TRANSWORLD

Conflicting Visions: Liberal and Realist Conceptualisations of Transatlantic Alignment

Andrew Byrne

This paper reviews liberal and realist interpretations of interstate alignment. It looks at the differing forms that alliances and partnerships have taken since the Cold War era with particular reference to the empirical record of transatlantic relations and scenarios for its future. Writers often dismiss realist and liberal interpretations as respectively pessimistic or optimistic about the prospects for transatlantic relations but there is significant debate within each school about the drivers of alignment, how this relates to the agent-structure debate and what this means for transatlantic relations. This paper highlights the shortcomings of purely structural explanations for alignment but also calls into question the functions ascribed to alignment behaviour by scholars of both disciplines. In an era of emerging threats and rising economic powers, theorists will have to address how more informal modes of collaboration can adapt to new challenges in a less Atlantic-centred world.

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Introduction

The end of the Second World War ushered in an unprecedented era of bipolarity and with it, the emergence of strikingly stable alliance formations within each opposing power bloc. These unique circumstances allowed theorists to generate and test hypotheses about alliance formation behaviour, often with widely diverging interpretations of the origins, functions and dynamics of these groups. As will be explored in this paper, however, the end of the bipolar era upended the structural context for much alliance theorising and forced scholars to reassess many seemingly weakened explanations for alliance formation and interstate cooperation. For neorealists, the persistence of alliances like NATO in the absence of a unifying external threat called into question the theories of structural purists. Similarly, the failure of any potential counter-balance to the US's unipolar position to emerge was a challenge to core realist assumptions of balance of power logic.[1] For liberals, the Western-designed institutions and partnerships of international cooperation would have to be adapted to meet the reality of emerging powers and a growing number of collective problem-solving challenges.

This paper reviews theories of alignment drawn from conventional Realism and Liberalism. While social constructivists and those employing the "security communities" perspective have made a rich theoretical contribution to alignment scholarship, these approaches are addressed separately by Thomas Risse's paper in this series. This paper explores the very different explanations for inter-state alignment presented by liberal and realist theorists and critically examines their arguments in the context of a new and shifting world order and for an uncertain transatlantic relationship.

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1 It remains the position of most realists that, in spite of emerging powers, the structure of the global system is still unipolar for the time being, owing to the United States dominance in all the relevant power capabilities: military, economic, technological, and geopolitical (see Posen 2006). Liberals are more inclined to argue for an emergent multipolarity in light of the rise of actors such as China. These divergent views on the structure of the system complicate. alliance-formation theory comparisons.

1. New Context, New Forms of Cooperation

While no two alliances in the Cold War era were ever identical[2] the end of this period has seen an ever-greater diversification of alliances and partnerships making classifications of alignment more difficult but certainly no less important. As Glenn Snyder wrote: "The protean character of alliances and alignments makes a clear definition essential." (Snyder 1997: 2) The forms and purposes of these groupings are also changing, with a greater diversity of informal networks of states and actors addressing a variety of non-military functions (Slaughter 2004). For some, the Cold War alliances now appear anachronistic and the US is said to privilege looser allied arrangements and "coalitions of the willing" (Menon 2007). Some predict that US foreign policy will experience an "end of alliances" or at the least a paradigm shift away from formal military alliances such as NATO towards more flexible and less binding agreements (Campbell 2004; Neuman 2001). Seeking to unburden itself of the institutional constraints of conventional alliances, US strategy is said to be moving towards what former Assistant Secretary of State Richard Haass described as "*á la carte* multilateralism". All of these changes make the task of defining terms such as "Alliance" and "Partnership" more difficult and they also call into question whether the dominance of these terms risks trapping us within out-dated strategic thinking, preventing us from understanding new emergent forms of interstate cooperation. It is vital therefore, that we begin with a clear conceptualisation of the units of our analysis together with a broader definition of alignment which can encompass more informal and emerging forms of cooperative behaviour.

2. Definitions

Alliances, while generally springing from formal interstate treaties are usually narrowly restricted to the issue of military security. Snyder describes alliances as "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership" (Snyder 1997: 3). Similarly, Stephen Walt defines an alliance as "a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states" (Walt 1987: 1).

By contrast, *coalitions*, although similarly focussed on military affairs, are less formal and less durable. Andrew Pierre describes coalitions as "a grouping of like-minded states that agree on the need for joint action on a specific problem at a particular time with no commitment to a durable relationship" (Pierre 2002: 2). An illustration of this distinction would be the contrast between the so-called "coalition of the willing" assembled by the United States to invade Iraq in 2003 and NATO, the quintessential alliance with an operational structure, treaty basis and supporting institutions, referred to by Western strategists simply as "the alliance" (Tertrais 2004: 143).

Partnership is a more recent arrival to the alignment lexicon but is increasing in popularity, reflecting broader forms of cooperation conducted, usually on a more informal basis. The 2010 US National Security Strategy refers to "partnership" forty-three times, less than the references to "alliance" or "allies" (sixty-three occurrences) but in connection with a much broader range of policy areas: energy, nuclear non-proliferation and trade (United States 2010). The term "partnership" is also used with reference to a group of heterogeneous partners: states, communities and the private sector. For its part, the EU has "strategic partnerships" with ten states, and ambitions to agree five more (Peterson, Byrne and Helwig 2012: 302). While alliances are monothematic as military agglomerations, partnerships are diverse in the policies they address. Whereas alliances are exclusively interstate,

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2 The most frequent contrast drawn was between the network-model of the NATO alliance and the "hub and spokes" model of US alliances in the Asian Pacific. See Adler and Barnett 1998.

partnerships imply a range of state interaction between governments, groups, corporations and even people.

Thomas Wilkins argues that alliances, coalitions and partnerships are best understood as forms of "alignment" a broader concept encompassing any form of interstate collaboration that involves mutual expectations of some degree of policy coordination (Wilkins 2012). Adding to the three forms of alignment discussed, Wilkins adds "security communities". The concept developed from what Karl Deutsch called "pluralistic security communities" (Deutsch et al. 1957). Such communities rest upon "dependable expectations of peaceful change" and close-knit networks of national policy-makers and political elites whose regular interaction and ideological affinity mitigates the security dilemma and makes war between partners unthinkable (Adler and Barnett 1998; Risse-Kappen 1995).

A motivating factor for the conceptual specification of these differing types of alignment is the notion that the term "alliance" is a growing source of strategic misunderstanding arising from the connotations of bipolar state-craft that come with the term. This is not to say that alliances do not persist in unipolar or multipolar contexts – current experiences demonstrate this – but rather that the theoretical frames that the term brings can narrow our field of vision. Each of the four forms of alignment outlined reflects, at the least, the differing preoccupations of theoretical schools[3] but also some significant theoretical divergences. Our choices as to which types of alignment matter can lead us to highlight certain causes of cooperation (interests within structural contexts for instance) and divert us from others (such as the role of shared ideas and identities). As we shall see, the theoretical lenses adopted when investigating these phenomena suggest very different outcome scenarios for the transatlantic relationship.

3. Realists and Alignment

For Realists, alliance and coalition models are seen as the only significant forms of alignment. Regarding the origins and purposes of alliances, realists are doggedly parsimonious, taking states as rational, security-maximising actors whose self-interested behaviour is largely determined by the structure of the international system. For realists, alliances are about capability aggregation and are formed to counter-balance powerful states (Waltz 1979), or ones perceived as threatening adversaries (Walt 1987), in a process often described as "hard balancing". Booth affirms this: "the traditional and still predominant explanation of alliances arises out of balance-of-power considerations" (Booth 1987: 263). Alliances can form in the absence of a clear and present danger, but only in a pre-emptive mode, to restrain putative enemies (Schroeder 1976). The central Realist assumption is a structural one: that alliances are predicated upon "the existence of an external threat and only incidentally (if at all) related to a sense of community among the allied powers" (Fedder 1968: 78). To put it more bluntly, "organisations are created by their enemies" (Waltz 1979: 75)

Because most of these writers are uninterested in matters beyond security, economic factors are reduced to input variables of the power projection capabilities of states. Economic measures only encroach upon the analysis in so far as these factors are of relevance to a state's military capabilities (Gilpin 1981). Similarly, domestic and transnational actors are excluded from the analysis as second-order factors. Ideological affinities and political proximity are referred to by some Realist writers as relevant but not decisive in alliance formation (Walt 1987).

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3 Security communities are generally more studied by liberal and constructivist scholars due to the interest these theorists have in variables such as domestic interest groups, cross-national actors and the role of ideas and identities, whereas realists are more concerned with security interests and the balance of power in an anarchic system and therefore focus on military alliances as strategies of rationally-motivated, security-maximising states.

4. Balancing and Bandwagoning

The central motivation of alliance formation – power agglomeration in order to maximise state security against a threat (Morgenthau 1978) – leads to two potential forms of alliance formation behaviour: balancing and bandwagoning. *Balancing* occurs when states join forces to avoid domination by stronger powers and is the central phenomenon of balance of power theory (Mearsheimer 2001). *Bandwagoning* is instead when a state joins forces with the aggressor in the hope of either appeasing that power and diverting its attack elsewhere, or more offensively, in the hope of sharing in the spoils of the victory (Walt 1987). An example here would be the Soviet Union's opportunistic entry into the war against Japan in 1945. Both of these behaviours are drivers of alliance or coalition formation but, according to Walt, balancing is always dominant. Balancing is more common because "an alignment that preserves its freedom of action is preferable to accepting subordination under a potential hegemon" (Walt 1987: 15). These notions of alliance formation pervaded Cold War thinking in Washington, with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger remarking upon the risk of bandwagoning behaviour if the US was seen to lack resolve: "If leaders around the world […] assume that the US lacked either the forces or the will […] they will accommodate themselves to the dominant trend" (Kissinger 1999).

5. From Strength to Threat

A key move of neorealism in the 1980s was to shift the analysis of what provoked balancing behaviour from assessments of a potential enemy's strength to the level of threat they posed (Walt 1987). Prior to this, most structural realist theories of balancing were framed solely in terms of relative power-assessments (Waltz 1979).[4] The power approach had flaws, primarily that it ignored the other factors which leaders consider when identifying risks to their security. Many states can have relatively strong capabilities, but the most severe threat is a state that combines great power, geographical proximity, offensive capability, and policies that suggest malign intent (Walt 1987: 17-33). This would lead realist alliance theorists in later years to argue that the reason for a sustained period of American unipolarity after the Cold War (i.e. the failure of any military counter-balance to emerge) was down to the benign nature of US hegemony, which posed little threat to most states (Walt 2009: 120). By integrating these new threat assessments and the unique form of American unipolarity into neorealist theory, Walt was attempting to re-shape neorealism in response to post-Cold War realities. However, in doing so Walt was demonstrating the limits of purely structural explanations for alliance formation.

6. Integrating Non-Structural Factors

In his work *Alliance Politics* Snyder shifted the realist lens to address the interaction of internal processes and politics in alliances with structural factors (Snyder 1997). The work broke new ground by integrating the "tools of management" dimension of intra-alliance behavior and the potential internal conflict between allies into the theoretical corpus of the neorealist research programme.

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4 It should be noted here that from 1979, the shift to structural or "neorealism" represented a major break with more classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau. Classical realists focused on the exercise of power by states as affected by human nature, ideologies, imperialism, diplomacy and public opinion. Waltz and the neorealists rejected this plurality of influences on state behavior; Waltz deliberately ignored the role of domestic factors, identifying the 'self help' nature of the international realm as the sole factor in determining state behaviour.

For Snyder, unlike Waltz, alliances are not an epiphenomenal feature of the system but depend on process variables. These variables (interests, capabilities and interdependence) exist at an intermediate level between the agents and the structure. For Snyder, alliance members are always engaged in a bargaining process. Members of an alliance are involved in the "security dilemma of the alliance", seeking to avoid the twin threats of alliance membership: entrapment and abandonment. On the one hand, states try to avoid entrapment (becoming involved in costly endeavours in which they have no interests); on the other hand, they fear abandonment by their allies when a real external threat is manifested (Snyder 1984).

A more radical group within Realism were the neo-classical realists who sought to return to the more inclusive theoretical approach of the classical realists. These scholars integrated unit level variables such as domestic politics and geographical position into the analysis (Schweller 2006; Rose 1998). A key focus for this group was addressing why states do not always take balancing steps against a dominant power. Schweller's text is perhaps the most sub-structural realist analysis of state behaviour and argues that "*under-balancing*" results from features of domestic politics: disagreement among elites about the nature of threats and policy responses, fragmented leadership, broader social disunity and regime instability (Schweller 2006). For Schweller, the more internal contradictions in a state's "software" (regime legitimacy, political integration and policy capacity) the less able it is to adapt its military "hardware" to respond to rising threats. His prime example is the divisions among elites in the United Kingdom (UK) and political instability in France in the late 1930s, both of which resulted in under-balancing against Nazi Germany (Schweller 2006). Neo-classical realists accept that states operate within the parameters that the structure of the system and the dispersal of power impose but they are interested in investigating the envelope of possibilities each state's particular context affords it. While this helps realists to explain phenomena such as "under-balancing" it undermines more purely structural explanations and calls into question just how firmly this remains a realist approach.

Other concerns of realist literature on alliances were the question of *burden-sharing* within alliances – a perennial bone of contention among NATO members – where larger powers tend to bear a disproportionate burden of providing deterrence as a public good while smaller countries free-ride (Sandler and Hartley 2001). The role of leadership within alliances also comes under some scrutiny, with asymmetry of capacities enabling stronger leadership and more durable alliances (Walt 2009). By the late 1990s however, Realists were forced to address the shortcomings of structural explanations for alliance formation. Why did the NATO alliance appear to persist and even expand its membership in the 1990s and 2000s, despite the disappearance of the Soviet Union? And what were the prospects for continued Western alignment in the context of rising economic powers?

7. Liberal Perspectives

Where Realism and Liberalism perhaps come closest is the space between Neo-Classical Realism and Liberal Intergovernmentalism. Typified by Andrew Moravcsik, the latter theory looks at foreign policy as a bottom-up process: foreign policy choices are *aggregate outcomes* originally resulting from micro-actors on the domestic level, whose preferences are at a later stage mediated by systemic factors, the preferences of *other* states, so that the generation of interests in single states is as dependent on domestic factors as it is interdependent with the interests of other states (Moravcsik 1997). Neo-classical realists are interested in some of these same domestic variables but they take a top-down structural approach, first analysing the macro-political structure of world power as a determinant for what actions domestic actors can take. The liberal approach has demonstrated the unique nature of the Western political sphere, identifying domestic factors such as liberal ideology, democra-

tic political structures and transnational elites as variables permitting the genesis of a uniquely stable, post-anarchic Western world. In this vein, much of transatlantic alignment is explained by reference to the domestic, societal context for international cooperation.

Neo-liberal institutionalism is marked out by its focus on *functional cooperation* and within that context, the role of institutions in managing the tensions which interdependence between states produces. Whereas for realists, institutions are seen as even less significant than ideological affinity in the constitution of alliances, neo-liberal institutionalists study their causal effects as constraints on defection or cheating by parties in international cooperation (Keohane 1984). It should also be noted that, unlike liberals, neoliberal institutionalists take state preferences as fixed and exogenously given and explain state policy as a function of variation in the geopolitical environment rather than the transmission of domestic preferences and the resulting interaction among single state interests (Moravcsik 1997: 536).

The institutionalist agenda differs substantially from other liberal approaches in its core assumptions and is sometimes accused of normative or ideological tendencies (Moravcsik 1997). These scholars are interested in collaborative activity that goes well beyond the confines of military alliances to include climate change and trade regimes. Once these institutions are established, participating states have strong incentives to maintain them and to comply with their rules in order to continue to reap the benefits of cooperation. Even when circumstances change, the short-term benefits of exiting or dismantling an alliance institution can be outweighed by the long-term benefits anticipated from participating in future. For institutions like NATO, this view suggests that institutional "stickiness" and "path dependency" can secure its survival with some adaptations. The key assumption of these scholars is that states are concerned with absolute gains and mutual gain outcomes are possible from collective problem-solving endeavours. By contrast, realists claim that states are competitively motivated and only ever interested in relative gains.

In the transatlantic context, the desire for collective problem-solving collaboration has motivated a wide spectrum of EU-US security endeavours; from cyber-security working groups to cargo-screening processes, to bank and passenger data sharing arrangements (Hamilton 2010). In the economic field, networks of transatlantic actors interact regularly in transatlantic business dialogues (TABD) and initial contacts are underway on establishing a transatlantic free trade partnership. This will no doubt be a lengthy process with no guarantee of success but these real-life examples provide support for scholars arguing that the multi-faceted nature of EU-US collaboration should be acknowledged as significant. This activity goes well beyond traditional alliances to encompass partnerships, agreements, structured dialogues, working groups and informal networks. There remains a debate between neoliberal institutionalists and liberals more generally about the preferences guiding such behavior, whether it is primarily motivated by the institutional effects derived from prior inter-state agreements (the neoliberal institutionalist view) or whether such cooperation results from complex interdependence between states which in turn is determined by the transmission of competing domestic preferences (liberal intergovernmentalist view).

8. Realist Scenarios for the Alliance: Collapse, Drift, Compete or Persist?

Realists are often accused of being uniformly pessimistic about the Atlantic Alliance but the debate is somewhat more nuanced. At one extreme, John Mearsheimer (1990) claimed that, in the absence of the Soviet Union as a unifying external threat, NATO would rapidly collapse and the Atlantic Alliance more broadly disintegrate as the US would divest itself of its costly commitments to Europe. Even more alarming, this would lead to a resurgence of violence on the continent:

"It is the Soviet threat that provides the glue that holds NATO together. Take away that offensive threat and the United States is likely to abandon the Continent, whereupon the defensive alliance it has headed for forty years may disintegrate. This would bring an end to the peaceful bipolar order that has characterized Europe for the past 45 years." (Mearsheimer 1990: 52)

Others, such as Waltz, perhaps chastened by several years of NATO expansion, were more measured in their comments. Waltz correctly identified America's unwillingness to continue to bear the burden of heavy troop commitments in Europe and wrote that all indicators suggest that NATO would disappear, if not immediately, then soon in the future: "NATO's days are not numbered but its years are" (Waltz 1993: 76). In short, he as well as many other realists are convinced that, while the Western Alliance may persist for some time, a transatlantic drift is inevitable (Waltz 1993; Walt 1998; Layne 1993). The reasons offered for the time-lag in the dissolution of the Atlantic Alliance are several: the US still has many benefits to offer its European allies, whereas the Europeans are said to have become accustomed to their easy lives with the US bearing many burdens. Yet balancing is sure to return, even if such a development is difficult to perceive at present (Waltz 1993: 76). Questions of how the alliances will dissolve and in what timeframe remain however unanswered.

But not all realists are uniformly pessimistic. Writing in the mid-1990s, Robert Art argued that the Alliance's hidden function was to mitigate security competition among European states and facilitate European integration. With interdependence comes vulnerability but this is diminished when there is a benevolent external party guaranteeing collective security. For this reason, he argued, the Alliance would endure. The US is still required as a committed ally by Europeans, Art argues, because they need a "night watchman" to guard against any re-nationalization or competitive security maximisation. The US presence reduces fears about relative power gains in the context of political interdependence:

"… the wish that the United States stay is the most potent evidence available that Western Europe's governments still do not trust themselves to avoid the worst excesses of their past." (Art 1996: 6)

Writing ten years later, Art argued that the need for an American night watchman had not diminished and remained a key factor motivating European support for the alliance, although now it was primarily the fear among Eastern European states of a resurgent and assertive Russia that was the key source of anxiety (Art 2006: 112). Once again, external threats were invoked as the drivers of alliance formation and longevity.

This explains European commitment to the Alliance but what of the American interest in its survival? Once again, the neo-classical realists appear to offer more answers, albeit with less parsimony. Viewing alliances as mechanisms to manage inter-state relations (rather than primarily to balance external threats) is one neo-classical perspective that suggests that the US may continue to support the Atlantic Alliance because it allows it to place constraints on its European allies with their consent (Pressman 2006). American anxiety about the development of autonomous defence capabilities within the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework was no secret during the 1990s.[5] US officials were keen to stress that NATO must remain the pre-eminent forum for European defence cooperation and that the "3 Ds" (no diminution of NATO, no discrimination against non-EU NATO members and no duplication of NATO assets) must govern any such endeavor (Albright 1998). Alliances as tools for "internally balancing" allied capabilities can explain why the US continues to invest in

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5 For official statements of US concern see speeches of William Taft (US Permanent Representative to NATO), February-March 1991; Reginald Bartholomew (Under Secretary of State) memorandum to European Governments, February 1991; US Dept. of Defence Defense Planning Guidance Memorandum, 18 February 1992; Remarks of US Permanent Representative to NATO on the subject of EU military autonomy (reported by Judy Dempsey in "NATO urged to challenge European defense plan", The Financial Times, 17 October 2003.)

and publicly commit to the Alliance. NATO institutionalises US leadership of the Atlantic powers and binds European militaries into collective operational frameworks making alternative arrangements more burdensome. This agenda perhaps represents something of a bridge between realism and the institutional perspectives discussed earlier; retaining the assumption of rational, security-maximising states but accepting the constraining role that institutions can have as part of an architecture of managing inter-state relations.

In stark contrast to such optimists, some realists have moved beyond predictions of transatlantic drift to suggest that Europe may emerge in its own right to balance against US dominance. Writing in 1993, Waltz argued that it would be irrational for a reunited Germany to choose to remain dependant on the US for its security: "A reunited, economically powerful Germany will seek military power and influence to match its economic might" (Waltz 1993: 65). This statement demonstrates yet again the realist assumption that states are unitary rational actors with uniform preferences derived from anarchy. Waltz's analysis is devoid of any consideration of the domestic and ideational particularities of post-war Germany. These would of course be central to any liberal or constructivist analysis of German foreign policy.

CSDP has also been labelled as an early sign of "soft balancing" behaviour (Pape 2005; Art 2006; Posen 2006). For these writers, CSDP demonstrates a fear of dependence on the US and a desire for security autonomy arising from the pressures of the anarchic system (Jones 2007). Most other realists disagree, arguing that CSDP is not an attempt to counter-balance but merely "leash-slipping" – attempting to increase autonomy and hedge against the uncertainty of US support in the future. (Walt 2009: 108). In this vein, defence autonomy is seen as a European attempt to gain greater leverage over the US *within* the alliance, rather than to hard balance against it. As Kissinger (1999) put it, "The sole remaining European motive for developing a capacity to act autonomously is to escape American tutelage and increase European bargaining power."

This view implicitly accepts Walt's adapted structural argument that the way in which the US exercises power and its geographical isolation make it that most unusual creature: an unthreatening great power. In this light, rather than seeking to balance against the US, Europeans will seek to ameliorate their position by further institutionalising the Alliance and ensuring the "unipole" does not simply impose decisions upon them (Walt 2009: 116). In response, the US will avoid highly institutionalized multilateral settings that tame its power, instead opting for ad hoc coalitions of the willing. It will choose allies not based on history, ideology, or culture but rather based on which allies will be most compliant (Walt 2009: 117). The stronger the unipole, the more selective it can be in these choices. The most-cited example of this behaviour was the ad hoc "coalition of the willing" and the quote by former Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that "the mission determines the coalition". This presents us with a tension that remains unresolved: are these divergent strategies irreconcilable? For some this is inevitable but there are no clues as to when the rupture will happen.

9. Liberalism's Mixed Optimism

By contrast, liberals predict little European anxiety about the US's power position and no significant yearning for a fully autonomous military capacity. The key significant variables for liberals all indicate positive prospects for the transatlantic relationship (Posen 2006). As stable, liberal democracies with market economies, the US and Europe enjoy a high level of two-way trade and investment, shared security institutions and an ever increasing list of collaborative problem-solving initiatives. The shared democratic values of the US and Europe, together with liberal elites and leaders, mean that the US is simply not seen as threatening, and balancing does not arise as a prospect (Owen 2002). Transatlantic institutions, chief among them NATO, guarantee collective security

and reduce uncertainty about the future actions of all members. While there was much hand-wringing in the early 2000s about divergent strategic cultures and European distaste with America's "aggressive unilateralism" (Kagan 2002), the last ten years has seen a mellowing of tensions and many examples of collaboration in security matters.[6] Indeed rising and dissipating tensions are perhaps more correctly viewed as part of a cyclical pattern of crisis in transatlantic relations that is hardly new (Lundestad 2008).

Democratic Peace Theory reaffirms this positive outlook. Both as fellow democracies and as each other's principal trade and investment partners, the US and Europe appear bound within a cooperative virtuous circle. As Gilpin (1987: 31) put it, "the mutual benefits of trade and expanding interdependence among national economies will tend to foster cooperative relations."

Finally, in ideational terms, post-WWII Europe is seen as a continent where the trauma of conflict has shaped the attitude of elites to opt for institutional engagement and the rule of law to settle conflicts, rather than force. CSDP, rather than an attempt to militarily balance against US dominance is seen by some normative writers as a regional peace-keeper and a force for stability in the neighbourhood; a requirement that the Balkans Wars made clear still existed. Some liberals even argue that CSDP represents an opportunity for Europe to develop a comparative advantage in civilian crisis management and peacekeeping. Combined with its large humanitarian capacity, European civilian power could partner with the US's hard power capabilities to strike a new, more outward-looking transatlantic bargain (Moravcsik 2003).

Liberals appear less concerned with the *stability* of the alliance than with its continued relevance in global politics. Liberals believe that, even without a common threat, Europe and the US will continue to need shared security and economic institutions. However, in the face of emerging economic powers, particularly China, many liberals fear that the Western-designed institutions of the post-WWII era may not be sustainable. The current liberal institutional structure is clearly a legacy of a time when the US was "the hegemonic organizer and manager of the Western liberal order – and its alliances, currency, technology and markets" (Ikenberry 2009). In the context of a flatter global power structure, these writers are concerned with the rise of new diffuse threats such as climate change, nuclear proliferation and malevolent non-state actors. The western-designed institutions and alliances of the late twentieth century appear ill equipped to deal with these new realities (Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006). Not only are institutions such as the UN Security Council, where the West is over-represented due to the concomitant presence of France and the UK as permanent members, or the international financial institutions (IFIs) in which the US and Europe still largely call the shots, seen as unfit for purpose, they are increasingly viewed as illegitimate. Indeed, "if Western-dominated institutions fail to adjust to geopolitical realities, they court a legitimacy crisis that will cripple global regimes" (Patrick 2009: 82).

From an American perspective, such risks call for a response that is less transatlantic-centred and less rigidly institutional. Without dispensing with formal alliances such as NATO and other traditional institutions, writers such as Patrick argue that the US should be "choosing from the 'prix fixe' menu of formal organizations, and ordering up an '*à la carte*' coalition of like-minded nations" (Patrick 2009: 78). While the reliable institutions and alliances of old offer action-ready capabilities, technical expertise, and international legitimacy, *ad hoc* coalitions can offer flexibility, like-mindedness, and quick decision-making. The à la carte approach does not suggest that the network of transatlantic alliances and partnerships are redundant but rather that the US will not confine its options for multilateral collaboration to the Atlantic area. This kind of institutional pluralism can help in sharing the burdens of international problem solving and can also provide healthy competition to conventional institutions.

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6 Recent operations in Libya and Mali saw relatively swift transatlantic cooperation in response to security crises.

10. The Answers Are Not Structural

While there is little common ground between the theories on whether or why the Atlantic Alliance will endure, evolve or collapse, all theories accept that alternative forms of alignment will proliferate. Yet informal and transient modes of alignment may be poor substitutes for the deterrence/balancing role that realists attributed to Alliances, as collective security commitments are seen as less absolute. Likewise, institutionally weaker partnerships imply looser constraints on partners to comply with rules and more opportunities for cheating or defection. Alignment literature will have to acknowledge that the very nature of alignment itself is changing.

Within Realism, it appears clear that the experience of unipolarity has shown up the limits of purely structural explanations. Unipolarity does not predict how the US will behave or how others will respond: "It matters who the unipole is, where it is located, and how it chooses to use its power" (Walt 2009: 120). In spite of growing awareness of the rising economic power of China in particular, the fact that US defence spending still exceeds the defense expenditure of the rest of the World combined means that – at least by realist metrics – the structure of global power will remain unipolar into the near future (SIPRI 2012). Brooks and Wohlforth (Art et al. 2006) argue that realists are best advised to acknowledge that the unique and unprecedented nature of American unipolarity poses an inescapable challenge to balance of power theory. Rather than softening up the concept of balancing to include such innocuous behaviour as intra-alliance bargaining strategies, realists should accept that any useful theory must be falsifiable and that the unprecedented era of peaceful, non-competitive unipolarity must be acknowledged as that rare moment when balance of power is simply proved wrong (Art et al. 2006: 191). Those theorists at the margins of realism, who investigate some of the same unit-level variables that liberals favour, have found arguments that go some way to explaining why the alliance persists and why it might continue to thrive in new ways. Notwithstanding, some structural realists will no doubt look for early signs of balancing as the oft-prophesied multipolar era appears to emerge.

For liberals, there is no shortage of evidence of policy initiatives aiming to widen the field of transatlantic collaboration in meeting global challenges. Each of the networks, dialogues, working groups and partnerships offers opportunities for illuminating empirical work into the dynamics of transatlantic cooperation. Each new initiative provides further evidence of a partnership that continues to identity new cooperative possibilities. The questions liberal scholars must now address are: how can this relationship be nurtured and furthered in the context of so many emerging diverse challenges? How can transatlantic cooperation be integrated within a wider alignment of liberal states beyond Atlantic shores? And what is the optimal institutional framework to commit this wider community to meeting the growing expectations for international cooperation, intervention and threat mitigation in flexible and legitimate ways?

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The Project

In an era of global flux, emerging powers and growing interconnectedness, transatlantic relations appear to have lost their bearings. As the international system fragments into different constellations of state and non-state powers across different policy domains, the US and the EU can no longer claim exclusive leadership in global governance. Traditional paradigms to understand the transatlantic relationship are thus wanting. A new approach is needed to pinpoint the direction transatlantic relations are taking. TRANSWORLD provides such an approach by a) ascertaining, differentiating among four policy domains (economic, security, environment, and human rights/democracy), whether transatlantic relations are drifting apart, adapting along an ad hoc cooperation-based pattern, or evolving into a different but resilient special partnership; b) assessing the role of a re-defined transatlantic relationship in the global governance architecture; c) providing tested policy recommendations on how the US and the EU could best cooperate to enhance the viability, effectiveness, and accountability of governance structures.

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