The Security Paradox: More Defense – Less Security?

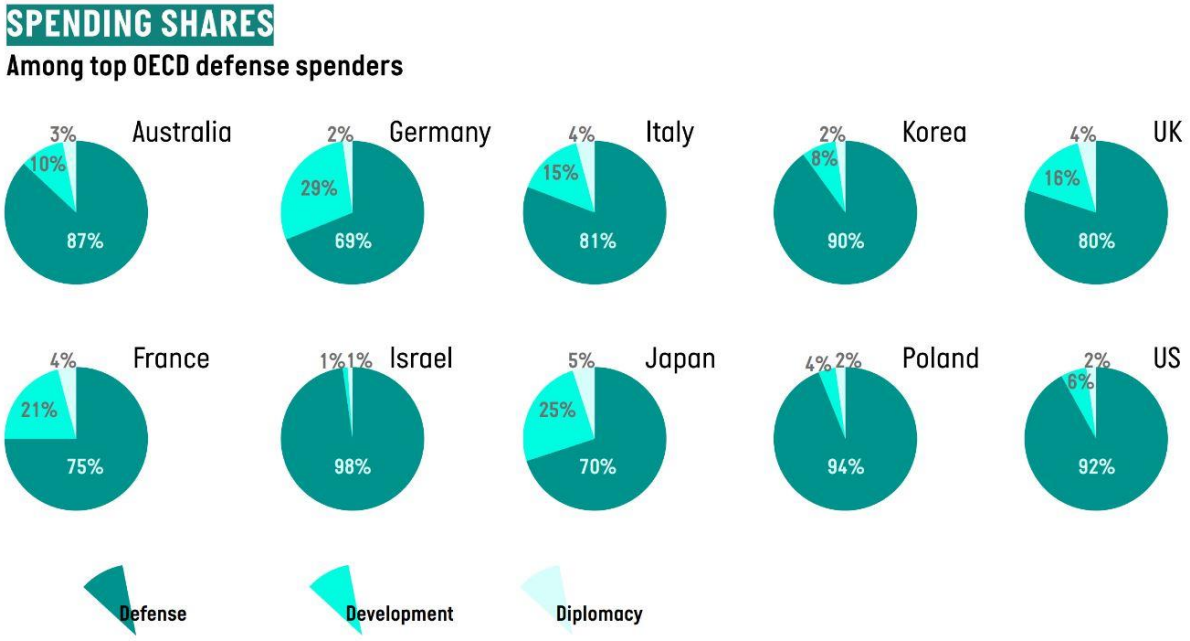
Publication: 11 February
Scope: Top 10 OECD defense spenders[1], spending on Defense, Development & Diplomacy (3Ds), 2015–2024

Core Findings – at a glance:

1. **Defense dominates security spending**
    a. **The OECD's top military heavyweights allocate seven times more on hard power than on soft power.** In other words:
        i. For every dollar they invest in **development and diplomacy combined**; they spend 7 USD on defense.
    b. In 2024, over 85% of all security-related spending went to defense; less than 15% to development and diplomacy.
    c. Combined military spending rose from $1.14 trillion (2015) to $1.45 trillion (2024) – an increase of almost 30%.
    d. Largest increases relative to GDP (in that order): Israel, Poland, Germany.
2. **Development and diplomacy are stagnating**
    a. ODA as a share of GDP has plateaued or declined across most top defense spenders.
    b. 20% of ODA in 2024 was spent on in-donor refugee costs; excluding these, external development spending is stagnating or shrinking.
    c. Share of ODA to fragile and conflict-affected states fell from 40% (2015) to just over 25% (2024).
    d. Within FCAS funding, spending shifted away from prevention and resilience toward humanitarian response (e.g. Nigeria, Sudan).
    e. Diplomacy spending remained flat at just under 0.1% of GDP throughout the decade.
3. **Growing imbalances between the 3Ds**
    a. For every $1 spent on development, $9 are spent on defense.
    b. For every $1 spent on diplomacy, $42 go to defense.
    c. In 2024, countries spent 65 times more on defense than on global health.
    d. Global health spending fell from $31bn (2021) to $23bn (2024).
4. **Cuts to Global Health undermine stability**
    a. A Lancet study estimates 14 million additional deaths by 2030 due to recent US ODA cuts.
    b. During the 2014–2016 Ebola crisis, loss of trust in governments fueled political tension and even violence.
    c. PEPFAR countries[2] showed 40% less instability than non-recipient countries.
5. **Soft Power is a money saver**
    a. It's 103 times more expensive to react to a conflict than to prevent it (see ONE's 2025 MSC analysis).
    b. WEF Global Risk Report 2025: Long-term threats are non-military
        i. State-based armed conflict ranks among the top short-term threats
        ii. However, none of the top 10 long-term global risks are military (climate, migration, environmental degradation, tech disruption).
6. **Strategic consequences of underinvesting in soft power**
    a. **The growing imbalance between hard power and soft power is a strategic liability for the OECD.**

[1] USA, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Israel, South Korea, Australia, and Poland
[2] PEPFAR refers to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief , the US government's flagship global HIV/AIDS initiative combatting the disease in more than 50 countries.

b. **Geopolitical competitors are gaining influence**, especially when investing across all three Ds:
    i. **China**:
        1. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has channeled more than $1.3 trillion in commercial loans into over 150 countries since 2013.
        2. According to a 2025 Afrobarometer survey, 60% of respondents across Africa view China's influence positively, giving it the strongest reputation among external actors
        3. China now has more diplomatic missions than any other country in the world, enabling continuous, embedded engagement.
        4. China is also starting to fill the void that other donors left behind when reducing their global health spending.
    ii. **Russia**:
        1. Deepened ties with political, military & business elites, often in fragile or authoritarian contexts, exchanging security assistance and political backing for diplomatic alignment, commercial access, and support in multilateral forums
        2. Africa elevated to a strategic priority in 2023.



The Security Paradox: More Defense – Less Security?

Top-ranking military experts speak in favor of investing in soft power as well:

- **David Petraeus**, Four-Star General & Former CIA Director:
  "Our security will be improved by sustaining foreign aid in the years ahead rather than by making further cuts."
- **James Mattis**, Former US Secretary of Defense:
  "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition."
- **Robert Gates**, Former US Secretary of Defense:
  "Development is a lot cheaper than sending soldiers."
- **James Appathurai**, Former NATO Spokesman:
  "Security without development cannot last."

ONE's Recommendations: Implement an integrated 3D approach

1. **Security funding must go beyond defense**
   a. Additional defense spending must be proportionally matched by investments in development and diplomacy
   b. Trigger early, collective action.
   c. Establish joint country strategies.
2. **Leverage development & diplomacy to prevent crises and enhance soft power**
   a. Allocate humanitarian aid and development funds based on risk.
   b. Fund diplomacy based on strategic need and capacity gaps.
   c. Move from fragmented projects to long-term funding.
3. **Recognize health as a security factor**
   a. Stabilize health ODA.
   b. Use debt2health as budget-friendly instrument.