

America and Europe towards 2020

AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

Does the 'West' still exist ?

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America without Europe?

If the West Collapses: Implications for American Foreign Policy

When the Cold War ended, a group of prominent social scientists – the international relations realists – provided a grim assessment of the future amidst the optimistic proclamations of a new world order. Without the threat of the Soviet Union to unite them, the realists argued, America and Europe would part ways. “NATO’s days are not numbered, but its years are,” wrote Kenneth Waltz.¹ A return to multipolar power balancing in Europe was inevitable, proclaimed John Mearsheimer.² After all, the history of international relations suggested that the great powers would always clash in a world that lacked a central authority to enforce order. It was true for Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece, the great European powers in the centuries before World War II, and America and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Why should the 21st century be any different? America and China would emerge as rivals; Germany and Russia would bid for hegemony in Europe; and the Transatlantic community itself would collapse.

Others who foresaw new trends in world affairs argued that the common values and the creation of a security community among the core of advanced, industrialized democracies (for whom war is no longer a policy option in relations with one another) had transformed part of international politics in ways that the realists could not fathom.³ To date that analysis has prevailed. But what if three decades after their earlier predictions, the realists were finally proven right about conflict and discord in the West? What if a new global balance of power, the collapse of the major post-World War II international institutions created under American leadership, and/or a growing divergence in values led to the collapse of the West as a coherent entity? America without Europe as its major partner would confront an array of new global challenges without the advantage of a strong democratic community at the core of its foreign policy, an unenviable situation to say the least.

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Europe's Place in American Foreign Policy at the Dawn of the 21st Century

Although America and Europe remain tied together today through strong political, economic and military linkages, Europe is no longer nearly as central to the Washington foreign policy community as it was from the founding of the Republic through the 1990s. From the American effort to gain independence, through the effort to block European expansion in this hemisphere, to the war with Spain and the emergence of America as a world power, Wilson's effort to create a Kantian community, the work of Roosevelt to keep Europe from falling under fascist rule, the efforts of his successors to save half the continent from communist domination, and finally the American role as humanitarian intervener and nation-builder in the post Cold War Balkans, Europe was consistently the most important region in the formulation of American foreign policy. The United States tried to keep European nations out of the business of this hemisphere, sought to prevent hegemonic domination of the European continent, and then pursued a project of building a Europe whole and free.

The exigencies for focusing on Europe no longer exist. Threats to America do not emanate from European nation-states as they did for the first two hundred years of the country's existence. The American post-World War II project of eliminating division on the continent is largely complete thanks to NATO enlargement into Central and Eastern Europe (followed by the EU's own expansion into the same region), the Dayton accords and the Kosovo war, and the effort to ensure that Russia did not reemerge as a power hostile to Western interests in the years following the Cold War.

Washington's general lack of interest in European affairs today is understandable; after all, policymakers address problems, and Europe is not the problem for the United States that it was earlier, and certainly not compared to other parts of the world. But Europe could become a problem for the United States in the future, both because it might succeed and because it might fail. And it could even be a problem if it simply muddles through.

Europe's Future: What Would Success Mean?

Various authors have defined future success in different ways, whether Charles Kupchan's image of Europe as the major threat to American power in the coming decades, T.R. Reid's examination of Europe's dominance through companies and currency, or Mark Leonard's argument that Europe will be the model for other parts of the world.⁴ It is possible that Europe could emerge as a military competitor by 2020, but unlikely given current trends, given its lack of willingness to spend on defense and the demographic challenges. What is more easily imaginable given current trends would be a Europe whose currency is the world's leading reserve currency, ending American domination of the international economy, and a Europe that was creating alternative approaches for the international community to solve problems in the vacuum created by a lack of American leadership. European success might also lead to Europe's role as an economic and security model for other regions seeking to move beyond traditional patterns of conflict in international affairs or for those countries that find the European lifestyle more appealing than that of the harder working Americans.

Europe's Future: What Would Failure Mean?

The current discord within Europe over the impact of the recent enlargements will certainly lead to a halt to any future enlargements for the foreseeable future and could even lead to the collapse of the European project itself. A collapse by definition would mean that Europe would no longer be a strong partner of the United States, which is why the United States has had a stake in Europe's development as a single entity since the Second World War.

Even the minimal failure, i.e., the failure to include Europe's periphery – Turkey, the former Soviet West (particularly Ukraine), the countries of the Western Balkans and the Caucasus – in the European Union would have significant consequences. What we learned in the 1990s was that the pull of membership in the European Union and NATO enabled elites to carry out painful political and economic reform that allowed them eventually to integrate into the West. And the prospect of future membership has been critical, for example, in Turkey, whose military has tolerated an Islamic party because of its pursuit of a pro-Europe policy, and whose government has allowed greater freedom of speech, abolished the death penalty, cut government subsidies, reached out to

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Turkey's Kurdish minority, and developed good relations with neighboring Greece.

Europe's failure to continue enlargement in the coming years could leave us by 2020 with a Turkey that might have open markets, but could well have a more politically active military, rolls back freedom for its Kurdish population, turns East in its orientation, and is generally unstable. Meanwhile, the Balkans could easily descend back into the chaos of the 1990s, and the failure of democratic consolidation in Ukraine and Georgia would mean that an authoritarian belt stretched across Eurasia, a region that contains significant nuclear material and scientists with the know-how to proliferate it, organized crime, traffickers of persons, drug runners, groups with links to al Qaeda, and an exploding HIV/AIDS epidemic.⁵

Europe's Future: Muddling Through?

It is quite possible – even probable – that Europe will neither succeed in developing itself as a strong political entity nor will it collapse. Rather it will find a way to muddle through much as is, ginning up ad hoc solutions to particular problems rather than fostering the kind of coherence for the enlarged Union that the constitution was supposed to provide.

Even the “muddle through” scenario could have negative implications for American foreign policy. Europe may have to expend enormous energy on maintaining the efficacy of the union, and there would only be resentment of an America that tried to distract it from the tasks on the continent by urging Europe to think more globally. Anti-Americanism is unlikely to dissipate simply because George W. Bush is no longer president. There would have to be a concerted effort by the United States to show some deference to European preferences on international issues, particularly on questions regarding the legitimate use of force and on the environment, in order to reverse the trends in European public opinion. But is the United States likely to defer to Europe in the coming years on international questions or to India and China?⁶ As the United States grows more Asia focused, Europe will only grow more resentful. If they fail to demonstrate the diplomatic skill to stay together on international issues, America and Europe may find themselves the target of skillful Chinese diplomacy playing the

two sides of the Atlantic against one another as they seek greater advantage with respect to the world's most dynamic economy.

So far, the discussion simply extrapolates from the current disinterest in Europe by America to lay out some problems that might crop up in the future. But what if we go from neglect to a real separation in the American-European relationship? How might this separation come about, and what would it mean for America's ability to conduct a successful foreign policy?

Possible Causes for Divorce

A major problem with forecasting is that we tend to use some combination of historical knowledge, existing theoretical constructs, and extrapolation from current trends in order to predict the future, and we get caught unaware by unanticipated events that seem inevitable after the fact.⁷ Although we might have predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union given the profound internal crisis that country faced in the 1980s, scholars and policymakers alike were caught by surprise at the whirlwind of events that took place soon after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. We should recognize that some new surprise could be the cause of massive change to our current global order – for example a global health or environmental crisis that reshapes international politics and that after the fact we all agree we should have foreseen. Or perhaps globalization will lead to a reshaping of the basic manner in which we organize ourselves politically and economically just as industrialization gave rise to the modern nation-state.

Even without anticipating a major shock to the international system, however, one can easily enough extrapolate from present trends to predict that the West might divide. The rise of India and China, a reassertion of Russia, and the emergence of a strong Europe could spell the end of the era of American domination, and the great powers might find themselves in a new era of balance-of-power politics. Or perhaps the crisis in multilateralism brought about by the American reaction to September 11 intensifies with a broader failure of institutions like NATO, the World Trade Organization, and the United Nations. Or the divergence in identities and interests across the Atlantic finally leads to

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a collapse of common values. Or we live in a world in which all three scenarios have come to pass.

Structural Change: The rise of new great powers and a new global order

Based on present trends, by 2020, China will have emerged as the second leading economic power in the world behind the United States. It's not hard to imagine that India has developed into a major economic actor, Russia has used its energy resources to rebuild a strong state and reassert its dominance over the Eurasian region, and Europe has succeeded in consolidating economic growth and political unity across the continent. As the National Intelligence Council has suggested, "With these and other new global actors, how we mentally map the world in 2020 will change radically. The 'arriviste' powers – China, India, and perhaps others such as Brazil and Indonesia – have the potential to render obsolete the old categories of East and West, North and South, aligned and nonaligned, developed and developing. Traditional geographic groupings will increasingly lose salience in international relations. A state-bound world and a world of mega-cities, linked by flows of telecommunications, trade and finance, will co-exist. Competition for allegiances will be more open, less fixed than in the past."⁸

Of these trends, it is China's rise that may have the most profound implications for world politics in general and American foreign policy in particular. Naazneen Barma and Ely Ratner have argued that "the rise of China presents the West, for the first time since the fall of the Berlin Wall, with a formidable ideological challenge to [the democratic liberal] paradigm." They argue that this new model combines "illiberal capitalism" (free markets but authoritarian politics) and "illiberal sovereignty" (a rejection of the right of the international community to intervene in internal affairs) that is enabling China to forge ties with like-minded countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East.⁹

China's rise as an ideological challenger might lead America and Europe to draw closer together as they did in the face of the Soviet challenge. But the post-World War II international order was sustained by the American commitment to multilateralism that gave rise to new political, economic, and military institutions that consolidated the West as more than just an idea. What happens if multilateralism has collapsed?

The End of Multilateralism: September 11 as a watershed event?

It has become fashionable to argue that September 11 changed America but not the rest of the world.¹⁰ But if September 11 and the war in Iraq changed America's interest in pursuing multilateral solutions to global problems, then the change in America will portend a broader change in global affairs. Or it may simply be that the institutions that America and its partners have relied on to manage international challenges are no longer able to address the problems of the 21st century. It is easy enough to imagine that the Doha round collapses completely, the NATO mission in Afghanistan fails, and the UN is unable to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. What would then happen to those institutions?

There may be enough momentum in the World Trade Organization and the United Nations that those institutions would survive their current problems. But it is hard to imagine that NATO can survive if it fails in Afghanistan. NATO as an organization held together in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War because it had unfinished business to deal with in Europe. It needed to extend its security umbrella across the continent in order to ensure democratic consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe, and it was faced with conflict in the Balkans that threatened its broader agenda. Once NATO had eliminated the threats that faced Europe from within, it was only logical that it turn its attention to the threats that emanated from outside of Europe, as America was arguing the alliance should do by the late 1990s. Although European countries balked at this notion initially, September 11 brought home the need to combat threats posed from abroad.

The NATO mission in Afghanistan is the boldest ever undertaken by the alliance. To date more than thirty thousand troops serve under NATO command in an effort to stabilize Afghanistan and defeat a resurgent Taliban. But the mission may well fail. Most European countries, notably France, Germany, Italy and Spain, are unwilling to send their troops on dangerous missions, leaving that work largely to the Americans, Canadians, British and Dutch (as well as the Australians). If NATO fails in its Afghanistan mission, those countries that were willing to engage Taliban forces will not soon forgive those that were not. If NATO cannot pacify Afghanistan, then it is hard to imagine that the United States will see any value in working formally through NATO to deal with the growing challenges from the Islamic world.

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Failure in Afghanistan might well occur in conjunction with a continuing divergence in values across the Atlantic, a divergence brought about in part due to a conscious European policy to utilize anti-American sentiment as a means of salvaging the European project.

The End of Common Values? Anti-Americanism and the Future of Europe

It is possible that the summer of 2004 will be viewed as the moment when the project to build a single Europe began to come unglued. Within months of the accession to membership in the European Union of ten countries, eight of whom came from the former communist East, voters in France and the Netherlands rejected the proposed European constitution. Many analysts pointed to the decision to expand the Union into the East and the proposed start of formal accession talks with Turkey as the catalyst for the constitutional rejection.

At the same time, a growing number of commentators have noted the divergence in values between Americans and Europeans on a whole range of issues: the organization of the economy and the welfare state, the environment, the role of religion in society, and the death penalty to name a few.¹¹

Is it far-fetched to imagine European elites turning to anti-Americanism in desperation as a means to regenerate the European project and foster greater unity?¹² These elites could argue that America was ill-suited to dominate world affairs because its values were so out of step with the rest of the world, and that Europe could not afford to be divided. A few winters without snow in the Alps or a few summers of searing drought might help bring the point home. And as the opposite sides of the Atlantic looked more and more different, the Western community might no longer be sustainable, and, just as Charles Kupchan predicted, Washington and Brussels by 2020 might go the way of Rome and Constantinople in an earlier era.¹³

What Divorce Would Mean for American Foreign Policy

Perhaps the most important casualty of a divorce would be the inability of the United States to foster a community of democracies to act coherently in world affairs. Such a community is only possible with a strong Transatlantic core. The implications for global democratic developments are even more troubling if the United States has lost its

primacy in international affairs. Michael Doyle has argued that the failure to support democratizing states in the 1920s and 1930s is typical of liberal states in changing international circumstances and that farsighted assistance to preserve an international liberal order has only occurred “when one liberal state stood preeminent among the rest, prepared and able to take measures, as did Britain before World War I and the United States following World War II, to sustain economically and politically the foundations of liberal society beyond its borders.”¹⁴

That Western order, under United States leadership, prevailed in the Cold War because the peoples of the communist bloc came to understand that they were far worse off than their Western counterparts. The values victory was consolidated in the 1990s by the West in Central and Eastern Europe, but not elsewhere. We are already seeing reversals of democratic trends in Latin America and Eurasia. After failure in Iraq and an inability of the United States to articulate a freedom agenda forcefully in its aftermath, democratic reversals might well become more commonplace around the world.

A world in which the United States no longer leads and Europe has gone its separate ways would resemble the world of the 1930s when the West divided and failed to respond to fascism. Richard Haass has written that the American era in the Middle East is already over, with profound implications for a region in which Iran will emerge as a leading actor while Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt may all become engulfed in crisis, not to mention Iraq.¹⁵ A broader end to the American era combined with the collapse of the Transatlantic community would be even more disquieting. China’s ability to pose an ideological challenge to democratic capitalism would become more significant, and Islamic fundamentalism would grow stronger.

If America and Europe go their separate ways, it is hard to see how core international institutions, including the World Trade Organization, the United Nations, and the G-8 (not to mention NATO), could function. So what would take their place? Without Europe and America working together, and certainly if America no longer dominates world politics, we are unlikely to see the development of successful new institutions. Instead, it is more likely that bilateralism will flourish in the trading realm, as the wealthy countries compete with one another to curry favor with leading developing nations, while shifting coalitions mark the political and military realm.¹⁶

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It makes a great deal of difference if this hypothetical world features a strong, united Europe or a weak and divided continent. The former could become a power countering American influence in the ways that Kupchan, Reid and Leonard have suggested. But Europe is likely to face grave difficulties in the future – economic stagnation, an aging population, instability to its immediate East, and continued energy dependence on an undependable Russia.

If Europe is weak and divided, the American approach to world affairs could rest on ad hoc coalitions made up in part of Commonwealth countries (notably the UK, Canada, Australia, and possibly India) plus perhaps some of the former communist nations (e.g. Poland and the Baltic nations). Meanwhile, France, Spain, Germany and Italy might try to salvage a Europe that moves closer to Russia and China.

Could America Return to Isolationism?

When the Cold War ended, American foreign policy elites worried greatly that the country would retreat into isolationism now that it had prevailed against the Soviet Union. On both the left and the right, voices called for an end to America's role as the world's policeman. In the 1992 campaign, with Patrick Buchanan drawing significant Republican primary support on a platform of America First and Ross Perot garnering nearly 20% of the vote in the general election decrying free trade, it seemed that perhaps America would retreat. Two years later, Republicans took control of Congress, and many new members proudly proclaimed that they held no passports and had no interest in traveling abroad.

Bill Clinton, although not elected for his foreign policy prowess, debunked the isolationists by arguing that in a globalized world, America could not afford to disconnect from the rest of mankind. And with the attacks of September 11, the American population supported active engagement to combat the threats posed from the broader Middle East.

By 2020, we will have a better idea if George Bush's belief that he will come to be seen as another Harry Truman is borne out. It is hard to imagine at this point that it will be.¹⁷ More likely will be the judgment that the management of the Iraq war was the greatest strategic blunder in American history and led to enormous problems for American foreign policy for years to come.

As such, we need to ask what the likely fallout will be for American politics. It is not enough to say that isolationism is impossible in a globalizing world. There are degrees of internationalism and isolationism.¹⁸ Economic engagement with the rest of the world is compatible with a worldview that is much more politically isolationist; after all, that was the premise of Washington's farewell address. Fewer American efforts to support democracy and a call for reducing American military presence worldwide are a rational public response to the Iraqi debacle.

American engagement with Europe has been a core component of its international engagement since the Second World War. If America and Europe go their separate ways, this is likely to feed isolationist tendencies. Without NATO, America would not have its most important formal military alliance, and if Japan has nationalized its foreign policy in response to a rising China and a nuclear Korea, Americans may believe they no longer need to provide a security umbrella for their leading Asian ally. The United States could certainly turn more of its attention to Asian affairs without creating the web of engagement that it has had with Europe.

Isolationism is even easier to imagine if somehow technological advances reduce the importance of hydrocarbons to the global economy. Perhaps that is unlikely by 2020, but certainly not by 2050. And if America no longer needs Gulf oil, then further retreat is easily imaginable. America could conceivably again seek to become the offshore balancer that the realists have become nostalgic for in recent years.¹⁹

A Return to Realism?

If we are imagining a world in which America and Europe have gone their separate ways, then we are imagining a world in which the realists were right. Europe might be strong, competing with America, China, India, and Russia for global influence. Or it might be weak, with some countries joining American-led coalitions, others seeking closer ties to Russia and China. It would be a world in which American primacy is likely to have ended, and it might be a world in which Americans have returned to political and military isolationism.

Perhaps America will have returned to a policy of offshore balancing. Rather than engaging overseas in crisis prevention and crisis

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management, America would simply ensure that no regional hegemon could emerge. But when the realists harken back to the halcyon days when America avoided entangling alliances, they ignore the costs that a policy of offshore balancing produced. True, America helped ensure that Japan did not succeed in Asia nor Germany in Europe sixty years ago. But the costs of waiting until those countries had started well on their way to seek supremacy in their regions were huge. Surely America and the world would have been better off if intervention had come sooner.

Any American grand strategy will be complicated in a world without Europe as a strong ally in dealing with two of the major issues that will continue to be at the forefront of American security challenges: nuclear proliferation and terrorism. By 2020, we may well look back on the early years of the century incredulous that America's war to prevent Saddam Hussein from developing weapons he did not possess distracted the country from preventing North Korea and Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons programs, which then opened to floodgates to others to follow, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Japan.

Such proliferation would confront Europe with an interesting dilemma, and might further complicate American deterrence strategies. In a world in which the non-proliferation regime has collapsed, and in which the Europeans no longer felt secure under the American nuclear umbrella, would the EU seek to develop its own program? What would the reaction be of the two current European nuclear states, the United Kingdom and France to a broader European effort to build nuclear weapons?

Finally, on terrorism, the United States and Europe maintained close working relationships in the areas of intelligence and finance even through the disputes of 2003-04. But at the end of the day, throughout this current period, we were still allies. If we are no longer allies, and anti-American politicians have emerged to lead major European states, could this working level cooperation continue? Being able to count on European intelligence services and banks has been a crucial aspect of American policy, one that could be severely compromised if America and Europe part ways.

During the Cold War, it was usually good politics and good policy for leaders of an American ally to stay close to the United States. What if

that is no longer true? Staying close to America cost Tony Blair, Jose Aznar and Silvio Berlusconi significant political support at home. If European populations come to believe that they are more likely to be targets (Madrid and London), the closer they are to America, we could see a serious effort by European politicians to play the anti-American card both to further their political ambition and as smart national security policy. If that is how the political winds blow in Europe over the next 10-15 years, America will find itself in serious trouble.

The United States will likely focus more on Asia by 2020 than on Europe. The emergence of India and China as major economic powers (and in China's case, possibly an ideological and military power as well) makes this quite probable. But a growing belief that Europe is no longer relevant poses high risks to America's ability to conduct foreign policy. If the realists do turn out to be right about American-European relations, they will have been assisted by a failure of U.S. imagination and of U.S. leadership. Those who think that America can conduct its foreign policy without a strong Transatlantic relationship would be giving up on a foreign policy that promotes political and economic freedom. America without Europe will find achieving its foreign policy aims to be extraordinarily difficult – would China or Russia be better partners? Americans and Europeans do not have to agree on everything, and their interests are different. But a collapse of the Western community, and with it the ideals of the West, would signal that international institutions could no longer function, that the great powers were once again playing off one another, and that the American era was truly over.

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Endnotes

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