

# Towards a Post-“Atlantic Order”?

## The Disruption of the American-European Partnership and the Rise of Asia-Pacific

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**T**HERE ARE a number of facts and evidences speaking about the change of the world. Markets, investments, business relocations but also academic reflections, new concepts, policy papers and international analyses observe and name the changes in various ways.

The post-1945 Atlantic order, based on the strategic alliance between the United States, Canada and Western Europe had developed a fundamental set of values, principles, rules and institutions which led, shaped and regulated the world as we know it today. This alliance (order) gave birth to a powerful and successful system of political and economic organization, under the rubric “*the West*,” providing security and prosperity for its nations during the Cold War. After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States actually remained the unique political, economic and military superpower. In other words, the triumphant America continued to lead the world as the only global actor taking the center-stage and being capable of world-wide impact strategies, having the most powerful military force, creating the most advanced technologies, pushing ahead the frontiers of knowledge and science as well as having the reputation of a country of radiant hope and good will. The U.S. won thus not only the Cold War against the Soviet Union but also the historical opportunity of setting a *grand vision* for a new century. For the next two decades, the American hegemony has been the key feature of world politics, within a *unipolar system of power*. Whether the U.S. succeeded or not to build the perspective of a new American century, in the early 2000s, we learn from Thomas P. M. Barnett: “America has searched for a grand strategic vision to animate our spirit and guide our actions, and it has failed. When we should have inspired hope, we have stoked fears, and where we should have built bridges, we have erected walls.”<sup>1</sup>

To understand correctly the essence of transatlantic partnership, before analyzing the nowadays “post-American world,” we have to look back to the Great War and World War II and see the crucial role of the United States in safeguarding peace and democracy in Europe. Defeating Nazi Germany was the second moment in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when America had to intervene militarily in order to end a blood-bath in Europe, to free and save the old continent. Jeffrey Kopstein made necessary amendments: “Americans and Europeans not only needed to be friends but also wanted to be friends.”<sup>2</sup> The

pragmatic reason of state was always combined in the case of transatlantic partnership with an idealistic approach and a strong cultural legacy built over centuries. That's why it's even more difficult nowadays to explain not only the crisis of the transatlantic relation but first of all the "anti-Americanism" of Europe's intellectual and political elites," Kopstein believes, not quite far from Markovits' analysis.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1949, most Western European countries (plus Greece and Turkey since 1952, and Spain since 1982) have been steady allies of the U.S. within NATO and that was undoubtedly the main mechanism of providing security for the democratic part of the continent. Beyond the Iron Curtain, the other half of Europe had to wait for almost fifty years to return formally to the Western club. By the time the European communist regimes collapsed, in 1989, there were 16 countries in North America and Europe fully "covered" by the famous Article 5.<sup>5</sup>

Winning the Cold War was the third time when America helped Europe to get rid of its own ideological frenzies, during one single century. In 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary became the first three former socialist countries to join the North Atlantic Alliance, followed in 2004 and 2009 by almost the entire East-Central Europe: nine more member states,<sup>6</sup> from the Baltic Sea to the Balkans. The massive enlargement to the East of the American led political and military coalition had extended the security umbrella over the whole Europe, to the Western frontiers of the former Soviet Union, now belonging to Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. "The security community" hosted and protected by NATO became the most powerful, democratic and prosperous group of allied nations in the modern history. It looked like the old dream-concept that Karl Deutsch developed in 1957 turned eventually into reality. The political triumph of NATO in the 1990s was thus beyond any initial expectation. Somewhat paradoxically, while on the peak of its political and military momentum the substance of the transatlantic partnership began to diminish ten years ago, starting with the American invasion in Iraq.

In January 2003, then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made his famous comments on *old Europe* and *new Europe*, stirring a wave of indignation in France and Germany. "You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France . . . I don't. I think that's old Europe. Look at the vast majority of countries in Europe. They are not with France and Germany. They are with the U.S. . . . If you look to the entire NATO Europe today, the gravity center is shifting to the East"<sup>8</sup> said the unpopular Secretary of Defense, prompting virulent critics from high French and German officials and European media. While Paris and Berlin were reluctant to join the military invasion project and eventually opposed any decision within NATO or UN Security Council, East-Central European new allies openly supported (politically and militarily) the U.S. campaign without having an international mandate. In a symbolic move, the "Letter of Eight" signed by Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, UK, Spain, Italy, Denmark and Portugal, was asking for European unity in supporting the UN Security Council Resolution 1441.<sup>9</sup> That was in fact a new step in dividing Europe along the "fault line" created by the issue of military intervention in Iraq, though we can understand from this alignment that *new and old Europe* were not actually working as East-Central vs. Western Europe but rather as *Atlanticist* European countries vs. *France and Germany*. Needless to say that former

President of France, Jacques Chirac threatened in 2003 the ECE candidates to EU membership in unusual way: “. . . this is not a responsible attitude . . . Beyond the fact of being infantile, this attitude is also dangerous. One must not forget that . . . enlargement will not work if one member state blocks it. These countries were both not well brought up and ignorant of the dangers of aligning themselves too closely to the American position.”<sup>10</sup>

The split of 2003 should be carefully placed under review. Was it only about President Bush decision to attack Iraq or was more (and deeper) than that? Maybe older inner pressures within the alliance, on both sides of the Atlantic, just found a fissure to erupt? G. John Ikenberry explains the climate of the American-European relations in the early 2000s: “European hostility to the United States—its polity, power and policy—reached historic levels . . . In the eyes of many Americans, Europe and the Western Alliance were no longer central to the pursuit of the U.S. global security. In the eyes of many Europeans, the United States had become a superpower that now must be resisted and contained. Some observers even speculated about the end of the West.”<sup>11</sup>

Other authors believe that a set of increasing differences between America and Europe with respect to military, economy, culture, religion or immigration pre-existed the political split of 2003 or even prompted the well-known tensions of the past decade. We have learned from Robert Kagan not only that, on major strategic and international issues “Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus,”<sup>12</sup> but more explicitly that growing power disparities between the U.S. and Europe fuelled specific and conflicting interests and perspectives which worked as a “foundation” for all recent disputes related to the world order. Kagan’s analysis refers to the very different ways in which “strong America” and “weak Europe” see the world, and how they report to global and regional risks, multiple threatens or causes of insecurity: combating vs. adapting to them. With reference to the well-known “cosmic” comparison between the “old world” and the “new world,” Charles Kupchan adds the historic observation that “during the nineteenth century, the United States was Venus and Europe, Mars.”<sup>13</sup> The two visions taken together (Kagan and Kupchan) reflect the global turning point which occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (starting with the Great War) and the dynamics of power, initiative and “energy” in international relations.

Again, Kopstein wants to explore the foundation of the transatlantic cleavage and sees “some deeper divergence in interests and values between the United States and Europe that had been identified before 2003,”<sup>14</sup> to a certain extent converging with Kagan<sup>15</sup> and Kupchan.<sup>16</sup> In terms of management and business culture, an essential dimension of the two systems, Peter F. Drucker highlighted both some ethic differences and “pragmatic” similarities. “Drucker recognized that there are organizational and philosophical differences in how U.S. and European businesses regard responsibility and governance.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, all four authors build their analyses on the common idea that America and Europe are different in terms of power, economy and culture. The accumulation of these differences (even no one critical) made possible eventually the disruption of the transatlantic relation and the nascent “Anti-Americanism” in Europe. The crisis of the political and economic Western system is linked with the rise of Asia-Pacific in all possible ways: causes, consequences, inter-dependency. On both sides of the Atlantic, lead-

ers and investors turn their heads to China, to India, to all the emerging economies of the Pacific and Indian Ocean region.

We don't know if the West is irreversibly declining or not but what we know for sure is that predictions of a new world, China-oriented, are not new in Western politics. More than a hundred years ago, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. Secretary of State John Hay was actually convinced that "the storm center of the world has shifted to China. . . Whoever understands that mighty empire has the key to world politics for the next five hundred years."<sup>18</sup> The year was 1899 and the speech was meant to launch the so-called "Open Doors" policy. Nevertheless an American century followed, not a Chinese one, notwithstanding the fears Hay expressed. That prediction came too early.

The "Asian miracle" returned to public discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The markets and transnational businesses are rapidly shifting to higher profit rates in the Far East, but not necessarily in the expensive and aged Japan, whose extraordinary post-WWII ascension had somewhat tempered in the late 1980s, then in the 1990s and 2000s. Now China, India, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia etc. are the "rising stars" of the global economy. It is not thus surprising to learn that minister mentor of Singapore, Lee Yew states in clear words: "the center of economic and geopolitical gravity is shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific. . . Trade, investments and economic ties will make this the world's most important and dynamic during the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>19</sup> With a massive, younger yet still cheap labor force and low taxation levels, Asia Pacific is growing year after year. More and more investments are attracted on extending markets while dozens of businesses face relocations every year due to competitiveness related reasons.

The North-American political and economic commitment to the European cause is way more timid than it was during the three wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Great War, World War II and the Cold War. While the Europeans are paying the price of their odd anti-Americanism, Washington is defining its new strategy towards the Pacific region. For the first time in post-war history, the U.S. government had published a policy paper (*The Strategic Defense Review*) in which they did not mention any more the priority of the transatlantic relation, while the growing importance of Asia-Pacific was clearly emphasized. "U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the area extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region."<sup>20</sup> More than a simple hint, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave almost a guarantee of this new Asia-oriented doctrine in her article suggestively entitled "America's Pacific Century" (Foreign Policy, 2011), unveiling that "America is going to refocus its efforts on this area-of-the-future."<sup>21</sup> Needless to say that the Strategic Defense Review was soon followed by the Chinese response, in the words of Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, who urged the U.S. government to respect China's interests in the region<sup>22</sup> and expressed concerns with regard to the United States strategy of boosting its naval and military presence in the Pacific area and East-Asia. Otherwise China seems to prepare its military forces to challenge the most powerful armies in the world in terms of budget, capacity of reaction and even technology. Recently, in 2012, the

Chinese military budget reached 11.2% of GDP (or approximately 100 billion dollars) and thus it became the second largest defense budget after the one of the United States, surpassing the entire Europe's military expenditures. The U.S. military budget remains however eight times higher than the Chinese effort in the field.

America's rebalancing from Europe (Atlantic) to Asia (Pacific) in a complete and steep way is not realistic and it won't happen, Ira Straus appreciates, emphasizing the role of the historic and cultural heritage: "the idea of an Asia-Pacific identity for the United States as an alternative to the Euro-Atlantic one is an illusion, no matter how popular it is these days. . . America can never lose its Atlantic roots."<sup>23</sup> Differences between America and Europe are real but not as evident for other cultures and civilizations as for Americans and Europeans themselves. Somewhat on the same moderate approach with Ira Straus, Kopstein and Steinmo nuance their analysis: "from the standpoint of Africa, Latin America or Asia, what potentially divides America and Europe may seem trivial compared with what unites them. Both are rich and powerful compared to other continents. The bulk of world trade flows back and forth across the Atlantic between Europe and North America."<sup>24</sup> Indeed the Euro-Atlantic space remains by far the richest region of the world, with the largest middle class ever met in the modern history and with the most intense concentration of capital and development.

George Friedman takes into consideration the impact of the long economic slowdown in America and Europe to reach interesting conclusions. On one hand, Friedman believes that "the United States faces a potentially significant but longer-term geopolitical problem deriving from economic trends. The threat to the United States is the persistent decline in middle class' standard of living, a problem that is reshaping the social order that has been in place since the World War II and, if it continues, poses a threat to the American power."<sup>25</sup> Europe is a different story, with different risks to pretty similar economic problems, considering only the increasing rates of unemployment. On the old continent vulnerabilities are rather political than related to strategic and military power, and threaten the survival of the European Union itself. While the U.S. does not face "political disintegration from unemployment, whatever the number is, Europe might."<sup>26</sup> Starting with a traditional but nowadays highly profiled British reluctance to European integration, continuing with surprising eruptions of neo-populism, radicalism and xenophobia in some West European countries<sup>27</sup> (Netherlands, UK, Italy or others), the face of the good and generous Europe of the 1990s and early 2000s is gradually changing. After the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, an "arguably rising phenomenon of Euroscepticism."<sup>28</sup> probably connected with the economic decline makes today any enlargement or deepening of the European integration extremely difficult if not impossible. Whether "the Euro crisis is an existential test for the European Union"<sup>29</sup> it's a fact that we all can agree, the outcome of the current political attempts to implement a fiscal and banking union remains to be seen. On the other side of the ocean, Tea Party is also a political expression of the growing frustration within the American middle class.

An important aspect of the transatlantic relation is the image of each partner on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Starting with the war of 2003 and augmented after the crisis of 2008–2010, the perception about America in Europe has seriously deteriorated due to three main reasons: the defiant attitude in relation to traditional multi-

lateral organizations like the United Nations or NATO (which did not confirm the mass-destruction weapons and, respectively, did not support the intervention in Iraq), the abuse of military power combined with killing innocent civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the irresponsible way Wall Street behaved during the crisis while grabbing huge bonuses and government bailouts at the same time. Those were undoubtedly wide spread clichés, “corrosive” myths which rapidly grew all over the world and thus created the image of a greedy and cynical power.

Back in 2007, Markovits’ “Uncouth Nation” reveals a whole set of traditional shortcomings of Americans<sup>30</sup> in Europeans’ eyes: venality, vulgarity, mediocrity, lack of culture, simplemindedness, obesity etc. Andrei Markovits gives a list of explanations for the recent European hostility: American unilateralism, the influence of “neocons,” the public image of high dignitaries such as Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld etc. What is even more interesting in Markovits’ analysis is the connection between anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in Europe, both being products of the European left.<sup>31</sup> That “irrational, ridiculous anti-Americanism” is rather characteristic to Western political, cultural and intellectual leftist elites than to ordinary people. Further, Markovits believes that both the anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism are less acute in our time in Eastern Europe than in the Western European countries.<sup>32</sup>

The Europe’s image in America also faces tough times. Comparing political and economic relation’s priority for the interests of their country, Americans placed in 2012 Asia on top (51%), followed by Europe (38%). Just a few years ago, in 2004, Europe was leading the top of Americans’ preferences with 54%, compared with only 29% of subjects believing that Asia should be the most important partner for America. In eight years, a significant switch of image and options made Europe a periphery in Americans’ eyes. From “weak” and “vulnerable” to “non-competitive” and “non-viable,” the European Union seems to be the fragile and artificial construction in which North-America does not invest trust (and money) any longer. The economic stake pushes America to global emerging powers. According to Marcin Zaborowski, “the relative weight of the US-EU relationship in the 2000s is considerably inferior to what it was in the 1990s, and the rise of new powers, primarily China, India and Brazil, will increasingly mean that the US will choose to do deals with these powers either or without consulting the Europeans.”<sup>33</sup>

The British attitude regarding the European Union is also part of the same diagnosis. Part of the EU but always reluctant to deepen the level of integration, London tries to get only the cherry on top of the cake (free access to a 500 million people market) leaving to French and Germans the “pleasure” of making common policies or dealing with the burden of the single currency. The “special statute” of Britain within EU is not new. It started in fact in 1973 with a disputed admission (and only after Paris withdrew its veto against London, following “de Gaulle era”), continued in 1984–1986 during the harsh talks with Thatcher’s cabinet for adopting the *Single European Market* and became consecrated in 1991–1992, with the negotiations on the *Maastricht Treaty*.

Between Commonwealth, the United States and the European mainland, the UK’s circles of strategic priorities were always more or less different than the ones of Paris, Berlin or Rome. London constantly refused to join Eurozone (the single currency adopt-

ed by 17 out of 27 EU member states), the Schengen Agreement and other common pieces of legislation or policies under Brussels' umbrella. Recently, David Cameron announced the intention of organizing a referendum after the next election of 2015 (but no later than 2017), in which the British people would decide over UK position with regard to EU membership. The speech of January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013 got little or actually no international support in Europe and the United States as well, but it was probably welcomed by the 45% or so of Britons who want to see the United Kingdom out of the European Union. At the end of the day, democracy is about votes and power legitimacy and so is for Liberal-Democrats (the second party of the present center-right government coalition in London) who don't support the idea of leaving the European Union. In fact, the domestic political game in Britain is quite complicated,<sup>34</sup> with the right-wing voters beginning to split between the Conservative Party and the peripheral UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party, led by the "exotic" MEP<sup>35</sup> Nigel Farage), which grew from approximately 3% at 2010 election to surprising quotas of 8–12% of the total political options in nowadays polls. Under these circumstances, Tories' strategy to occupy the *anti-Brussels theme* might be seen as a tactical move in the perspective of the 2015 general election, while maintaining London's traditional Atlanticist orientation. This is the main reason we can find for the argumentative "referendum speech" of January 2013. Nevertheless President Obama immediately called David Cameron and suggested that Washington would "prefer a strong British voice within EU"<sup>36</sup> rather than turning European countries "inwards."

The past and present relation with Russia, both for Europe and the U.S., is a major chapter in itself. The strategy of collective defense within the North-Atlantic Alliance, the economic and technological competition with the rival socialist bloc, but first of all the tensioned political relation with the Soviet Union represented the trigger and "hard core" of the transatlantic partnership in the post-war era. In fact, the concept of *the West* was the political, economic, military and institutional response of the liberal democracies on both sides of the Atlantic to the major split caused by the Cold War. The Western Alliance or simply the West worked as an "endurance code" for hope, democracy, freedom and prosperity against Moscow's ambitions to spread the communism around the world.

After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the military threat from the East diminished. The relative normalization of the political, diplomatic and military relations between NATO and Russia was soon followed in Western Europe by a decreasing interest for preventive strategies and security spending. Consequently, while the East-Central European countries were seeking NATO admission to secure their territories, Western Europe chose to put security issues on the second level of priority and left to Americans almost the whole burden of the NATO budget. This asymmetric military and security effort within the transatlantic alliance prompted the U.S. frustration and even reproaches for a low European commitment in NATO. According to Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, "the intensity of the transatlantic crisis over the U.S. led intervention in Iraq in early 2003 has put into question on both sides of the Atlantic the relevance and the future prospects of the Euro-American alliance."<sup>37</sup> While Germany made Russia its largest trade partner, Obama's attempt to "reset" relations with Russia (under the presidency of Medvedev)

has visibly faded after Putin's come back to Kremlin in May 2012. The project of the American anti-missile shield in East-Central Europe (with components in Poland, Romania and Turkey) is still an issue of divergence between Washington and Moscow. Notwithstanding the official purpose of protecting the allies against virtual missiles from Iran, Russia believes that the interceptors diminish in fact its own potential of deterrence in the region.

Speaking about the "erosion" of the post-World War II Western system, one of the most trenchant authors in transatlantic relations, Charles A. Kupchan believes that "the Atlantic order is in the midst of a fundamental transition."<sup>38</sup> What caused the break? What possible directions and finalities could have this transition? Is there a post-Atlantic order? Trying to offer his own vision on these issues, Kupchan put on top of the list the European integration after the end of the Cold War: "a Europe at peace and a deeper and wider EU have diminished European dependence on U.S. power."<sup>39</sup> Then the first "technical" disagreements between the America and Europe loomed, at the end of the 1990s: the clauses of Kyoto Protocol on global environment policy and the privileges before the International Criminal Court, especially with respect to the regime of judicial immunities for the U.S. troops abroad.

After Obama's first term, the international stage looks like a "global leadership vacuum," as Spiegel noticed after February 2013 Security Conference in Munich, with "Europe incapable and America unwilling."<sup>40</sup> Syrians have been waiting a solution to their tragedy for 23 months. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict made actually no step towards a solving approach, but Palestine became "observer state" affiliated with the United Nations, despite the opposition of the U.S. and Israel. North Korea is threatening everybody. Iran is defiant but discretely invited to talks. Egypt is in the midst of a never-ending "spring". Turkey blames angrily Israel for irresponsible actions in Syria: both are important U.S. allies but have deteriorating relations. The U.S. Ambassador is killed in Benghazi, in a "liberated" Libya. To the south, the Tuaregs' assault in Mali makes the meek president Hollande an exotic hero, welcomed by enthusiastic singers and dancers. China and Japan's dispute over a small archipelago goes on in a slow but steady Asian pace. Russia still opposes to the anti-missile shield in East-Central Europe. Basically, no thorny file in international politics was closed or resolved in the past five years.

Nevertheless the good news for the beginning of Obama's second term at White House is the remarkable European-American project of the "Atlantic Internal Market". Whether the grand vision of the EU-US High Level Working Group to establish a large space of free economic and trade relations will become effective and with what results it remains to be seen. It is yet too early to make a prediction. The political message for investors as well as for strategists around the world is however significant: the German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle believes that "a transatlantic agreement holds potential that goes far beyond the strictly economic. This would send a strong political signal about the West's ability to shape our world."<sup>41</sup> In his January 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 statement, Westerwelle also thinks that "our coordination and cooperation have grown even closer. Nonetheless, in the face of a pressing need for reform, both Europe and the US have become more inward-looking in their economic and financial policy than is good for us in a rapidly changing world."<sup>42</sup>



The stalemate in local or regional conflicts, the lack of solutions in sensitive regions like MENA (Middle East and North Africa), Afghanistan, Iran, Korean Peninsula or East China Sea, and the sentiment of the multilateralism's futility (UN, NATO) are symptoms of the "post-American world" and the disintegrating Euro-Atlantic alliance. As mentioned before, a *global system with an unwilling America, incapable Europe and economically growing but politically limited Asia-Pacific* is so far a "no man's land". As I emphasized in a 2012 article, nobody speaks about a "Chinese dream"<sup>43</sup> and no one wants to be Chinese, no matter the annual rate of economic growth is or how many towers are built in Beijing. There is no other system of values and way of life to replace what the Western liberal democracies have done for the middle class in the past 65 years. The crisis of the West and the decline of the Atlantic order do not necessarily mean we move towards a post-Atlantic one.

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## Notes

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### **Abstract**

#### **Towards a Post-"Atlantic Order"?**

#### **The Disruption of the American-European Partnership and the Rise of Asia-Pacific**

Since 2003, the vast majority of the analyses, theories and academic reflections with respect to the decline of the Western order were based on the common idea that we are witnessing a gradual but definitive break of the post-1945 transatlantic relations. We might disagree with the severity of the diagnosis but some analytical and methodological demarches have to be done in order to understand the main directions of a changing world. Having in mind the global transformations following Western political, diplomatic and military crisis of 2003 (over Iraq invasion) as well as the implications of the financial crisis of 2008, scholars admit the end of the unipolar system (meaning two decades of U.S. hegemony after the demise of the Soviet Union) as well as a certain fading of the European-American strategic alliance. This article is an investigation of the transatlantic partnership (past events, current substance and perspectives), in the context of Asia-Pacific ascension. From political to economic dimension and from military to strategic issues, the "post-American world" which Fareed Zakaria has described so accurately is moving to a multipolar architecture, with several centers of growth and influence that are competing for resources and pre-eminence. Accordingly, global economy and international politics face a shift of "gravity center" from Atlantic to Pacific.

### **Keywords**

America, Europe, partnership, crisis, Asia-Pacific