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New Patterns of Transatlantic Security: The Challenge of Multipolarity

Asle Toje

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If the world is indeed becoming multipolar, what will this mean for the transatlantic relationship? Despite all the talk of rupture, the fact of the matter is that in the first two decades of the post-Cold War era, transatlantic relations have remained remarkably unaffected by the changes in the international system.

10 Washington has retained much of its military and strategic leadership in Europe through NATO, and upon invitation by the Europeans. Yet, there are now increasing signs that the “window of continuity” is closing. With the stalemate in Iraq and the equally difficult situation in Afghanistan, 2009 is a year for taking stock of the transatlantic bargain, like it or not.

15 The basic argument presented here runs as follows: The world is becoming multipolar. Trends and developments in NATO, the US, the EU and the European great powers all indicate that the transatlantic bargain is no longer sustainable. These developments bring urgency to the question: in a multipolar order, will the West be one of the poles? There is much to indicate that this may not

20 be the case.

The structure of this article is relatively straightforward. The first section traces the essential characteristics of the “transatlantic bargain”, the understanding between Europe and the United States that underpins transatlantic unity. The second, main, section explores inter-related questions that challenge this

25 understanding: (1) the weakening of NATO; (2) the diminished importance of Europe in American geopolitics; (3) the semi-failure of European foreign policy integration; and (4) the absence of a grand bargain amongst Europe’s leading powers. In the concluding section, a few thoughts will be offered on the question of multipolarity and how this might affect the transatlantic West. The approach of

30 the article is neoclassical realist, drawing to the full on the realist tradition.

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How the West was one

A cherished child has, as the saying goes, many names. Thus, some call it the transatlantic partnership, others call it the West or, indeed, “Empire” by invitation.¹ Since the end of the Cold War, the term “transatlantic bargain” has become increasingly popular. This is not least because this concept directs attention to a mutual understanding with two dimensions: one intra-European and one Euro-American. The term was coined by Harland Cleveland, former US Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), who argued that: “The glue that held the allies more or less together is a large, complex and dynamic bargain – partly an understanding among the Europeans, but mostly a deal between them and the United States of America.”² Under the original Euro-American bargain, the United States would contribute to the defence of Europe and to the region’s economic recovery on the condition that the Europeans would unite in the effort to defend themselves against the Soviet threat and would use economic aid effectively. At the same time, European integration was made possible by American security guarantees. The US presence effectively defused the regional security dilemma, what A. J. P. Taylor once called “the perpetual quadrille of balance of power in Europe”.³

It is important to note that in Cleveland’s bargain, US engagement was not only invited, but was also conditional upon European cooperation and unity. The bargain was never solely a military understanding. European integration was a key element in the US’ post-war *Europapolitik*. Although the strength and significance of different factors varied over time, many of the sources underpinning the American rationale behind venturing into this bargain were clearly discernible: counter-balancing the Soviet bloc; the containment of Germany; cultural closeness to Europe; a desire to have other partners share in the burdens of global leadership; an ideological desire to export American ideals; as well as a desire to help Europe break out of the circle of increasingly destructive inter-state violence.

But the original vision of a two-pillar structure for NATO with equal sharing of the burden and power between the US and Europe did not materialise.⁴ Throughout the Cold War, the Europeans failed to generate military strength anywhere equivalent to that of the US. The overall trend was that the less the Europeans were able to shoulder the burdens of Alliance, the stronger the American claims to primacy became.⁵ Stanley Sloan calls this a “defence dependence culture”.⁶ Moreover, friction in

¹ Lundestad, “‘Empire’ by Invitation?”, 263–77.

² Cleveland, *NATO: The Transatlantic Bargain*, 3–9. The term was later developed and applied by Stanley Sloan, *NATO, the European Union and the Atlantic Community*, 3.

³ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918*, xix

⁴ Captured in the Vandenberg Resolution (1948), the Brussels Treaty (1948) and the North Atlantic Treaty (1949).

⁵ Betts, “Political support system for American primacy”, 1–14.

⁶ Sloan, *NATO, the European Union and the Atlantic Community*, 6.

65 Euro-American relations spurred attempts at European foreign and security policy
coordination. In other words, there was an understanding in Europe that European
integration would in some way influence or give greater symmetry to Euro-American
relations. Yet, what initiatives such as the West European Union, the European
70 Defence Community and the European Political Cooperation (EPC) mechanism
all had in common is that they were token efforts with scant impact on real world
affairs. This was perhaps due to Europeans attaching greater value to American
protection than to any perceived benefits of greater autonomy.

Over the years, a number of attempts have been made to renegotiate the trans-
atlantic bargain – both on the part of the Americans, tired of perceived European
75 free-riding and wilfulness, and on the part of Europe, opposed to perceived
American dominance and inconsiderateness. The 1956 Suez crisis was perhaps
the most high-profile instance. The US made it clear that the European powers
were not at liberty to carry out their own power plays without American author-
isation. There have been a number of other shifts, though, from the 1967 Harmel
80 Report to the 1973 “Year of Europe”, from the US-Soviet bilateralism of the 1980s
to the 1995 “New Transatlantic Agenda”. Indeed, the transatlantic bargain has
proven surprisingly malleable. Change at one end has brought about change at the
other without rupturing the overall understanding. That said, the general trend was
that the bargain grew increasingly unequal over the four decades of the Cold War.
85 Towards the end, the US dealt with the Soviet Union bilaterally, determining the
fate of Europe over the heads of the Europeans.

The phases of renegotiation have invariably been accompanied by outpourings of
scholarly ink warning that that the bargain is in imminent danger of breaking
down. The main reason why this did not happen during the Cold War is that
90 US interests essentially coincided with those of Europe.⁷ It was clear, however, that
the Cold War bargain would have to be rebalanced to reflect the erosion of the
unity of purpose that the Soviets had provided. This was perhaps best illustrated
when the previously secret and focused NATO strategy morphed into a wordy,
open source “strategic concept”, and with the rise in Europe of a foreign and
95 security policy dimension. This is not the place to go into the make-up of the
Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of which the European Security and
Defence Policy (ESDP) is considered a key element. That has been amply provided
elsewhere.⁸ It suffices to say that while NATO shifted towards a comprehensive
approach to security in terms of means and ends, the EU travelled in the opposite
100 direction, taking on board “hard security” elements, resulting in a functional

⁷ See Lundestad, *Just another major crisis?*, 9–12

⁸ For a list of relevant works, see Smith, *The Making of EU Foreign Policy*, 12.

overlap between the two organisations. At the turn of the century, it was becoming increasingly clear that the post-Cold War transatlantic *modus operandi* was growing increasingly untenable.⁹

NATO's struggle for self-preservation

105 What is known as NATO's "self-preservation challenge" is in fact a mix of several predicaments. One is that the post-Cold War era has seen a steadily growing transatlantic gap in military capabilities. Much the same situation is reflected in the power sharing within NATO, where the US has grown increasingly inclined to pressure often reluctant allies into playing an active role in US-made geopolitics.
110 Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union has left NATO without a shared enemy to justify this and lacking a common purpose to underpin the future of the Alliance. Unwilling to accept the dictum that alliances do not outlast the threat that they were joined to counter, the general commitment to NATO has nevertheless remained strong on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁰

115 NATO was the arena of one of the most bruising disputes regarding the Iraq war in 2003 over the question of early military planning for the defence of Turkey in case of war.¹¹ This was made worse by the fact that NATO had invoked its Article 5 collective defence clause on 12 September 2001, a gesture the US ignored as it proceeded to topple the regime in Kabul with a select group of willing and able
120 allies. In short, for a number of reasons, there was a strong sense that the future of the Alliance was at stake and that a common cause was needed to illustrate alliance unity. This cause was found in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, which in 2009 is in its sixth year. But there is much to indicate that the fate of the North Atlantic Alliance may well be determined in a landlocked
125 country in Central Asia. Among the reasons for this is that the military capabilities gap across the Atlantic is widening faster than it was during the Cold War, threatening interoperability. Far from strengthening the Alliance, the eastern enlargement has opened up a second capability gap between the old and new European alliance members by adding no less than 13 militarily weak states to their numbers.

130 This is perhaps best illustrated by the limited progress in the NATO Response Force (NRF).¹² The NRF was intended to be an agency for the continued relevance of NATO and a catalyst for the transformation of the Alliance. It followed a series of unsuccessful NATO efforts after the Cold War, such as the Rapid Reaction Force, the European Security and Defence Initiative and the Defence Capability
135 Initiative. The NRF was launched at the 2002 Prague NATO Summit and declared

⁹ See Toje, *America, the EU and Strategic Culture*, 143–52.

¹⁰ A point stressed in Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 394–422.

¹¹ See Pond, *Friendly Fire*, 76

¹² See Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United*, 133–51; Duignan, *NATO: Past, Present, Future*, 156–89.

operational four years later at the summit in Riga. At the NATO meeting in Noordwijk in October 2007, however, defence ministers acknowledged that the NRF had not delivered on its original intentions.¹³ The NRF was also intended to strengthen the European pillar of NATO and bridge the growing gap between US and European military capabilities.¹⁴ Its pending failure and NATO's continued push to take in new security-consuming members such as Albania, leaves open questions as to whether the Alliance's future is that of a military alliance proper or whether it will transform into a "concert of democracies".¹⁵

At the same time, NATO's political dimension is suffering from a lack of cohesion. An obvious example is the planned Missile Defence to protect NATO territory. In the face of strong Russian opposition, alliance unity has fractured. This was all the more noteworthy because the shield is essentially a defensive measure that will increase allied security. The US reaction to dissent has not been, as was the case over the 1981 deployment of Pershing II missiles, to craft a consensus, but rather to rely on bilateral agreements with the states that are to host the installations. Much the same lack of unity has been apparent in the attempts to offer NATO membership to the Ukraine and Georgia. Despite clear signals from Washington to open a Membership Accession Plan (MAP), the NATO Summit in Bucharest failed to grant more than a rhetorical commitment to possible future membership. The South Ossetia war that broke out four months later only served to entrench divisions over how to handle Russia and former members of the Soviet Union.¹⁶

The political and military shortcomings of the Alliance are most obvious in the 50,000 strong International Security Assistance Force. Although most of the allies have now reconciled themselves with the notion that the operation may carry on for decades and that the bulk of the forces since 2007 have operated under a joint command, there are also clear signs that the Alliance is getting bogged down. The overall trend whereby the allies agree on the end goals, while differing on means and strategies, has resulted in the ISAF being riddled with caveats as to what the various forces can or cannot do, the level of commitment required and the degree of integration of civil and military measures. As Defence Secretary Robert Gates noted to the 2008 Munich Security Conference, while all NATO allies are doing their bit, these bits do not add up to achieving the collective goals of the alliance. A number of allies seem to be closer to pulling out unilaterally than they are to shouldering more of the operational burden. It is to be expected that as the

¹³ "Eingreifgruppe am Ende", *Der Spiegel*, 17 September 2007; J. Mark, "NATO scales down plans for rapid reaction force", *International Herald Tribune*, 25 October 2007, 3.

¹⁴ Yost, *NATO and International Organizations*, 102–11.

¹⁵ The term is associated with the "Princeton project on national security", led by G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter.

¹⁶ Witney, "The death of NATO", 2–6.

operation becomes increasingly controversial among the European publics, the disputes across the Atlantic will become more frequent and more bitter.

175 It would seem that the lack of a shared threat perception and a common purpose is eroding NATO. The “war on terror” has not provided the new single common purpose hoped for. While the US sees itself as engaged in a war, the Europeans do not. Defence Secretary Gates has questioned both the ability and the will of the European allies to achieve success in Afghanistan.¹⁷ It is, however, important to stress that the question is not whether or not NATO will be closed down, it won’t. The question is how long it will remain a relevant institution. NATO is losing the
180 loyalty and backing that is essential for it to retain its role as an alliance proper and the primary venue for transatlantic security cooperation. Talk in Washington of revamping NATO towards global membership indicates that this may well prove the case.

The diminished importance of Europe in American geopolitics

185 The degree to which the European Union is misconstrued or only partially understood in the US is often underestimated in Europe.¹⁸ Sentiments in the American foreign policy establishment have been characterised by a profound ambivalence regarding European security cooperation. American commentators alternate between lambasting the EU for lack of progress in its foreign policy dimension and worrying that the Union is in fact a ploy to challenge US primacy.
190

During the Cold War, the main fault line ran through Europe. Even if the United States repeatedly threatened what John Foster Dulles famously called an “agonizing reappraisal” of US policy *vis-à-vis* Europe, this never happened – mainly because Europe was the centrepiece in America’s global grand strategy.¹⁹
195 For the better part of the past three decades, Europe’s privileged position in American foreign policy has competed with two alternate perspectives, that of unilateralism and that of what Fukuyama calls the “multi-multilateralism” of overlapping institutions, a perspective echoed in Anne-Marie Slaughter and John Ikenberry’s “world of liberty under law” initiative.²⁰ While the neoconservative
200 movement strongly argued that the US should pursue its own interests and count on its friends to follow its lead, the multi-multilateralists have argued that the transatlantic connection should be brought into sync with other partnerships in Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Many expected America’s role in Europe to diminish after the end of the bipolar conflict. Yet, surprisingly little changed. Europe had a

¹⁷“Gates faults NATO force in southern Afghanistan”, *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 2008, 21.

¹⁸ Brimmer, *Seeing blue*, 11–14.

¹⁹ Truman *et al.*, *Foreign relations of the United States*.

²⁰ See fn 15; Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*.

205 privileged position in US policy throughout the 1990s, illustrated by the American
engagement in the Balkan conflicts and the enlargement of NATO.

Today, there are a number of indicators that the US commitment may be
weakening. The US National Security Strategies of 2002 and 2006 make it clear
that Europe is no longer the main theatre of operations and that US forces will be
210 redeployed accordingly. The past decade has seen steady reductions in US troop
levels in Europe – to little more than 50,000 in 2008.²¹ The ongoing global
redeployment has led to the closure of a number of installations, such as the
symbolically important Keflavik base in Iceland, while new structures in Central
and Eastern Europe are skeleton bases with little permanent personnel. This down-
215 scaling of engagement can perhaps be best understood as a shift from being a
“European power” to being “a power in Europe”.²²

The change in force posture is also reflected at the operational level, where the
tendency to rely on global coalitions of the “willing, able and invited” has gone
some way towards replacing the collective thinking of the Cold War. The US is in
220 practice, if not in theory, constructing a system of concentric circles where an inner
core is invited to participate in intelligence, technology and genuine consultations,
while allies in the outer reaches receive little of either.

This shift is also discernible in terms of political attention. In the past, European
leaders could rely on ample “face time” with American leaders. This is no longer
225 the case. The personal ties and cordiality that made the transatlantic relationship
“special” have become less pronounced as the Cold War generation is edging
towards retirement and being replaced by leaders with no special affinity for
Europe, as is a little noted aspect of Barack Obama’s foreign policy manifesto.²³

The absence of a common purpose manifests itself across a wide range of policy
230 areas from trade issues to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the role of the
United Nations, the Bali roadmap on climate change, how to handle Russia, the
independence of Kosovo and differences over future EU and NATO enlargements.
The list goes on. American leaders retain a strong sense of entitlement to political
support from allies in Europe due to a perception of shared interest and confidence
235 in its ability to “see further into the future” as Madeleine Albright once put it.²⁴
At the same time, European confidence in American leadership plummeted under
President George Bush Jr.²⁵

²¹ SIPRI, *SIPRI yearbook 2008*, 44.

²² See Holbrooke, “America, a European Power”, 38–51; Peterson, “America as a European Power: the end of Empire by Integration”, 613–29.

²³ Obama, “Campaign 2008”, 24–46.

²⁴ Quote, Albright Interview on “The Today Show”, NBC-TV, 19 February 1998.

²⁵ The German Marshall Fund’s 2007 survey of transatlantic trends shows that only 36 per cent of Europeans view American leadership in the world as “desirable”. This figure is more or less unchanged since 2004.

The change in the US' *Europapolitik* is changing the fundamentals of the transatlantic bargain. Not due to any rise in anti-Europeanism in the US, but rather because Europe is no longer the centrepiece of the US grand strategy and will therefore be deprived of the privileges that this position gave it. That is not to say that Robert Kagan's image of Europe as an essentially spent force is shared by many in Washington today. This means that whether or not the Europeans decide to strengthen their defence cooperation, the US is set to play a less pronounced role in European security than it has done over the past seventy years. This also means that President Obama can be expected to continue the pragmatic line of George W. Bush where the focus is more on displayed willingness to contribute to joint efforts than on institutional frameworks.

The semi-failure of European foreign policy integration

The main trends during the 2003–08 period can be divided into two broad categories that both fall under the heading “The semi-failure of European foreign policy integration”. The term “semi” is used here because the EU has succeeded admirably in fusing 27 states into a union that effectively limits the exercise of hard power internally. However, the external policies of the EU have failed to live up to the expectations raised. European political integration has come to a point where it is irreversible, or at least cannot pull back very far. Yet there are also signs that the EU has moved so far towards unity that it cannot go any further. There can be little question that increased interdependence and political integration have facilitated a more closely knit intra-European bargain. But the EU member states have retained the autonomy of their reactions and of their foreign policy outlooks.²⁶

Scholars and practitioners continue to struggle to come to terms with the multi-purpose, multi-dimensional, semi-supranational, semi-intergovernmental character of the European Union. The EU is clearly a partial and incomplete, yet potentially formidable strategic actor. European integration has been cyclical. Sprints of feverish activity have been followed by prolonged periods of inertia, followed by renewed optimism, followed again by disillusionment. In 2009, the EU finds itself deep in another depression.²⁷ The rejection of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty in the Irish referendum of June 2008 is, if anything, an indicator of a broad lack of enthusiasm for handing ever more competences over to Brussels. The flurry of integration of the 1990s achieved a number of results that had been thought impossible, monetary union chief amongst them. But many issues were left unresolved, especially in matters of political integration, which left what Chris Hill

²⁶ Keohane, “Ironies of sovereignty”, 743–65; see also Posen, “ESDP and the Structure of World Power”, 5–17

²⁷ G. Parker, “Poll finds 44% think life worse in EU”, *Financial Times*, 18 March 2007.

called a “capability-expectations gap” between what the EU has been talked up to do and what it is practicably able to deliver.²⁸

275 By 2008, the capability-expectations gap has narrowed. The EU has made pointed efforts to structure the economic, diplomatic and military assets of the member states in such a way that they can be mobilised in an EU context.²⁹ Under the Headline Goal 2010, the EU member states are focusing on closing the enabling shortfalls while employing the capabilities available in the European
280 inventories as effectively as possible.³⁰ The EU’s capabilities are governed by a comprehensive, if somewhat Byzantine and unevenly integrated, institutional structure.³¹ Although several of the new agencies are under-funded and under-staffed, the EU possesses institutional frameworks through which policies can be implemented. The operational nature of the institutional structures is illustrated by
285 the EU’s engagement in a number of small-scale pre- and post-conflict missions spanning from Indonesia to Congo, Bosnia, Chad and Kosovo.

Yet, it is far from obvious that EU members share sufficient foreign policy interests, traditions, goals and outlooks to automatically generate substantive common policies. In the absence of defined policy objectives, European
290 leaders have lapsed into constructive ambiguity, process-orientation and declaration-chasing as modes of foreign policymaking.³² The chief reason for the inability to concur is that the CFSP is governed by the twin precepts of intergovernmentalism and consensus. The 2003 Iraq crisis was a blow to CFSP. Since 2003, the list of attempts at common policies that have been blocked, neutered or derailed has
295 grown. The foreign policy provisions contained in the Lisbon Treaty indicates that the current state of affairs is not a transient phase.³³

The consensus mechanism is the tap that regulates the output in terms of the quality and quantity of CFSP activity. The consequences of embarking on bold ventures such as the CFSP/ESDP without a decision-making mechanism that
300 balances legitimacy and efficiency are plain to see. In a range of issues from the independence of Kosovo, the handling of Georgia, the non-proliferation efforts in Iran, to the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and Chad, the EU foreign policy dimension persistently fails to deliver. The result of underfunding, unevenly integrated institutional arrangements, weak capabilities and a vague mandate is that EU
305 foreign policy is light on substance.

Prosperity and power, although connected, cannot be equated. The EU is clearly not a great power today, but is it on the way to becoming one? There are few signs

²⁸ Hill, “Closing the Capability-Expectations Gap”, 18–38.

²⁹ For assessments of these efforts, see Cornish and Edwards, “The Strategic Culture of the European Union”, 814–15.

³⁰ Lindström, “The Headline Goal”.

³¹ Smith, *Europe’s Foreign and Security Policy*, 22–42.

³² Heisbourg, “Europe’s Strategic Ambitions: Limits of Ambiguity”, 5–15.

³³ Whitman, “Foreign, Security and Defence Policy and Lisbon Treaty”, 1–4.

that this is the case. The common foreign policy is an academic-bureaucratic creature, not a politico-military one. Some European actors may strive to become great powers; others may wish to avoid doing so. The choice, however, is a constraining one. Because of the extent of the interests, larger units existing in a larger arena tend to take on system-wide tasks. With its looming presence in the system, the EU is finding that it has global interests to mind. It has tried to mind them by relying on traditional modes of integration, but has come up short. Similarly the internationalist credo that has served the EU well in internal integration seems increasingly out of date in an international system where other global actors are aggressively pursuing their national interests.

The absence of an EU-3 grand bargain

In the absence of an effective collective decision-making mechanism, an obvious supranational alternative is a system in which the stronger states form a *directoire* to provide strategic guidance to the EU.³⁴ Indeed, the past decade has seen the emergence of a semi-permanent power bloc, notably the “EU-3”, comprising Germany, France and Britain, which has become increasingly central to EU foreign policy-making.³⁵ Former EU commissioner for external relations Chris Patten put it bluntly: “I mean no disrespect to other states but there is no European policy on a big issue unless France, Germany and Britain are on our side.”³⁶ This trilateral understanding is at the heart of the intra-European bargain. Each of the EU-3 has, depending on circumstances, played important roles both as vanguards, but also as obstacles – sometimes as Euro-idealists, sometimes as national interest-driven realists. In real terms, a single member state or even a coalition of smaller member states will find it very difficult to hold out if the EU-3 are in agreement.³⁷

Traditionally, France and Britain have been seen as the “indispensable nations” in terms of European political integration.³⁸ A number of events epitomised by the 1956 Suez Crisis drove a wedge between the two that endured until the end of the Cold War. While Britain sought to influence the US by keeping in its inner circle of allies, France attempted to carve out a more independent position. Experience in conflict management in Europe alongside the Americans in the 1990s made leading voices in London share Paris’s conclusion that Washington cooperates with no state on an equal footing. France and Britain found common ground in the belief that

³⁴ Kissinger, *A World Restored*.

³⁵ On the history of the *directoire* in EU foreign policymaking, see Nuttall, “Coherence and Consistency”, 26–59.

³⁶ Patten, *Not Quite the Diplomat*, 159.

³⁷ As was indeed illustrated by the failed Polish attempt to hold out against an electoral structure in the Council favouring Germany in the EU constitutional treaty. See P. Anderson, “Depicting Europe”, *London Review of Books*, 20 September 2007, and Brummer, *The big EU-3 and ESDP*.

³⁸ An overview is provided in Howorth, “Britain, France and the European Defence Initiative”, 33–55.

340 renegotiating the intra-European bargain would be the best way to alter the
dynamics of the Euro-American bargain. Security and defence policies were finally
being brought into the intra-European bargain in harness with the continued
Euro-American accord. The 1998 Saint Malo Declaration charted a middle path
between the desire of the “Atlanticists” for US engagement in Europe and the
345 “Europeanists” desire for greater autonomy.³⁹

A key difference persists in the question of unipolarity and multipolarity, globally
and within the confines of the transatlantic bargain.⁴⁰ French Foreign Minister
Dominique De Villepin welcomed a multipolar order: “To be truly stable, this
new world must be based on a number of regional poles, structured to face current
350 threats. These poles should not compete against one another, but complement each
other. . . . The determination of European countries to develop a common foreign
and security policy must reflect that.” In contrast, Tony Blair was uncompromising
in his defence of unipolarity: “Some want a so-called multi-polar world where you
have different centres of power. . . . others believe, and this is my notion, that we need
355 a one polar world which encompasses a strategic relationship between Europe and
America.”⁴¹ Although the likely elements were in place, the Saint Malo declaration
was not an irreversible Anglo-French “grand bargain” over foreign policy of the sort
that Germany and France reached over the monetary union. Although obvious
elements of the deal were in place (e.g. French acceptance of the need to reform
360 the controversial Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in return for Britain giving up
its budget “rebate” and diverting the funds to power capabilities), there remains a
fundamental difference in strategic outlooks that persists to this date.

The role of Germany has sometimes been obscured by the behaviour of Britain
and France. In power terms, Germany is the only European power that, relying on
365 its own population and economic resources, can hope to emerge as a separate pole
in a future multipolar world order.⁴² Germany is ready to receive the mantle of a
great power if only it wishes to reach for it. Relying on non-confrontational
measures and skilful diplomacy, Germany has accomplished a peaceful rise no
less spectacular than that of China or India. Over the past five years, Germany
370 has established a strategic relationship with Russia that neither France nor Britain
come close to matching, while maintaining tight relations with the United States.
Germany is also cooperating more closely with China, probably, than any other EU
member. At the same time, Germany has supported the CFSP/ESDP and, at least
on a rhetorical level, been more willing than its two European partners to accept
375 elements of supranational governance in EU foreign policy.⁴³ For historical reasons,

³⁹ Joint Declaration on European Defence, British French Summit, St Malo, 3–4 December 1998.

⁴⁰ Hyde-Price, *European Security in the Twenty-First Century*, 163–73.

⁴¹ Quoted in Menon, “From Crisis to Catharsis”, 632–48.

⁴² Waltz, “The emerging structure of international politics”, 44.

⁴³ As illustrated in the debates leading up to the EU Constitutional Treaty in 2002/03.

Germany is less concerned than France and Britain with the need for a strong military component in the CFSP – it is happy to regard the CFSP as a process where the lack of output is secondary to the pacifying qualities of the process itself.⁴⁴

380 Since the Iraq crisis in 2003, new governments have taken office in London, Paris and Berlin. Some hoped that the removal of three leaders who had grown to be on strained terms personally would allow for new impetus in the intra-European bargain. So far this has not been the case. French President Nicolas Sarkozy alone has shown interest in the topic.⁴⁵ The Franco-German-British Triple Entente has
385 found it difficult to move from a general agreement that the EU should play a role in world affairs to the specifics of defining policy goals, the means by which they are to be attained and the degree of commitment this would require from the member states. It seems clear that while France questions the ends favoured by Britain, Germany is still for historical reasons unwilling to embrace the system-
390 altering potential of a great power and is therefore opposed to the hard-power means recommended in London and Paris. Britain and France, while eager to assert leadership in Europe, remains unwilling to channel their foreign and security policies through the EU.

What future for a unipolar West in a multipolar era?

395 The twentieth century started out distinctly multipolar. But after five decades, two world wars, and many smaller conflicts, a bipolar system emerged. This system proved more stable than many had expected.⁴⁶ Then, with the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, bipolarity gave way to unipolarity – an international system dominated by one power – the United States. But today
400 tectonic plates are shifting.

For nearly two decades, we have referred to our times as a postscript, the “*post-Cold War era*”. In the aftermath of the collapse of communism, there was a profound sense that the world had changed and many assumed that we were now on the way to a more moral, more rational world order, based on the
405 spread of the rule of law, liberal democracy and human rights.⁴⁷ In the constructivist worldview, the nation state was assumed to be on the decline superseded by post-modern supra- and sub-national entities.

Unipolarity as a global political order was an inherently transitional phase, one that by 2008 seems to be irrevocably over. It is difficult to pin down the best

⁴⁴ Brummer, *The big EU-3 and ESDP*, 35.

⁴⁵ J. Thornhill, “Sarkozy in drive to give EU global role”, *Financial Times*, 27 August 2007, 24.

⁴⁶ Rosencrance, “Multipolarity, and the future”, 315–17.

⁴⁷ Matlary, *Dynamics of EU Security Policy in the New National Interest*, 12.

410 quantitative yardstick for this change,⁴⁸ but regardless of statistics, it seems certain
that a shift has taken place. Power, like love, exists primarily in the eyes of the
beholder. While the US may well be able to defeat any conceivable coalition
of challengers, it is no longer perceived as being able to do so. The Iraq war has
dispelled that notion.

415 The international system is in transition. The emerging multipolar order will be
based on nation states, not supranational institutions. The United States, China,
India, Japan, Russia, and Europe make up just over half the world's people and
account for 75 percent of global GDP and 80 percent of global defence spending.⁴⁹
Whether Europe will be counted as a separate pole remains uncertain. Analysts in
420 the US National Intelligence Council predict that the EU's global influence will
wane.⁵⁰ This author concurs with that prediction: the EU has missed its window of
opportunity. It is hard to see how future integrative efforts can succeed under the
current circumstances when they failed to do so during the fair years of the 1990s.
In the absence of an unexpected event such as a clear and present external threat
425 arising, Germany will likely emerge as the ranking European power by virtue of its
population and economy. Nevertheless, failing to perform external tasks does not
mean that the EU will cease to carry out its vital role as a regional security complex.
Robert Kagan and Robert Cooper, who disagree on many things, agree that the EU
is not in danger of falling apart.⁵¹

430 What is interesting is that the shift towards multipolarity appears to be happen-
ing much faster than anyone, save a few realists, predicted. Consider some of the
main events of the past year. 2008 saw the acknowledgement on behalf of the UN
to reform itself and for the EU to adopt the constitutional treaty that had come to
symbolise a federal future. The Beijing Olympics symbolised a momentous transfer
435 of capital and production capacity away from the transatlantic region. The South
Ossetia war in August simultaneously illustrated that war between states is possible,
and that it can be fought without any "revolution in military affairs". The war also
showed that Russia is willing to confront the United States and that the European
states will fail to act assertively when confronted with aggressive behaviour. The
440 outfall of the financial crisis is not yet known, but it seems certain that it will
introduce an element of scarcity into the international system that can be expected
to sharpen competition over relative gains.

Will the expected change to multipolarity be a peaceful one? Richard Haass
believes we are entering into a phase of "nonpolarity". Although the gap between

⁴⁸ Fareed Zakaria offers a lengthy discussion of the relative power balance of the United States versus the rest, ranging from military might to economic weight and from industrial capacity to education and engineering before finally settling on symbols such as the highest building as the best indicator (Zakaria, *The post-American world*).

⁴⁹ SIPRI, *SIPRI yearbook 2008*.

⁵⁰ National Intelligence Council, "Global trends".

⁵¹ Kagan, "Power and Weakness", 3-28; Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations*.

445 the United States and the rest of the world is shrinking, it is still so wide that
any open challenge by a single emerging power or coalition of powers “is unlikely
to arise anytime soon”.⁵² He is joined in this prediction by scholars such as Charles
Kupchan and Fared Zakaria who both agree that, if properly managed, American
primacy could last for another generation.⁵³ More theoretically inclined scholars
450 such as John Mearsheimer are less sanguine, in part because the revisionist powers
are aggressors that sees themselves as victims, in part because the system-determin-
ing powers will be tempted to fail to police the rules of the system.⁵⁴ The former
will see the system as having been balanced against them, the latter will be
disappointed in its inability to perpetuate their elevated position.⁵⁵ The presence
455 of a large number of small and medium-sized states that are effectively unable
to defend themselves adds incentives to a violent transition.⁵⁶ Which of the
two it will be will be determined almost entirely by the decisions taken
in Washington.

In 1993, Kenneth Waltz predicted that American primacy would last for
460 some years before giving way to a multipolar world order governed by balance
of power politics that over time would likely erode the “transatlantic West”.⁵⁷
Since the option of balancing is ruled out, the transatlantic West will have
to overcome ever more urgent coordination problems. Four issues stand out.
One, alliances provide collective goods, hence they face the great dilemmas of
465 collective action. In plain terms, allies will try to shift the burdens of alliance
onto the shoulders of their reluctant allies. Such buck-passing is a standard feature
of alliance politics.⁵⁸ Two, states faced with rivalry between several poles might
conclude that a drawn-out conflict between the rivals could weaken all, even if one
side eventually prevailed: hence they may stay on the sidelines, hoping thereby to
470 improve their relative power position versus each of the contestants.⁵⁹ Three, some
actors may prefer to opt out of the balancing process altogether because they believe
that they are unlikely targets by a potential aggressor. Four, diplomacy is an volatile
game, and to build a defensive coalition takes time. A balancing pole could con-
clude that it can offset this process by offering preferential treatment. If these
475 questions are acute, states can lose faith in balancing and instead bandwagon
with the challengers, since solitary resistance is pointless and balancing brings

⁵² Haass, “The Age of Nonpolarity”, 44.

⁵³ Zakaria, *The post-American world*, 208; Kupchan, *The end of the American era*, 12.

⁵⁴ Mearsheimer, “Back to the future”, 54–6.

⁵⁵ Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, 60–2; Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, 14; Aron, *Peace and war*; 12–17; Carr and Cox, *The twenty years' crisis*, 27–31.

⁵⁶ Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry”, 5–7; Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited”, 163–7; Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited”, 36–41.

⁵⁷ Waltz, “The emerging structure of international politics”, 44–79.

⁵⁸ Snyder, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics”, 461–95; see also Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 125–6 and Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 1–17.

⁵⁹ Mearsheimer, “Back to the future”, 54–6.

too few gains. Thus factors that weaken the balancing process can generate dynamics that weakens the process even further.⁶⁰ All of these factors goes against an integrated West in a future multipolar system.

480 This article started out with a question: will the West remain united in a multi-
polar world? The answer is: probably not in the long run. The reason is both
structural and ideological. In issue area after issue area it is becoming clear that
the US and Europe do not share the same geopolitical interests. This may well be
temporarily alleviated by the elixir of a new and dynamic US president, but the
485 fissures are sure to re-emerge. He will likely find it difficult to build a foundation
for a new common purpose for the Euro-American link. An increasingly pressured
United States will be looking for ways to decrease its global footprint, and the weak
and turbulent allies in Europe will be a likely place to start. Kenneth Waltz caused
much consternation when he, in the aftermath of the Cold War, presented his ideas
490 that the US would disengage from Europe, that NATO would decline and that the
world would return to a multipolar international system. History may yet prove
him right.

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⁶⁰ These questions are explored in Jervis and Snyder, *Dominoes and bandwagons*, 20–51.

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