

Restoring the Atlantic World

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President Obama's new defense strategy hit Europe with full force. The new emphasis on Asia, withdrawal of two combat brigades from Europe and reduction of war fighting capability was seen by many as the final departure from direct engagement in Europe.

The American decision reflected a disturbing paradox which has defined trans-Atlantic security relationships since the late 1990's. The more Europe has sought to define a separate security identity, the less United States has considered a trans-Atlantic security community to be useful in pursuit of its interests.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy established in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, was based on the deeply held belief that unity and common action among EU members could generate influence which offset the power which Europe lost in the wars of the 20th century. Time and again, this dream has been proven to be illusionary at best. But the fallacy continues to be applied, including in the fields of security and defence..

Europeans have defined their goals in terms of their success in achieving internal consensus rather than on their ability to produce practical results. As a result, Europe has essentially lost its ability to participate on the global political-military stage. And few of its citizens seem to care. When asked in 2010 about this fact, German and French elites told an American pollster, it didn't matter, because the Americans would take care of everything anyway.

This disturbing situation is often blamed on the lack of resources or on Europe's inability to speak with a single voice. However, in a multipolar world, these traditional excuses are now longer credible. Rather than a single voice, the West needs a coherent sense of common purpose which each ally can implement according to its talents and abilities. Europe may not match American resources, but it can provide a sense of solidarity and burden sharing which would be a firm foundation for a new sort of Atlantic partnership.

The policy of détente in the 1970's is the best example of a successful European initiative. Exerting influence became tougher after 1990 Europe when lost its central strategic position on the border between East and West. Without this advantage, Europe's only hope of maintaining its global reach was as an participant in American strategy formulation. . It is at this task that Europeans have failed miserably.

The Maastricht Treaty called for a common defence identity, but it did not prescribe how to achieve it. Europe's wrong turn came after the disaster of the Balkan wars. Rather than defining their failures as the lack of political will, they decided that "more Europe" within institutions with no American participation would redress their weaknesses. The same thinking underlies Europe's apparent indecision in dealing with the Euro crisis.

Building a separate European identity, meant putting energy usually reserved for consultations with America and NATO into European strategies and institutions. Soon NATO was no longer a place for frank trans-Atlantic discussions. EU institutions first refused even to work with NATO, or the OSCE, which was also seen as competition. Very soon, the bonds of commonality were torn. Americans lost the habit of defining their security interests jointly with Europeans.

Without a direct link to American strategic power, Europe has no chance either of developing an independent security identity or of being seen as a credible player on the global

military/security stage. It's only real options are either sit at home and wait for Americans to call, or actively rejoin the Atlantic security community.

First on the agenda should be a new strategy for Atlantic relations. But this time the initiative should come from the European side. Europe has essentially made itself uninteresting for America. The US must be offered more than a continuation of bureaucratic processes, which many Americans consider to be empty of content.

Let's get down to basics: The Atlantic Alliance provides a world class economic power such as Germany with global protection from the strongest military power in history, at an affordable price. With Europe's security interests becoming increasingly fragmented, only a strengthened transatlantic Community can offer EU members a platform from which to pursue their global interests in harmony with their own democratic values.

Ultimately, this means offering more Europe by demanding less Europe. A vision of a two pillar Atlantic world will merge into new forms of global integration based on high speed networks. Instead of repeating the same endless mantra about a single European voice, Europe could build on the strength of its diversity by working with the United States to conceive a new sort of Atlanticism. The goal of this new type of alliance would be to apply Western values pragmatically as an operating system for integrating new nations and new problems into a coherent global framework.