



THE CHANGING NATURE OF NATO: TOWARDS A REGIONAL SECURITY ORGANIZATION?

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Abstract:

This article deals with the role of NATO as a cornerstone of the Transatlantic Relationship, and its possible development as a regional or global organization. In this regard, NATO has launched the development of a new Strategic Concept and Transatlantic Relations are being redefined in an international context of loss of US hegemony. Obama's foreign policy strategy is to reposition the US for a much more multipolar world, while, at the same time, the European integration is progressing and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is being developed. Europe is not longer the centre of the US strategic policy, and the European Union has its own interests to defend, especially in its neighbourhood. However, the United States and the European allies still have common threats and shared security interests, and NATO is still the primary Transatlantic security institution. An Alliance exclusively focused on European Security and collective defence is probably not interesting for the US anymore, but a global NATO, with global reach and global partners, is not acceptable for European countries. A NATO with regional identity, but open to discuss common challenges and threats of global nature is an intermediate option.

Keywords: Transatlantic Relations, NATO, ESDP, European Security, New Strategic Concept.

Resumen:

El artículo trata el papel de la OTAN como pieza clave de las Relaciones Transatlánticas y su posible desarrollo como organización internacional de carácter regional o de proyección global. En este sentido, la OTAN está desarrollando un nuevo Concepto Estratégico y las Relaciones Transatlánticas se están redefiniendo en un contexto internacional de pérdida de la hegemonía norteamericana. La estrategia de política exterior de Obama consiste en resituar a los Estados Unidos en un mundo más multipolar, mientras, al mismo tiempo, la integración europea avanza y la Política Europea de Seguridad y Defensa (PESD) se desarrolla paulatinamente. Europa ya no es el centro de la política estratégica de los Estados Unidos, y la Unión Europea tiene sus propios intereses que defender, especialmente en su vecindario cercano. No obstante, los Estados Unidos y los aliados europeos siguen teniendo amenazas comunes e intereses de seguridad compartidos, y la OTAN sigue siendo la principal institución transatlántica de seguridad. Una OTAN exclusivamente centrada en la defensa colectiva y la seguridad europea probablemente no sea interesante para los Estados Unidos, mientras que una OTAN global no es aceptable para los países europeos. Una OTAN de carácter fundamentalmente regional, pero abierta a discutir sobre los desafíos y amenazas comunes de carácter global es una opción intermedia.

Palabras clave: Relaciones transatlánticas, OTAN, PESD, Seguridad Europea, Nuevo Concepto Estratégico.

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1. Introduction

Alliances are generally an incentive created by an anarchical international system to face the security dilemma. Thus, the alliance formed by the United States and its European allies, and then its main embodiment, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), should be generated by the structure of the current international system, and not only be a follow-up to the Cold War. However, an international organization like NATO is also the result of its historical development and can not forget its legacy when designing its future. Then, since this current alliance is not completely new, it will have some features from the former and some ex novo.

Transatlantic relations have suffered important tensions, especially during the last decade. In this vein, US policy, strategies and behaviour during the Bush Administration have been considered profoundly destabilising for the foundations of the US-Europe Alliance and for transatlantic relations as a whole. US foreign policy since the 9/11 attacks has produced a perception of disengagement in the US-Europe Alliance. The arrival of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States has been perceived as a window of opportunity to reinforce the Atlantic Alliance, but new transatlantic relations depend on a redefinition of United States foreign policy, which no longer considers Europe as a priority and maintains a much more global vision.

At the same time, European allies' behaviour in the last decade has created a perception of abandonment in the US government, or in certain circles, even defection, related to issues such as the Global War on Terror (GWOT), or Iraq. However, changes in transatlantic relations are related more to international system dynamics and domestic changes rather than simply US behaviour during the Bush administration. US policies before Obama were supported more by European allies than expected, despite reluctance in European public opinion and in some European core countries, France and Germany mainly, as regards the Bush administration. These results could have been produced due to similar assessments by European countries, not only in terms of threat perceptions, but also in terms of strategic vision, above all among countries (Spain, Portugal, the UK, Italy) on the periphery of the EU core, and Central and Eastern European countries.

In any case, NATO's European allies consider the change of administration in the United States as an opportunity to reconstruct transatlantic relations on new bases, but they must first resolve several issues. Is it already the time to define a real "European identity" inside NATO or, on the contrary, should each member country continue to give priority to its bilateral relationship with Washington, in order to protect its own interests? Do the European Alliance countries want to, or can they, maintain NATO as a regional (not global) organization? The answer to these questions will be very important, not only in defining the future of transatlantic relations and the design of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), but also in persuading the Obama administration that NATO must remain a cornerstone in its new vision of international relations, instead of leaving the Alliance more or less irrelevant.



2. International Order and Transatlantic Relations in Alliance Atlantic Politics

The structure of the international system after the end of the Cold War and the 9/11 attacks has clearly and deeply changed, and, more than a no polarity system³, a kind of “Unipolarity-Multipolarity complex”⁴ has finally arisen, although several of its characteristics, actors and interactions, still have to be defined. It is clear that there is a military unipolarity, a redistribution of economic polarity and, finally, the world governance system is under reconstruction.

First there is a more anarchical international system with different parameters than those of the Cold War⁵. In spite of the absence of military conflicts among great powers, the actors in the international system seem prone to the use of force or the threat of the use of force in conflicts. At the same time, however, the "soft power" or "power of attraction" is now much more important than ever in international politics. Soft power, getting others to want the outcomes that you want, persuades people rather than coerces them. “A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries admire its values, emulate its example; aspire to its level of prosperity and openness”⁶. Soft power lies in the ability to attract and persuade, and the attraction and image of success of the European Union abroad (as a model of economic integration), is a good example of this strategy. In addition, the centre of world affairs has moved from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Secondly, there is a different and asymmetrical distribution of power and capabilities at global level. A clear US military superiority (pre-eminence), and a group of great and regional powers, mainly the EU, Japan, China, India, Russia, Brazil, Iran and South Africa, some of them competing with the United States in economic terms and political influence, at the regional or global level.

Third, there is a new concept of security, where the difference between internal security and foreign security has been blurred. Issues such as “energy security”, “environmental security” or the "new security threats" (terrorism, piracy, transnational crime, cybercrime, etc.) are now part of the political agenda. A trend to the “privatization of war” exists, due to non-state groups and the creation of low-intensity conflict environments, but there is also rising classical competition among regional powers, creating a complex environment.

Moreover, and as a fourth character of the international system, as a result of US policies and behaviour during the Bush administration, there is a weakened acceptance of the US role as a benign hegemon (weakened normative pre-eminence). The Obama administration still has to show its international leadership on these issues.

The United States enjoyed the three pre-eminences that denote primacy, or *in strictu sensu*, hegemony during the Cold War: political-military, economic and normative. This is no longer the case. Transatlantic relations have to face a different international system from that

³ This vision is developed in Hass, Richard: “The Age of Nonpolarity”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 3 (May-June 2008).

⁴ Samuel Huntington used this term first in 1999. See Huntington, Samuel: “The Lonely Superpower”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 2 (March-April 1999).

⁵ See Waltz, Kenneth: “Structural Realism after the Cold War”, *International Security*, vol. 5, no.1 (Summer 2000).

⁶ Nye, Joseph S. (Jr): “The Benefits of Soft Power”, Harvard Business School, (08 February 2004), at <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4290.html>.



of the Cold War; a different distribution of power and capabilities at global and transatlantic level; but also changes produced within each part of the alliance.

Transatlantic relations were established within the framework of the Cold War international system, and based on certain core parameters:

- Political-military parameter: an existential security threat posed by the Soviet Union, with Europe protected by US Extended Deterrence.
- Economic parameter: a deep bilateral relationship since the Marshall Plan.
- Democratic Peace parameter: common values such as democracy, rule of law, civil freedoms and human rights, and free market economy.⁷

Progressively, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, changes in transatlantic relations could be seen, above all since the middle of the 1990s, although as noted above the inertia and relative stability of the alliance framework allowed this structure to be maintained. The “soft landing” and development of a new international system during the 1990s were not well recognised in spite of successive crises in the Balkans. American and European Allies reinforced the transatlantic link using the inertia of the Cold War model with only some gradual institutional changes, in part due to a thirst for the “dividends of peace”, even though NATO started a policy of enlargement to the East and instigated a change in the vision and the mission of the Atlantic Alliance. The 1999 NATO Strategic Concept would substantially reflect these changes in the nature of the alliance. However, evolution in the international system and in the parameters of transatlantic relations was clear and progressive during the 1990s, producing a unipolar international system where the US enjoyed a situation of global primacy⁸ that the European allies did not question. But, at the same time, US Extended Deterrence in Europe lost its main rationale after the end of the Soviet threat, and the role of transatlantic relations in US strategic policy then started to change.

From an economic point of view, the members of the original transatlantic market turned their attention increasingly to a globalized economy, where competition, not cooperation, is the general rule. The transatlantic market, although reinforced after successive initiatives and buttressed by the largest mutual foreign direct investment in the world, is not the only market for Europeans and Americans. The European integration process has been focused on a progressively enlarged common market, and both sides of the Atlantic have focused on the opportunities offered by Asian economic growth. In addition, the consensus about US normative pre-eminence has changed to a new normative framework. According to this, “Democratic Peace” should be achieved, but using different means according to Americans and Europeans. There is a different understanding of the content of democracy and human rights and the ways to promote them globally. Once again, we have to see if the Obama administration has a new perspective on these issues, closer to the European vision.

⁷ Deutsch, Karl (1957): *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

⁸ Krauthammer, Charles: “The Unipolar Moment”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 1 (Winter 1990/91), pp. 23-33.



3. The Atlantic Alliance and Transatlantic Relations in the Post-Cold War

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO may be facing its most decisive moment since the end of the Cold War. The Alliance survived the collapse of communism, at a time when many questioned its necessity, given that there was no enemy. The organization was able to adapt, and contributed very significantly to the democratization, the expansion of market economy, and the stability of the former enemies of Central and Eastern Europe. In the 90s, the Alliance broke the geographical boundaries established by the Treaty of Washington, acting with its military forces in the Balkans. This was the acknowledgment that security threats emanate from beyond NATO's borders. A few years later, in 2003, the Alliance began its military operations in Afghanistan.

NATO is currently in a process of redefinition that will affect its goals, missions, and US/Europe relations as a whole. The United States does not have the primacy it enjoyed during the Cold War and the last decade of the twentieth century. We are living in a post-American world, and Obama's foreign policy strategy is to reposition the US for that post-American world, working with anyone who can help serve the US's interest⁹. For instance, apart from the necessary collaboration in the UN Security Council, he will work with China on economy and environment, with Russia on disarmament and nuclear proliferation, and with Yemen on terrorism, if necessary. In addition, Europe is no longer a US priority. That is, Europe has been a key ally in the past, but cooperation with it in the future will depend on whether it has something to offer or not.

The European allies are also changing. The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) delivered mixed results in its ten years of life. "While the success of this Unión Policy is unquestionable, its omissions and failures are equally evident"¹⁰. The progress that has been made is a source of satisfaction, but the European Union continues to be perceived as a marginal player in global security matters. The Lisbon treaty has just come into force, providing new tools that should enhance the EU's international role: the new High Representative (with reinforced responsibilities); the President of the European Council, an integrated diplomatic service, and enhanced cooperation and permanent structured cooperation for those members which wish to go further in the field of defence. It is the time to develop these tools to place the EU among the main actors in the multipolar world (as the European Security Strategy declares), but it will depend on the political will of Member States.

Taking into account these parameters, the tendency in transatlantic relations was that the Allies should face problems in material capacities, incentives to cooperate, and convergence in expectations of interests (present and future). As a result, they faced uncertainty, and after the 9/11 attacks and previous assessment about the evolution of the international system, US policy and behaviour tried to balance this situation and this was to provoke reactions¹¹.

The gap in military capabilities between the U.S. and the European NATO allies is not new, but it is increasingly difficult to accept. Europe lived under the protection of the United States during the Cold War, but the Extended Deterrence is already an illusion. The United

⁹ Shapiro, Jeremy, Witney, Nick: "How Europe can be heard in Washington", *Financial Times*, Nov 16, 2009, p. 13.

¹⁰ Gnesotto, Nicole: "The need for a more strategic EU", in Vasconcelos, Alvaro (ed.) (2009): *What ambitions for European Defence in 2020?*, Paris, European Union Institute for Security Studies, p. 25.

¹¹ In this sense see Walt, Stephen (2005): *Taming American Power*, New York, Norton.



States defended Europe against communism, but now it neither can, nor wants, to defend European “interests” in a multipolar context. The interests of U.S. and European allies are not always the same, even on security issues. But the differences among allies should be considered legitimate and acceptable. A healthy transatlantic relationship requires tough negotiations to establish commitments that work for both parties. The development of the ESDP should be useful in building credible military capabilities available to the EU, to defend the EU’s interests¹², but also available to make a more balanced contribution to NATO.

Alliance creation is a result of the existence of general incentives generated by the structure of the international system, states will search for allies or abstain from alliances, and since there are asymmetries in capabilities and different security interests, alliance formation (maintenance, in the NATO case) will mean gains and costs. But there are other major interests that help to address indeterminacy in the bargaining process of creating the alliance: general interests and particular interests, which predispose states to align with certain other states.

General or strategic interests are related to the anarchic structure of the international system. From this point of view, US Extended Deterrence in Europe lost its sense after the end of the Soviet threat, and Europe is not the centre of US Strategic Policy: there are other areas such as East Asia and the Greater Middle East that command greater attention. But the European Security Strategy (ESS) 2003, its 2008 Report on Implementation and the United States National Security Strategy 2002 and 2006 identified a more anarchic international system and common threats such as terrorism, proliferation of WMD, regional conflicts, and rogue states, among others. The United States and the European Allied Forces not only share the principles of liberty, democracy, and respect for human rights, but also security interests on many issues. NATO remains the main international military organization, and the best tool for effective transatlantic cooperation, but its future will depend basically on its capacity to cope with these common threats. And, particularly, the European allies need to convince the US that maintaining the Atlantic Alliance is necessary and beneficial for both parties, although EU countries are not willing to accept a global NATO, which the United States would like. The US time of global dominance after the Cold War has gone, and the Obama administration will work with any country that can help serve US’s interests, by forging tactical alliances when necessary¹³. In turn, a strong EU will not always work with NATO in the future, including on security issues. “The EU’s main partner outside NATO may sometimes be the US, but at other times it may be India or China, the African Union of Latin America, or even a large coalition of states legitimised by the UN”¹⁴. Even in this new context, NATO must remain the backbone of the relationship between the US and EU to address risks and threats to common security and shared interests.

Particular interests create conflict or affinity with other states. Thus, features such as power content, ideology, prestige, economy can create a set of affinities, giving states expectations that they will be supported by those with whom they share interests: for instance, the United States expects the support of Europe/EU in its fight against terrorism, because of NATO’s military support during the Cold War, a shared ideology based on liberal democracy, economic interdependence and general normative agreement on international rules. Moreover, the internal political configuration of states, apart from general ideological preferences, is also

¹² On the evolution of European military capabilities in the last ten years, see Keohane, D, Blommestijn, Ch.: “Strength in numbers? Comparing EU military capabilities in 2009 with 1999”, EUISS, *Policy Brief* n° 5 (December 2009).

¹³ Shapiro and Witney, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ Vasconcelos, Alvaro: “2020: defence beyond the transatlantic paradigm”, in Vasconcelos, *op. cit.*, p. 18.



important for the continuity of the alliance. These alignments created a core of precedents and relationships, which conditioned the process of alliance bargaining, “predisposing the system toward certain alliances and against others”: in this case, the experience of the US/European alliance during the Cold War created a predisposition to maintain the alliance. But conflicts and affinities reduce but do not eliminate indeterminacy in choosing allies or adversaries, due to overestimation or underestimation of conflicts with third parties by allies: for instance, the perception and assessment of terrorism, Iraq, or Iran is seen by the United States and European states differently¹⁵.

The Allies have been moving between cooperation and weak commitment. NATO’s European allies promoted the use of Article V of NATO after 9/11; the GWOT and *Enduring Freedom* Operation in Afghanistan were launched with full European support and commitment, and the new strategy of the Obama administration for the area has been positively received by the Allies. A great majority of Western European countries, especially the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and Portugal, and all Central and Eastern European countries, supported the US invasion of Iraq, despite the opposition of two core European countries, France and Germany. However, a realignment of the United States with Germany/France and with Russia for different reasons has been produced: Iran’s nuclear program, nuclear disarmament and Afghanistan in the first case, and energy and European balance in the latter.

A weak commitment and no support in specific conflicts have been the choices in other cases, with a number of different variations. For instance, re-alignment, de-alignment, failure on explicit commitments and failure in providing support in contingencies where it is expected. In the current situation of the US-European alliance, the latter two will be the only ones to be considered, since the alliance remains, although expectations of support are weakened. A strategy of weak commitment reduces the risk of entrapment and enhances bargaining leverage: there is EU support in the Afghan case, anti-terrorism, and Iran, but with ambiguous European military commitment in spite of NATO’s military strategy.

Different U.S. administrations had been arguing unsuccessfully since the end of the Cold War that the main threats to the transatlantic alliance were terrorism and WMD. The lack of European interest in these issues was one of the parameters that contributed to the US tendency for unilateral solutions to global problems. Even the effects of 9/11 and the Iraq war on European threat perceptions have been ambiguous.¹⁶ Some allies try to avoid burden-sharing, in the face of a rising threat, expecting not to bear unnecessary costs or/and improve their relative position vis-a-vis their allies in the future. In terms of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan or the military aspects of the GWOT, European states see the costs of intervention as being high, and pass them on to the US. They believe that, due to the commitment to fighting these countries and US military superiority, this buck-passing and partial abandonment (in the GWOT’s case) will not mean a dangerous reduction in either US security or European security. But it increases the risk of abandonment, reduces their reputation for resolve and encourages the adversary to stand firm¹⁷. A US strategy of deterrence (threat of force) is opposed by some European states through lack of willingness to use force in support of the United States, in order to restrain their ally. For instance, France and Germany’s position

¹⁵ See Sarotte, M.E.: “Transatlantic Tension and Threat Perception”, *Naval War College Review*, vol. 58, no. 4 (Autumn 2005).

¹⁶ This argument is developed in Gordon, Philip H. and Shapiro, Jeremy (2004): *Allies at War: America, Europe and the Crisis over Iraq*, New York, McGraw-Hill.

¹⁷ Snyder, Glenn, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics”, *World Politics*, Vol. 36, no. 4 (July 1984), p. 471.



against the Iraq invasion, or withdrawal of Spanish and other countries' troops from Iraq. The Obama administration offers new opportunities for cooperation with European allies on a multilateral basis. This would mean the end of the much criticized US unilateralism, but it will require an increased European commitment to Obama's new multilateralism, assuming greater responsibilities. Afghanistan is probably the test case for how the U.S and Europe will manage their relationship. The challenge for Europe is to act as a credible partner.

4. The European Union, the United States and the Future of Transatlantic Relations

The progressive development of an EU foreign and security policy creates alternative visions and strategies for EU general and particular interests. On the one hand, the European Union has been defined in recent decades as a "civilian power" or a "normative/civilizing" power, that is, "The EU's strength and novelty as an international actor is based on its ability to extend its own model of ensuring stability and security through economic and political rather than military means"¹⁸. This strategy has been one of the main assets of European Union foreign policy, and can remain so. As Javier Solana (former NATO Secretary General and EU High Representative) often said, "the world demands Europe", its particular way of doing things. In this sense, it is very important that the EU is the largest trading power in the world, as well as a major donor of humanitarian help and development aid. However, the EU launched a Common Security and Defense Policy in 1998, in order to make available military capabilities that did not exist before. The achievement of these capabilities could weaken the argument that the EU is a "civilian" actor¹⁹, but the ability to use some level of military force in certain situations (when "soft power" is not enough), would give credibility to the European Union as an international actor. No "normative power" without "real power"²⁰. Some crisis management operations led by the EU, and the "Atalanta" mission against piracy off Somalia's coast, are examples of these situations where being a "civilian power" is not enough. The threat or use of force to meet international commitments or to defend the EU's interests is also a likely scenario in the future. Without the development of new military capabilities, the EU's role in the world could become irrelevant, not only because the United States will prefer to work individually with each allied country, but also because the European Union will not achieve its aspiration of being a major actor in a multipolar world.

On the other hand, the security interests of US and European allies are not in the same geographical area in many cases. The European Union Security Strategy (2003 + 2008) points out that "the European Union is inevitably a global player..."²¹, and identifies a range of global challenges and key threats to European Security²². Nevertheless, in fact, EU foreign and security policy can not be global yet, mainly for its lack of diplomatic, political and military capacities. It is not a lack of ambition of the EU as an organization, but a lack of

¹⁸ Sjørnsen, Helene, "What kind of Power?" *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 13, no. 2 (March 2006), pp 169-170.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Marquina, Antonio and Caballero-Anthony, Mely: Human Security: European and Asian Approaches" in Marquina Antonio (ed) (2008): *Energy Security. Visions from Asia and Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, pp.244-272.

²⁰ Vasconcelos: "2020: defence beyond the transatlantic paradigm...", *op cit*, p. 13.

²¹ Solana, Javier: "A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy", *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (NATO), Brussels, Belgium (12 December 2003), p. 1.

²² "Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy, Providing Security in a Changing World", *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (NATO), S407/08, Brussels, Belgium (11 December 2008), p. 3.



resources and, frequently, a lack of political will of its member countries. The European Union will probably be an important actor for global security in the future, but it still does not have all the capabilities to fulfil this role.

There is a precondition in this approach. The EU should be able to speak with one voice in international institutions, NATO included. This is probably one of the most important challenges for EU Security Policy in the near future. The European Union must overcome existing divisions between its members on many issues of foreign, security and defence policy; This is not easy in an organization with 27 members, with very different security interests (in the Mediterranean or in Russia, for example), and various defence traditions (great powers, neutral countries, and former communist states). In this context, the emergence of a multi-speed Europe for security and defence matters is likely, with a first group of countries willing to make progress in the integration of their security and defence policies, which must include core countries of the Union. This probably would not be welcome in the United States, which has traditionally opposed the creation of a "European Union caucus" within NATO²³, but it would be an important step towards that "single European voice", and towards consolidating the European Security and Defense Policy. In this vein, the United States and the European Union need to avoid misperceptions and to ensure that the process of European integration strengthens, rather than weakens, transatlantic relations.

Coming back to the field of security threats, Europe's main concern in the near future will be security and stability in its neighbourhood. The European Union has launched military operations on an ad hoc basis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Darfur, Chad and Somalia, but their basic interests are not in sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia. They are in the nearest neighbours with conflicts or political problems that can cross borders and directly affect the security or interests of EU countries: in North Africa and the Mediterranean (Middle East, Iraq and Iran included), in the Black Sea and the Caucasus, and in the eastern neighbours, mainly in Russia, which is a key player for European policy and security (military security and energy security). The risks and threats for the European Union are not only terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and rogue states, but also energy security (supply sources and transportation routes), uncontrolled migration, organized crime, the destabilization of neighbouring countries, the consequences of armed conflicts in nearby regions, or the consequences of climate change. The European Neighbourhood Policy shows the geographical priorities by offering the EU's immediate neighbours by land or sea (Mediterranean and Eastern countries) a privileged relationship, aimed at enhancing development and democratization as the best way to prevent conflicts and improve stability. European and United States interests with regard to these countries are often divergent and even opposed.

In fact, after the end of the Cold War, as was mentioned, Europe was not the priority of US Global Policy, although it was still a main element, but the vision of military superiority might create a tendency in the EU "to pass the buck" to the United States.²⁴ Although the allies committed themselves to fighting against terrorism, and undertook a number of common actions, they continued to maintain quite different views of how important the threat was, as well as how to combat it. Similar differences could be extended to other international issues like Iran or Afghanistan in the future.

²³ Larrabee, Stephen F.: "The United States and the evolution of ESPD", in Vasconcelos: "What ambitions..."*op. cit.*, p. 51.

²⁴ Christensen, T. and Snyder J.: "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity", *International Organization*, vol. 44. no. 2 (Spring 1990), p. 139.



These different interests and perceptions feed strategies of weak or ambiguous commitment. The United States, while it led the transatlantic Alliance throughout the Cold War, maintains different attitudes toward EU security policy²⁵ and, in some cases, remains suspicious of allies because of the fear that NATO's alliance obligations might force the United States to act in operations not of its choosing. Moreover, a collective European military force gives the EU more options, allowing Europeans to be less bound to follow the U.S. lead in NATO, particularly if that involves operations such as Iraq.

There are European perceptions of a declining credibility in the US commitment to Alliance interests. The US focuses on global, rather than European, security concerns. For instance, the US Global Posture Review, the plans for troop withdrawals in Europe, the establishment of US bases at the periphery of Europe to address extra-European threats, and, now, from Central and Eastern European countries, the BMD withdrawal from Poland and the Czech Republic. Furthermore, this trend would reinforce European fears about entrapment: being dragged into a conflict over a US interest that they do not share or share only partially. In this sense, European allies valued preservation of the alliance more than the cost of supporting the United States in Iraq or military support of the GWOT. Moreover, they saw possibilities of extraregional entrapment in terms of further NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia, an entanglement in Afghanistan or even beyond, supporting NATO Global Partners. Europeans thus try to escape or minimize risks of entrapment without serious risks of US abandonment, although accepting partial abandonment in the form of troop withdrawals and South Asia priority²⁶.

On the other hand, the lessons learned after the campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and the GWOT drove a remarkable change in US policy toward a more multilateral approach during the second George W. Bush administration and the Obama administration. It was implicit that it was necessary to de-emphasise unilateral solutions and coalitions of the willing, and to accept other powers' interests, seeking partnerships with regional powers to face problems and crises. In this sense, this means a better understanding in Washington of the limitations of military power and a greater appreciation of the European contribution.

5. Conclusions

Transatlantic Relations have to face a different International System from that of the past, and the development of a NATO's new Strategic Concept has to reflect this new scenario. The United States does not have the primacy it enjoyed during the Cold War (except for military power), and a much more multipolar world is arising. NATO is currently involved in a process of change that could not only affect its structure and missions, but also its definition as a regional organization.

Since the end of the Cold War, Transatlantic Relations have experienced important tensions. US Foreign Policy since 9/11 attacks has produced a perception of disengagement in US-Europe alliance. At the same time, European allies' behaviour in the last decade created in US government an image of lack of commitment related to issues as the fight

²⁵ Oudraat, Chantal de Jonge: "U.S. Attitudes evolve about EU Security Ambitions". *European Affairs*, (Summer/Fall 2007).

²⁶ But the Secretary of Defence decided to freeze the plans for further reducing the US Armed Forces. See: Shanker, Tom: "Gates halts cut in Army Force in Europe", *The New York Times*, November 21, 2007, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/21/washington/21military.html>.



against terrorism (GWOT), Iraq and Afghanistan. The election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States has been perceived by the European allies as a window of opportunity to reinforce the Atlantic Alliance, but it will not be an easy task.

Obama's foreign policy strategy is to reposition the US for a post-American world, where Europe is no longer the US priority. The US focuses on global, rather than European, security concerns, and there are other priority regions such as East Asia, the Greater Middle East or the Pacific. Europe has been a key ally in the past, but cooperation with it in the future will depend on whether it has something to offer or not. The European allies need to convince the US that maintaining the Atlantic Alliance is necessary and beneficial for both parties, although EU countries are not willing to accept a global NATO, which would like the United States. An Alliance exclusively focused on European Security and collective defence probably is no longer interesting for the US, but a global NATO, with global reach and global partners, is not acceptable for European countries. The new Strategic Concept has to resolve this incompatibility, in a much more multipolar world, in which Europe declares its readiness to take a more active role. European and US interests are not always the same (even in the Euro-Atlantic area), but there are common security interests and shared values that make NATO essential for Europe and North America. An Alliance with regional focus (but open to discuss global risks and threats) would make easier the agreement on common threats and shared interests. The Alliance has been the best tool for effective transatlantic cooperation on defence issues, and must remain so. The Obama administration offers new opportunities for cooperation with European allies on multilateral basis, but this new policy will need a stronger European commitment. It is the time of a much more balance relationship between European allies and the United States. Otherwise the United States could lose interest in NATO. In any case, it will require tough negotiations to establish compromises that work for both parties.

The European contribution to the Alliance also has to change. Transatlantic Relations can not ignore the European Union integration process and the development of a Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy. In this context, the EU needs to have something to say, collectively. Taking into account the EU's difficulties in reaching agreements by consensus on security and defence, it is likely the emergence of a multi-speed Europe for these issues. In the absence of a "single European voice", it would be an important step towards consolidating the European Security and Defense Policy. In this regard, the United States and the EU need to ensure that the process of European integration strengthens, rather than weakens, Transatlantic Relations.

The development of the ESDP should be useful in building credible military capabilities available to the EU, to defend the EU interests, but also available to make a more balanced contribution to NATO. The goal is not to create a rivalry between the European Union and NATO, but rather to establish a useful and credible alliance between American and European allies, an organization able to cope with common threats and shared interests. The challenge for Europe is to act as a credible partner. European "civilian" or "normative" power has to be considered as an important contribution to the Alliance policy (as it is for EU foreign policy), but the EU's role in the world could become irrelevant without the development of military capabilities to deploy abroad.

Europe's main concern in the near future will be security and stability in its neighbourhood. Although the Security Strategy refers to the EU as a global player, the EU foreign and security policy can not be global yet, mainly for its lack of resources and the political will of some of its member states. This is another reason not to support a global



NATO with global reach and global partners. The European Union will probably be in the future an important actor for the global security, but it still does not have all the capabilities to fulfil that role. Neither the EU nor its Member States probably can afford the political, economic, and military requirements of a global NATO.