form of these resolutions and bills is not the same as the congressional records since they don't explicitly contain statements from members of congress. However, they do show general attitudes and sentiments regarding NATO and especially the US relationship to the alliance which is central to the purpose of this paper. In varying forms and with different subject matters, they consist of declarations and acknowledgments regarding the US-NATO relationship, including aspects the drafters want to see be addressed or improved. The main difference between a bill and a resolution is that a bill has the potential of being turned into law, while a resolution does not. However, both types of documents can express the sentiments of any of the houses and give "advice" on aspects of foreign policy.<sup>29</sup>

### 4.3 Operationalization

In terms of operationalization, the analysis of the primary materials will be outlined chronologically. To capture general sentiments and grasping the overall content, each document required a brief read through. After a first review, I was able to identify recurring types of phrasings and wordings used in describing NATO and/or the US-NATO relationship. Out of these, I have then formulated two broad themes/categories that could encapsulate or capture the different types of statements. Partly for the purpose of distinguishing between subject matters and what the content could be understood as referencing to but more importantly, to make it easier in drawing conclusions about what type of role conceptions the documents implicitly or explicitly are indicative of. Either in how members of congress or the drafters of resolutions describe the US role parallel to NATO, or what type of engagements they would want to be involved in through NATO as an institution. With regard to the purpose of the study, to examine whether there has been a shift in the US outlook of NATO in terms of role conceptions, this will be covered in the discussion after the analysis. As defined by Holsti, role conceptions can most often be derived from a selection of words or shorter sentences encompassing an implied general role the state would want to see itself adopt, commit to, or engage themselves in.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> United States Senate, Types of legislation, US Senate website, (updated 15/5 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Holsti, 1970, p. 254-255.



Which theme or category statements could be understood as belonging to will be explained continuously throughout the analysis, this in order to keep the chronological “line-up” of the documents in terms of the year they were held as meetings (congressional records) or when they were drafted (resolutions/bills). The themes have purposely been formulated quite broadly in order to enable the distribution of statements, since the form and content of the materials vary to a certain extent. References to defense expenditures or the 2% spending guideline will not be treated as “belonging” to any specific theme, since they are contextual aspects regarding the distribution of contributions to NATO and as such, not part of the main analysis. The two themes/categories are:

- **General support** – Statements that highlights the vital role of NATO, its transatlantic partnerships, and the unification of US and Europe
  
- **US-NATO relations** – Statements that highlights US commitment to NATO and the importance of US leadership in the organization

# 5 Analysis

## 5.1 Congressional records

### 5.1.1 Record 1 (2016)

The four congressional records (meetings) took place in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. The first record was taken from a meeting held April 20 2016 in the House of Representatives and consists of remarks made by representative Bradley Byrne (R-AL)<sup>31</sup>. His remark in the record is titled “Encouraging NATO participation from member nations”, which very much sums up the general standpoint in this record. He reiterates that some have started to question the relevance of the alliance in wake of, at the time, worrying developments in places such as the Crimean Peninsula amongst others.<sup>32</sup> The point being made is that since the US roughly accounts for two thirds of NATO members’ total defense expenditures and that as of 2016, only five members have met the 2% recommendation in spending of GDP, the alliance is in need of improvement. The representative argues NATO needs to be restored to an organization that collectively “[...] wields the power to deter aggression and secure peace”.<sup>33</sup>

Since this congressional record was fairly short (the shortest remark), this was the only statement that could be understood as indicative of sentiment towards NATO and subsequently also, a role conception. An aspect which the representative, in this case, would like to see NATO through its members performing even better or further. Especially in terms of improving the distributional structure and the capabilities of the alliance. This statement should thematically be seen as “general support”. Even though it shines light on some of the deficiencies of NATO, it highlights the relevance of the organization, in terms of what role it collectively is supposed to fulfill with regard to peace and security, and why such matters as reaching the 2% guideline target are pivotal for such purposes. Further, the role conception the statement implicitly could be indicative of, of which the US would like to embrace through the institution of NATO, would

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<sup>31</sup> Abbreviation after Congress members stand for political party, and state they represent, e.g. (Republican-Alabama).

<sup>32</sup> Unites States Congress, House of Representatives, Congressional Record – Extension of remarks, Proceedings and Debates of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, Issue: Vol 162, No 61, US Congress website, 20/4 2016, p. 543.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

broadly be something in line with “provider of security, peace, and stability”. Even though not clearly stated, the context in which the statement is brought forward can be interpreted as pointing towards such a role.

### 5.1.2 Record 2 (2017)

The second congressional record was taken from a meeting held April 4 2017 in the Senate and consists of remarks made by senators James Inhofe (R-OK), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH). The statement of senator Inhofe is quite brief and specifically concerns the accession of Montenegro into NATO (joined in 2017). He makes several remarks on the importance of assisting willing countries such as Montenegro to join NATO and argues that decisions such as this send strong signals of “transatlantic unity”.<sup>34</sup> He further describes NATO as playing a “[...] vital role in maintaining security and stability throughout Europe”.<sup>35</sup> These two phrasings are, similar to the previous section, not specifically putting emphasis on the US itself, but more so on NATO as a whole. However, since they focus on the role and the engagements of the organization, of which the United States indisputably is a foundational (and leading) member, they should be understood as being vital to US interests as well. Statements regarding transatlantic unity, and of NATO as playing a vital role in maintaining security and stability in Europe, should thematically be interpreted as “general support”. In particular, because they highlight NATO’s vital role in preserving security in Europe and giving credit to the importance of such a transatlantic bond. Consequently, these two statements, similar to the first record, could be indicative of a role conception in line with “provider of security, peace, and stability”. Even though broad, a role conception that could be interpreted as encapsulating the ways they describe NATO, and the types of engagements the US would like to be seen as performing.

Senator Brown’s remarks about NATO are similarly supportive, he briefly also mentions the accession of Montenegro but talks about NATO more generally. He argues that the US must stand by its “[...] ironclad commitments to NATO’s security and solidarity”.<sup>36</sup> Further, he describes NATO as being a “[...] steadfast resource in the fight against terrorism”,<sup>37</sup> and an

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<sup>34</sup> United States Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, Issue: Vol 163, No. 58, 4/4 2017, p. 2212.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 2213.

“[...] indispensable/indisputable resource for the international community”.<sup>38</sup> Statements that clearly indicate positive sentiments to NATO. The first statement, maintaining that the US must stand by its commitments to NATO’s security and solidarity is a clear expression of general commitment to the organization, thereby a statement that should belong in the theme ”US-NATO relations”. Further, a statement that could be encompassed by a role conception in line with “upholding security partnerships”. The other two statements in this section, describing NATO as a steadfast resource in the fight against terrorism, and an indisputable resource for the international community, are more so indicative of “general support”. Especially regarding the vital significance of NATO’s organization. Similar to the previous section, quite broad statements that although not explicitly referencing the United States, are descriptions of the purposes and engagements of NATO as an institution. And as such, indicative of a role conception similar to “provider of security, peace, and stability”. Broadly encompassing the type of engagements the US potentially would want to adopt or be a part of bilaterally.

### 5.1.3 Record 3 (2018)

In the next congressional record, a meeting held July 12 2018 in the Senate, former senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ) makes several remarks about the importance of the NATO alliance. His general remark refers to a series of meetings the US administration and President Donald Trump had in Europe over the summer in 2018, especially with NATO allies in which Trump characterized the NATO relations in quite harsh tones.<sup>39</sup> The senator makes the point that there is nothing to gain in debating and describing the North Atlantic Alliance in the way that the president does, arguing, in the context of NATO that; “The world relies on the United States for stable and reliable leadership, and we have in turn benefitted greatly from the peace and stability for which we have been the chief guarantors”.<sup>40</sup> This quote is sort of a summarizing remark of the general points the senator wants to make and as such, it reflects overall sentiment. It is indicative of aspects which thematically both can be placed in “general support”, and in “US-NATO relations”. Since it points out that the US has “benefitted greatly” from the peace and stability of which NATO’s organization has helped provide, it is indicating appreciation for its institution (even though the US has been its main sponsor). However, it also states that the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> United States Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, Issue: Vol 164, no. 117, 12/7 2018, p. 4934.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

world relies on the US for stable and reliable leadership. A statement which both implies the importance of US leadership in the world in general, but implicitly also indicates the relevance of US leadership within NATO's institution. As such, a reference to the relationship between the two "bodies", United States and NATO. The senator's remarks reflect not only positive sentiments towards NATO, it also shows what kind of significance is placed onto the organization. The specific statement he makes can both be indicative of the US wanting to embrace a role conception such as "world leadership/international leader", or the broader "provider of security, peace, and stability", which has appeared earlier.

#### 5.1.4 Record 4 (2019)

In the last of the congressional records, a meeting held January 22 2019 in the House of Representatives, several representatives make statements with regard to the importance of NATO. Representative Eliot Engel (D-NY) starts out by saying that NATO in no way should be seen as obsolete and that it for a long time, almost 70 years, has been a "[...] bedrock of transatlantic peace, security, and stability".<sup>41</sup> A statement that recognizes the vital role NATO has fulfilled in preserving transatlantic security relations, thereby encompassing the theme of "general support". Likewise, representative Michael McCaul (R-TX) uses similar words to describe NATO's role, he says that the alliance has enhanced the military capability of the US in that it has helped preserve its "[...] military prowess around the world" and especially, "[...] created a bulwark against international terror".<sup>42</sup>

Statements of this character are both indicative of general support to NATO, especially in terms of the vital role it has embraced as a "bulwark against international terror", but also, indicating the importance of the US-NATO relationship. Declaring that NATO has helped enhance the military capability of the United States is clearly demonstrating the significance and the essential meaning of US-NATO relations. Especially in how it is described that NATO has helped preserve the United States its "military prowess around the world". Declarations which very well could be understood as indicative of role conceptions in line with "provider of security, peace, and stability", or "world leadership/international leader". As touched upon before, even though not all statements necessarily point towards the US in specific, they are

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<sup>41</sup> United States Congress, House of Representatives, Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, Issue: Vol. 165, No. 13, 22/1 2019, p. 976.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 977.

implicitly referencing role conceptions and engagements which the US either are involved in or would want to be involved in, through the institution of NATO. Worth mentioning here is also that representative McCaul reiterates the importance of alliance members meeting the 2% guideline in military spending, as a way of reaffirming the partnerships NATO represents.<sup>43</sup>

Another representative, Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) describes the NATO principle of mutual and collective defense as one of the reasons behind it being “[...] the most successful military alliance in human history”.<sup>44</sup> He further argues that any pleas for NATO members to increase their spending to at least 2% of GDP, does not mean the US intends to leave NATO. Instead, he means it is a demonstration of the trust the United States places onto the alliance, describing the power of the NATO partnership as “absolutely invaluable”.<sup>45</sup> These statements are not indicative of any explicit role conceptions of which the United States would want to be a part of, however, they clearly state general support for the alliance, as well as the importance of the US-NATO relationship. Especially in declaring the “invaluable” nature of the NATO partnership and its place as the most successful military alliance in history.

In the same record, representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) discusses the US-NATO relationship in a very similar fashion. She describes NATO as being “[...] the backbone of American national security and foreign policy”, and in particular, as a “[...] bulwark against the outbreak of war”.<sup>46</sup> Declaring NATO as being the “backbone of American national security and foreign policy” could be interpreted as a reference to the theme of US-NATO relations, especially in terms of what these partnerships have meant for the US over the years. Descriptions of NATO as a “bulwark” against the outbreak of war, on the other hand, is undoubtedly an expression of support and firm belief in the organization. These statements are indicative of a supportive stance in general but most importantly, they highlight what NATO as a platform of security has provided for the world in general, and for the US in particular. Further, out of these two statements, the latter especially could be interpreted as the kind of engagement the US, (through NATO) would want to commit to, serving as a “tool” against the outbreak of war. Consequently, indicative of a role conception that could be characterized as “preserver of international security”.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 979.

## 5.2 Resolutions and bills

### 5.2.1 Senate resolution 156 (2013)

The first resolution, “S. RES. 156” was introduced in the Senate in 2013 with the title: “Expressing the sense of the Senate on the 10-year anniversary of NATO Allied Command Transformation”. As the title suggests, the resolution is a celebration of the ten-year anniversary of a NATO military command, a headquarters based in the United States which deals with some of the alliance’s activities and operations.<sup>47</sup> However, the resolution does not only reference the military command center, it makes many different declarations about the organization in general. With regard to NATO’s importance to international security, it states that for many years, “NATO has been the cornerstone of transatlantic security cooperation [...]”,<sup>48</sup> especially in terms of promoting stability. Such a statement should be seen as belonging to the theme of “general support”. Not only since it acknowledges the historical importance of the alliance, but also because it highlights the vital role NATO has performed regarding transatlantic relations. The resolution further describes NATO as representing the “vital transatlantic bond of solidarity between the United States and Europe [...]”,<sup>49</sup> declaring that, “through the alliance, the United States and Europe are effective and steadfast partners in security [...]”.<sup>50</sup> Similarly expressing the same sentiments in the resolution’s final passage where it is stated that the Senate, “conveys appreciation for the steadfast partnership between NATO and the United States”.<sup>51</sup>

These declarations are relatively clear in showing how US policymakers want to describe the alliance, especially the capabilities it possesses in between its allies and how appreciative the US is of these partnerships. As such, they are all referencing aspects that primarily would belong in the theme of “US-NATO relations”. Even though they mention the transatlantic nature of the partnership between the US and NATO (which would be the theme of general support, highlighting transatlantic relations), they explicitly focus on the US-NATO partnership and what this has meant for US security. In particular, the appreciation the United States has for the vital bond of solidarity between the US and Europe. The recurring references to the

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<sup>47</sup> United States Congress, Senate resolution, S. RES. 156, 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, US Congress website, 31/7 2013, p. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

transatlantic partnership in this document also imply what type of role conceptions the United States would want to embrace. Potentially both a “regional security partner” (with regard to the transatlantic region specifically), and along with NATO, a “provider of security, peace, and stability”. Worth noting is also that this resolution mentions the 2% expenditure guideline, explicitly urging all alliance members to reach this target.

### 5.2.2 Senate bill 2238 (2014)

The second legislative document, “S. 2238” is a bill that was introduced in the Senate in 2014 with the title, “NATO Alliance Recognition and Promotion Act”. In short, a bill focusing on the support of enlargement initiatives, encouraging states who might be seeking to join NATO to actually do so and that the US along with NATO should pursue to support such nations.<sup>52</sup> It explicitly recognizes the importance of the alliance, using the same formulation as the previous resolution, and states that for many years, “NATO has been the cornerstone of transatlantic security cooperation [...]”.<sup>53</sup> An organization that has served as an “[...] instrument for promoting peace and stability in Europe”.<sup>54</sup> Both of which, statements indicative of the theme of “general support” since they both highlight NATO’s importance for transatlantic relations, but also in how it has served as a platform for promoting “peace and stability”, thereby acknowledging the vital role of the organization. Further, the bill declares that the United States, as a way of “self-help” will “[...] continue to work with allies to maintain and improve our individual and collective allied capacity”.<sup>55</sup> As well as that the US are committed to “[...] enhancing security cooperation with European allies and maintaining a military presence in Europe [...]”,<sup>56</sup> especially by “[...] providing visible assurances to NATO allies in the region”.<sup>57</sup> In the bill’s final declarations, it is also stated that NATO members should review their defense spending in order to ensure the alliance’s capabilities, an implicit reference to the 2% spending guideline. These last three statements should be understood as in different ways referencing the theme of “US-NATO relations”. Since the declarations are formulated from a US point of view, in how the United States intends to continue its cooperation with NATO allies to enhance and improve the partnerships at hand, they are clearly referencing the

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<sup>52</sup> United States Congress, Senate bill, S. 2283, Bill, 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, 1/5 2014, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 2-3.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 2-3.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



relationships in the alliance and especially, US commitment to maintain those relations. Explicitly indicated in how the United States is committed to showcasing their support and “providing visible assurances” to NATO allies in Europe. As such, role conceptions this resolution is indicative of are “regional security partner”, and something in line with “regional leader” or “regional protector”.

### 5.2.3 House resolution 469 (2015)

The third resolution, “H. RES. 469” was introduced in the House of Representatives in 2015 and was titled, “Urging North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries to meet or exceed the two percent gross domestic product commitment to spending on defense”. The resolution is fairly short and its general content can essentially be summed up by its title. It specifically and explicitly calls on NATO members to meet the 2% guideline in spending. As such, it concerns the point which several other documents (both legislations and congress records) have touched upon but devotes an entire resolution to the specific cause. It calls upon members to meet the guidelines in spending, also stipulating the purposes of those expenditure guidelines. As measures of response to any kind of threats to freedom, security, and stability.<sup>58</sup> This sort of declaration makes clear the importance the US places in the 2% expenditure guideline and that member states reach this target. Especially regarding which purposes those expenditures are intended to address, as a protection against any threats to freedom, security, and stability. Aspects which subsequently could be interpreted as what the United States would want to commit to and engage with internationally, through the institution of NATO, broadly encompassed by the role of “provider of security, peace, and stability”. In the resolution’s final passage it is acknowledged that “the resolute commitment of the United States to NATO is steadfast [...]”,<sup>59</sup> and that “[...] the efforts of member nations that have met GDP commitments is applauded”.<sup>60</sup> Statements which not only indicates support for the alliance but also acknowledges the US commitment to NATO, thereby references belonging in the theme of “US-NATO relations”. Even though the resolution is quite explicit and direct in its pleas for member states to meet spending guidelines, there are no indications that the support or belief in the alliance is weakening.

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<sup>58</sup> United States Congress, House resolution, H. RES. 469, 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 8/10 2015, p. 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

#### 5.2.4 House resolution 739 (2016)

The fourth resolution, “H. RES. 739”, also introduced in the House of Representatives was drafted in 2016 with the title, “Reaffirming the commitment of the United States to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)”. Similar to the resolutions discussed above, the title of this document clearly indicates what the legislation is focusing on but even more importantly, this specific title encapsulates the common phrasing which has been used extensively before. Namely that the United States reaffirms its support and commitment to NATO. The resolution declares that for more than 60 years, “[...] NATO has been a successful intergovernmental political and military alliance”.<sup>61</sup> An organization that is “[...] the foundation of transatlantic security and defense”,<sup>62</sup> and similarly an institution that has served as a “[...] critical coalition in preserving peace and stability in the transatlantic region”.<sup>63</sup> These three declarations indicate a clear US appreciation of NATO, thereby statements that should be placed in the theme of “general support”. In particular, how they acknowledge the absolutely vital role the organization has played in preserving peace and security in the transatlantic region. It is also declared that NATO, as an institution “[...] strengthens the security of the United States by utilizing an integrated military coalition”.<sup>64</sup> A statement which also indicates a supportive stance for the organization, but more importantly, indicates what it has provided for the United States in terms of security, therefore referencing the overall US-NATO relationship. Role conceptions, as indicated in this resolution that the US would want to embrace, would then be “regional security partner” and perhaps “provider of security, peace, and stability”, especially with regard to the first three statements concerning the importance of transatlantic relations.

#### 5.2.5 Senate resolution 54 (2017)

The fifth resolution, “S. RES. 54”, was introduced in the Senate in 2017 with the title, “Expressing the unwavering commitment of the United States to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”. A resolution that noticeably pronounces its definite support for the alliance and its partnerships. It states that ever since its foundation, “[...] NATO has served as a central pillar of the United States national security and a deterrent against adversaries and external

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<sup>61</sup> United States Congress, House resolution, H. RES. 739, 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, 18/5 2016, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

threats”.<sup>65</sup> It unquestionably states that in order for the organization to remain one of the greatest military alliances in history, “continued United States leadership in NATO is critical [...]”.<sup>66</sup> Further proclaiming that participation in the alliance “[...] strengthens the security of the United States”,<sup>67</sup> and equally that, “[...] a strong and united Europe is important to United States strategic interests”.<sup>68</sup> This resolution in its entirety makes no mistake in clarifying the US support for NATO. In different ways, all these statements make references to the theme of “US-NATO relations”. It is stated that NATO has served as a “pillar of US national security”, that continued participation in the alliance strengthens United States security but above all, that US leadership in the organization is critical. Phrasings which indicate a strong and unwavering US commitment to NATO’s institution and furthermore, suggests role conceptions which the US would want to perform. Roles such as “regional leader” (in terms of US leadership) and “upholding security partnerships” (regarding the importance of a strong and united Europe). As several other documents, this resolution also covers the aspect of defense spending, strongly encouraging member states to meet the target in the 2% guideline.

## 5.2.6 Senate Resolution 570 (2018)

The sixth and last resolution, “S. RES. 570”, was introduced in 2018 in the Senate with the title “Emphasizing the importance of meeting NATO spending requirements”. Similar to the house resolution 469 from 2015, which urged member states to meet or exceed the 2% guideline in spending, this legislation equally stresses the importance of such measures. It declares that negotiations over fair burden-sharing have been around ever since the alliance’s foundation and that such questions are as relevant now as they were then. It states that “strengthening NATO’s capabilities is critical to the future of the alliance [...]”,<sup>69</sup> especially pointing out that the 2% guideline target is “an important measure of allies’ commitment to NATO [...]”.<sup>70</sup> Making it very clear about why meeting that guideline is so important not only for the specific member but for NATO’s partnerships overall. Neither of these statements can be interpreted as straightforward “general support” or as making clear references to the theme “US-NATO relations”. They merely imply that the future of the alliance depends on member states being

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<sup>65</sup> United States Congress, Senate resolution, S. RES. 54, 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 7/2 2017, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> United States Congress, Senate resolution, S. RES. 570, 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, 10/7 2018, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

committed to meeting requirements in military spending. Even though the message in this resolution is very outspoken and direct, in emphasizing the seriousness of meeting spending targets, the resolution makes it abundantly clear where the US stands in its support of NATO. In the ending passage, it is resolved that the US Senate, “reaffirms the commitment of the United States to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the foundation of transatlantic security and defense”.<sup>71</sup> A declaration that clearly acknowledges the US commitment to the alliance and as such, demonstrates the trust it has in NATO’s institution. Thus, a statement that should be seen as belonging to the theme “US-NATO relations” and further, along with the previous two declarations, indicative that the US wants to embrace a role conception of “upholding security partnerships”.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

## 6 Discussion

Before discussing the role conceptions that have emerged from these documents, and what eventual changes there has been in the US outlook of NATO, it is important to note that these role conceptions on their own not should be understood as completely encapsulating US foreign policy and the general relationship towards NATO. They are merely an insight into the US-NATO partnership and the sentiments expressed in US congress within a small time frame. Although, they are still reflecting a generalized picture of the overall US-NATO relationship, especially concerning eventual changes in general sentiments.

To briefly sum up the role conceptions identified in the congressional documents, I interpreted there being indications of approximately six different roles that the United States could be understood as being involved in or wanting to be involved in, through NATO's institution. "Provider of security, peace, and stability" (indicated continuously almost every year), "upholding security partnerships" (indicated from 2017 and onwards), "world leadership/international leader" (indicated from 2018 and onwards), "preserver of international security" (indicated in 2019), "regional security partner" (indicated in between 2013 and 2016), and lastly, "regional leader/regional protector" (indicated in 2014 and 2017). Even though occasional role conceptions only might have appeared in one specific year or at separate occasions with several years in-between, based on the similarities and the recurrences of role conceptions there have seemingly not been any major actual changes. The indications of role conceptions have been relatively consistent and similar over the time period, meaning that the statements and general sentiments behind them largely have been similar as well. The majority of statements could be seen as having a positive or appreciative stance towards NATO and its partnerships, similarly also expressing a clear US commitment to the organization, as shown in the encapsulating themes of "general support" and "US-NATO relations". Statements of a more "dissatisfactory" nature, such as declarations of the absolute necessity of member states reaching the 2% spending guideline, were almost entirely made in contexts where US commitment to NATO simultaneously was expressed.

The role conceptions of "provider of security, peace, and stability" and "regional security partner" which have been indicated most frequently, illustrate that the US both want to strive towards providing security and stability through NATO and act as a partner in such

engagements through the organization. Engagements that, since they have been referenced to almost continuously in between 2013 and 2019, would demonstrate that there has not been a change in the general outlook of NATO's institution and purposes. Despite the fact that a role conception such as "provider of security, peace, and stability" could be interpreted quite broadly at times, the references underlining the role were nonetheless clear in indicating US desire for striving towards such kind of measures. A general determination and commitment to being engaged in any kind of initiatives concerned with providing security and peace. "Provider of security, peace, and stability" could be understood as being quite similar to the role conception of "preserver of international security". However, since the latter out of these only was indicated at one point and specifically referenced the role of NATO as being a tool or a "bulwark" against the outbreak of war, it is more so indicative of the US wanting to embrace the role of being a safeguard against the outbreak of conflicts. Thereby more of a specific reference to preventing wars rather than "merely" providing security and stability in general. "Upholding security partnerships" would generally be indicative of the importance the US is placing on NATO's partnerships and especially, the relevance in maintaining those relationships. Further, remarks about the significance of US leadership have also appeared as a vital point of view, not only with regard to Europe or the transatlantic area as a region (regional leader/regional protector) but also in the world generally (world leadership/international leader). Role conceptions that assembled together have been indicated intermittently in almost the entire time period.

Regarding the aspect of military contributions to NATO, the documents showed that this is a matter of great significance for US policymakers. Associations to NATO's capabilities and its capacity to ensure peace and stability were made continuously throughout the documents. References to the 2% expenditure guideline in specific were made each year, if it were not explicitly mentioned in a congressional record it was subsequently stated in a resolution the corresponding year, consequently, during the entire time period between 2013 and 2019. As stated before the analysis, even though such aspects not have been a part of the main analysis of role conceptions explicitly, they have been included as an important contextual factor to take into account parallel to interpretations of the general US outlook of NATO. In particular, as a way of recognizing the reason and the significance behind general attempts to persuade alliance members to increase defense contributions. Symbolically suggested in such opinions expressed

by Donald Trump as mentioned in the beginning, that allies need to step up to the task in evening out “unfair” burden-sharing arrangements.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, to put the NATO contributions (from the background section) into context, the level of expenditures among member states other than the US, could be seen to have increased in between 2013 and 2019 (figure 2), principally the same time period as the congressional documents. Even though the United States were shown to have the absolute highest expenditures, accounting for approximately 70% of the combined expenditures of all allies. It was shown that NATO’s European members including Canada, actually had increased their expenditures. (The US figure of 70%, as noted in the introduction, should be seen in context of them also being the world leader on defense spending in general). The number of members exceeding the 2% spending guideline of GDP was also shown to have risen from only three members in 2014 to nine in 2019 (figure 1). Developments that could indicate there are steps being taken towards a more balanced burden-sharing arrangement. However, whether this change should be seen as a direct result of continuous US appeals in the documents during this time period, might be difficult to determine in this circumstance. Especially on the basis of a study which only has dealt with a US point of view.

To sum up, the similarities and recurrences of role conceptions in the documents have shown no signs of a changing US outlook of NATO’s institution and its partnerships. It is precisely the consistency and the recurrence of the role conceptions that are most important to acknowledge in this context. Not to say the specific statements and role conceptions are inconsequential in any way, but it is the “change” that is most relevant to take into account, or more accurately, the lack thereof, that should be highlighted. Something that, despite occasional “hard” tones and resolute demands for improvements in spending, could be indicative of that the United States still has belief and trust in the institution of NATO. That it deems its role and what it stands for in the international arena vital to such an extent that it cannot risk jeopardizing the cohesion of the partnerships it has helped establish over many years.

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<sup>72</sup> Haltiwanger, *Business Insider*, 2019-12-2.

## 7 Conclusion

To recap, the purpose of this study was to examine domestic US sentiments and attitudes towards NATO. By the use of the theoretical framework national role conceptions, the intent was to see whether there had been a shift in the general US outlook of the organization between 2013 and 2019, in context of contributions to NATO. Through a qualitative content analysis, a series of US congressional documents were examined to determine how the United States views their own conception of the alliance, its relationship to it, and the roles the two bodies embrace bilaterally. The reason for a study of the United States, in particular, is because of their indisputable role and position in NATO as one of its most fundamental members, both historically and in terms of contributions.

The documents have generally shown to be indicative of support for NATO and its partnerships, as well as expressing appreciation for the roles and engagements the organization has embraced. Engagements that as interpreted from the documents, are the types of initiatives and actions that the United States would want to or have sought to be involved in through NATO. Role conceptions such as “provider of security, peace, and stability” and “regional security partner” amongst others. All in all, it can be concluded most importantly that general sentiments and attitudes in the documents, and subsequently, the role conceptions they have been understood as indicating, have largely appeared consistent throughout the time period of 2013-2019. A time period in which the distribution of contributions to NATO also has started to show tendencies towards becoming more balanced in terms of burden-sharing. Even though the United States still accounts for the highest share in combined defense expenditures, other allies have started to increase their contributions and expenditures. This apparent development in general contributions, parallel to the similarities and recurrences of role conceptions has above all, led to the conclusion that on the basis of an insight into these congressional documents, there have not been any significant changes in the general US outlook of NATO.

Even though the congressional documents consistently and continuously have highlighted the importance of member states increasing their national expenditures, especially regarding the 2% spending guideline, it would be difficult to establish whether this has been a causal factor behind actual increases in NATO allies’ expenditures between 2013 and 2019. However, if one were to relate this aspect to what Jordan Becker & Edmund Malesky touched upon in an article



in earlier research, that NATO states adopting more of a transatlanticist role strategy have been seen to allocate more resources to the alliance, as opposed to those adopting a more European-based role;<sup>73</sup> one could hypothetically argue of there being a correlation in this circumstance. Potentially that such states that clearly have steered towards transatlanticist strategies in their foreign policy, quite possibly states with very “US-friendly” security strategies, are the same ones that have made significant increases in their allocation of resources to NATO. Although hypothetical, these aspects could have a correlation and possibly, be the prospect for future research in that regard. Analyzing whether there is a link between the countries with a clear “US-friendly” position in foreign policy and the ones that consistently make significant increases in national defense spending, either in the context of NATO or regardless of NATO membership.

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<sup>73</sup> Becker & Malesky, 2017, p. 163-165.

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