

# TRANSWORLD

THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP AND THE FUTURE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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Historically, the system designed to ensure international security has its roots in the evolution of the European-centred balance of power into the transatlantic-promoted liberal order. Because the liberal order is so dependent on Western (US) power, the emerging multipolarity undeniably poses a challenge to it. Yet, even the most restrictive among the non-Western powers such as China and Russia have a stake in its endurance, meaning that multipolarity is not intrinsically incompatible with the liberal order. If centrifugal dynamics prevail, the transatlantic ability to shape security governance will diminish,

largely as a consequence of Europe's modest hard power and lack of strategic cohesion. On the contrary, if centripetal dynamics prevail, the Europeans can make use not only of their individual assets to address functional threats such as terrorism and regional crises but also exploit the soft power potential of the EU, whereby US power gains greater outreach and impact. Because US power is still so strong and the US-European partnership still enduring, the capacity of transatlantic relations to shape security governance has not vanished. Multipolarity has made the use of that capacity a more complicated exercise, but not necessarily a less effective one.

## Transatlantic Relations and Security Governance

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EU    US    Governance    International security    Multipolarity

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## Introduction

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“Governance” is a term of recent conceptualisation. Partly because of that, it is not entirely free of indeterminacy. The term refers to a complex web of political interactions unfolding on multiple levels – institutionalised and informal, governmental and non-governmental, global and regional, public and private, etc. – and displaying both fragmenting and centralising dynamics (Peterson and Müftüler-Baç 2014). The co-existence of these conflicting trends derives from the fact that governance is a system of rules and practices which is as much characterised by the absence of a formal hierarchy as it is by the interdependence of the interacting units.

In keeping with this broad formal definition, a study of a system of governance is primarily concerned with detailing and illustrating the various mechanisms set up by the units to organise collective action and address systemic problems. This is however only a first step. A study of a governance system cannot but extend to analysing the specific kind of interaction in which the units are involved, whereby the position occupied by the units in the system, as well as the degree to which they depend on one another to make the system work, emerge as fundamental research questions.

This is particularly the case when the object of the analysis is the governance of international security, a dimension in which the extreme differentiation of the units in terms of preferences and resources is in itself a systemic problem. It follows that an analysis of international security governance is first and foremost an analysis of how the interacting units manage their own relations – governance mechanisms look quite different if such relations are based on cooperation or on competition. Competition or cooperation patterns are structurally linked to the converging or diverging preferences of the units as well as to the capacity of the units to satisfy those preferences. Each unit occupies a structurally different position in the security system because preferences and capacities of the units vary in the most extreme fashion. Hence, the system emerges from the interaction not so much of all units but of its most resourceful or, to use a term more in line with security studies, most powerful ones.

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Since the middle of the last century, and especially following the end of the Cold War, the United States (US) has been at the epicentre of international security – its vast political, economic and military resources (still) unmatched. Hence, the set-up of today's security governance reflects to a great extent US preferences as well as its relations with those countries that possess resources large enough to impact its action. These other countries include rivals but also partners and allies, through which US power expands and endures. Thus far, no partnership has been more important for the US than the one with European countries, whereby today's security governance complex is largely a result of transatlantic cooperation. Illustrating how this relationship has played out historically and analysing how it can continue to shape security governance in a world in which non-Western powers are on the rise is the goal of this paper.

The paper is divided into four sections. We first provide a historical account of how institutions in the transatlantic area and its parts (Europe) evolved from mechanisms of conflict management, against the background of the emergence of the modern state, to regimes with globalising ambitions taking the form of international organisation. In the second part, we turn to strategies pursued by the US and Europe – in cooperation with one another or independently – to shape regional and global security governance after the end of the Cold War. We identify prevalent patterns of multilateral or unilateral and formal or informal solutions to security problems, and attempt to trace them back to their strategic and normative premises. In the third part, we identify the elements of tension, emanating from the transatlantic partners themselves as well as from rising non-Western powers, which threaten the functioning of today's security governance. In the fourth section, we finally attempt to determine how the transatlantic relationship can still contribute to security governance in the changed circumstances brought about by the incipient multipolarity.

## 1. From Continental Balance of Power to a Threshold of Global Hegemony

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From the advent of modernity until the 20th century when, in Zbigniew Brzezinski's words, Europe changed from *subject* to *object* of global international relations (Brzezinski 1997:5), European powers imposed a "diagram" on world politics as a certain form of knowledge that made exercise of their power both intelligible and possible. German philosopher Carl Schmitt famously conceptualised this diagram as a *nomos*, a territorial order in which the "new world" (i.e., non-European) was rendered a space where brutal wars for control over land could take place, but in Europe, where war also remained an important instrument of change, it would be a "*bracketed*" war. In other words, recognising that war was inevitable, its bracketing under what Schmitt describes – and certainly to some extent idealises (Koskeniemi 2004) – as *jus publicum Europeanum* rationalised the war by limiting the legitimate authority that could wage it to the state (Schmitt 2003, Odysseos and Petitto 2007).

It was this basic norm that had conditioned the emergence and functioning of a *balance of power*, the "best and most solid foundation of a neutral friendship," in the words of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) that contributed to ending the War of the Spanish Succession. A metaphor borrowed from statics and accounting, balance of power made a discursive *entrée* in the late 15th century with regard to Italian city states, and soon developed into a regulative ideal that sought not to prevent war, but to protect sovereignty and political survival of the recognised European powers (Haslam 2002). The balance of power at this time, therefore, stood for an informal configuration regulating interactions in the multipolar regional (continental) environment, even as war among European powers was steadily becoming more frequent, lasted longer, involved more men and gained a global dimension (Parker 2005). Needless to say, the protection of sovereignty that the balance of powers was meant

to guarantee would only be extended to selected actors, the great powers.

The regulative ideal of the balance of power would remain internalised in European powers' foreign policies until the latter part of the 19th century when the continental map was redrawn following in particular the unification of Germany. The main exception to this state of play was Napoleon's bid for hegemony. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), European powers attempted to institutionalise the balance of power in terms of a cooperative great power condominium ("concert") with the added element of solidarity in preserving their regimes' internal stability.<sup>1</sup> For a (short) while, the idea of the concert of powers seemed to enjoy support from all the great powers; however, after the demise of Lord Castlereagh (1822), the main supporter of the concert of power in the British government, London returned to continental balancing as its strategy and the (institutionalised) congress diplomacy receded.

A fundamental transformation of European security governance in terms both of its formalisation and universalisation came in the aftermath of World War I (WWI) with the foundation of the international organisation, notably the League of Nations. The League's final design was more modest than proposals by its early advocates (cf. Dickinson 1916 and 1917, Bryce 1917). In the end, the main executive body of the League, the Council, would reflect the traditional concert idea: in the words of then US President Woodrow Wilson, the Council was to become a site of the "*community of power*" as opposed to the erstwhile continental *balance of power*. But it was to comprise the existing powers, rather than be independent from them.

Despite its modest institutional design and limited membership, the League was a revolutionary step toward transforming global security governance. Establishing an international organisation with the aim to formalise global security management and ensure peaceful change was a watershed in terms of how the Western nations – including the US, instrumental in the League's conception despite its eventual decision not to become a member – strove to define the ways in which war was (or was not) waged around the world. Perhaps the most significant example of this transformation was the very abolition of the traditional institution of war as a means of change – through the personal indictment of Wilhelm II (accused of causing WWI), the Geneva Protocol (1924) and ultimately the Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928). Another example, less often mentioned, concerns the designing of a comprehensive regime to combat terrorism which was subjected to a robust international debate for the first time following the Marseille *attentat* (1934), in which the Yugoslav King Alexander and French Foreign Minister Barthou perished (Zlaticar 1975, Saul 2006). The objective of this regime was to contain subversive political violence within the boundaries of nations where it originated, and thus to protect international order (the ultimate referent of security in this debate). For that purpose, the 1937 *Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism* envisioned universal normalisation (establishing an act of terrorism as a criminal offence in municipal law everywhere, subjecting it to same punishment and preventing special protection of "terrorists" as political criminals), as well as creation of universal and extraterritorial means of communication, surveillance and punishment of terrorism; thus closing potential jurisdictional lacunae was to be achieved through the establishment of the International Criminal Court by a separate but related convention (Ditrych 2013 and 2014).

The League also became considerably involved in the area of arms control and disarmament, covering both conventional and nonconventional (chemical) weapons. It was in the latter category where it achieved most success, with the conclusion of the Geneva Protocol (1925) prohibiting the use of poisonous and asphyxiating gases. The regime prohibiting these weapons was far from comprehensive: it only prohibited use of these gases and hence was not a disarmament regime, and some signatories reserved the right to use chemical weapons in

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1 For a comprehensive account see Kissinger (1973).

self-defence or claimed to be bound by provisions of the protocol only *vis-à-vis* its other signatories. That said, and occasional later breaches notwithstanding,<sup>2</sup> the League was instrumental in establishing the “chemical weapons taboo” (Price 1995).

The League of Nations fell into oblivion as the World War II (WWII), even more violent than the previous one, shook the world. The counterterrorism regime was never established, and the League’s attempts at disarmament or arms control scored only limited success. But all these would serve as antecedents for what followed. The global assemblage of (counter)terrorism that evolved particularly after 9/11 contained some practices envisioned in the 1930s. While the League of Nations’ world disarmament conference (1932) was a failure, some techniques such as inspection regimes that were to be put in practice in later arms control agreements would first be outlined here; the same was the case with initial efforts to supervise trade in arms in the 1920s, e.g. through public export licences (Webster 2012). Finally, the United Nations (UN) as one of the key organisations of the Western liberal order (again, with a globalising ambition) developed after WWII – in addition to the Bretton Woods institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) – was modelled partly after the League. Following its first attempt at order-building in the aftermath of WWI, the US now engaged in engineering a rule-based order (cf. Ikenberry 2011) as a key component of its foreign policy, which was integrated into the strategy of containment of Soviet expansive tendencies (Gaddis 2005b).

The role of the US as a pacifier in the developing world was controversial, given Washington’s policies from Latin America to the Middle East (including its *de facto* support for the occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel following the 1967 Six Days’ War) and Africa (with its support for the South African regime in spite of the apartheid system). In the global North, with Europe now divided and reduced to a chessboard rather than a global actor, the US however managed to contain conflict through economic assistance (Marshall Plan) and a system of military bases and alliances, the most important of which was the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Unlike Moscow, Washington did not form an empire, although US influence over its European allies and overseas deployments seemed assets that only empires could flaunt (Ignatieff 2003). If empire it was, however, it was one of “invitation,” at least in Western Europe (Lundestad 2003). A case can be made that the US *hegemonia* (rather than *arché*, domination) actually facilitated the exercise of its power rather than limited it, by designing an apparatus of global liberal governance institutions and practices.

The map of the security governance architecture during the Cold War therefore could be sketched as follows. In the West, security governance rested on an economic system (initially with a globalising ambition to forestall future economic crises and thus remove causes of war) and formal regional arrangements such as NATO and European integration institutions (combining traditional intergovernmentalism with elements of supranationalism in a new “diagram,” albeit regional rather than global) emerging from the interplay of both securitisation and desecuritisation of continental conflict (Wæver 1998). In the “second world,” the more imperial (*arché*-based) arrangement prevailed, as demonstrated by the Soviet Union’s “disciplining” interventions in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). Yugoslavia and China were the only members of the communist bloc that fell out with Moscow, both to an extent as a result of the US containment strategy. The bridge between these two regional architectures was formed by a “bipartisan” system of security management evolving between Washington and Moscow – a “concert” of a kind – manifest in general mutual respect for their respective spheres of influence and in arms control arrangements based on a shared understanding of the benefits of maintaining strategic stability. Within the Global North, the transatlantic area was heavily

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2 These include, notably, the use of chemical weapons by Italy in Abyssinia (1935), Japan in China (1937-1945), Egypt in Yemen civil war (1963-1967), the US in Indochina (1960s and 1970s), Iraq against Iran and the Kurdish population (1980s), and Syria (2013). See Zanders (2013).

regulated, reflecting the remarkable solidity of the US-European bargain. Indeed, despite a number of tensions and “swings” – including the arrangements for fairly sharing defence burdens, fears of a great power condominium between Washington and Moscow or alternatively of withdrawal on the part of Washington’s partners, concerns about a resurgent Germany, etc. – the transatlantic relationship remained strong. The Global South was much less regulated than the North, and here, in what can be seen as a temporary restitution of the *nomos*, wars reminiscent of colonial enterprises (or colonial wars *tout court*) could be waged (Ditrych 2014:71). Unlike the transatlantic area, in Indochina, the Middle East or North Africa the transatlantic partners’ policies could also considerably diverge. The top layer of the global security governance architecture was the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as an international institution, which however under the straitjacket of Cold War competition was severely incapacitated.

## 2. Post-Cold War Governance Architectures

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The geopolitical sea change that was the end of the Cold War dramatically transformed the security landscape in which the US and its allies operated. The main security challenge confronting the West was, to put it simply, to “win the peace” (Ruggie 1996). The collapse of the Soviet *arché*, or domination, exposed a vast area spanning Eastern Europe and Central Asia to political fragmentation and instability. The challenge of re-creating security governance in the former Soviet space (and beyond) was indeed daunting, but the West did not have to start from scratch to put a response together. The security or security-related structures that underpinned the containment strategy – the US’s alliances in Europe and Asia, the European integration process, and the expansion of rules-based arrangements (particularly in the non-proliferation field) – were for the most part the same that undergirded the liberal order the US and its allies had been promoting since the end of WWII. It seems natural then that the West’s approach to post-Cold War security governance has mostly (though not entirely) consisted in the expansion and adaptation to an evolving threat environment of the liberal order hard security components. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US had unrivalled material resources, the prestige and authority deriving from its status as victor in the Cold War, and extensive systems of alliances and partnerships, most notably with European countries (Keohane et al. 1993, Ruggie 1994). All these assets have since been mobilised to build a composite set of security governance mechanisms which operate on different levels (regional, global), in different dimensions (material, normative), and in different frameworks (formal, informal).

### 2.1 NATO and the EU

Arguably the single greatest contribution made by the West to the shaping of today’s security governance system has been the expansion and upgrade of Euro-Atlantic frameworks for collective security action, notably NATO and the European Union (EU). Both organisations can boast some indisputable accomplishments in guaranteeing Europe’s security. In the early 1990s, German re-unification was still a matter of concern for many in Western Europe, the peaceful transition to democracy of Eastern European states uncertain, and the risk that the ethnic conflicts that were bloodying the former Yugoslavia would spill over into the surrounding region real. The creation of the EU – a dramatic upgrade of the European integration process, which for the first time formally encompassed security responsibilities – and the dual enlargement of the EU itself and of NATO have put these concerns to rest (Nugent 2004, Rosamond 2014, Wallander 2000). A re-unified Germany has been permanently anchored to an established European system of governance, the potential of resurgent nationalism in Eastern Europe to trigger inter- and intra-state conflicts and derail democratisation processes undermined, the Balkans stabilised and progressively integrated.

Western conflict management in the Balkans was a transformative experience because it consolidated the view that Europe's long-term security and the expansion of the EU and NATO were inseparable (Goldgeier 1999, McCalla 1996, Nugent 2004). It was also instrumental in influencing Western thinking about how to cope with regional crises and mass atrocities whenever traditional post-WWII formal security mechanisms, ranging from UN-brokered mediation efforts to UN-mandated peacekeeping missions, proved ineffective. The novelty for the Atlantic Alliance was that it would engage in military undertakings whose purpose had nothing to do with territorial defence or deterrence against hostile countries. The rationale of NATO's "out-of-area" operations rested instead on the need to defend loosely defined Western security interests in regional stability as well as to address normative concerns (Yost 1998, Kaplan 2004). Finally, the experience of the Balkan wars worked as a powerful drive towards the creation of an EU autonomous crisis management capacity.

Lacking the hard power of NATO (i.e., of the US), the EU has shaped security governance mechanisms mostly by developing non-military assets, ranging from diplomacy to various forms of civilian assistance, including police training, judicial and security sector reform, border management, and still others (Smith 2002, Merlingen and Ostrauskaite 2006, Dobbins et al. 2008). The gradual, if incomplete, emergence of the EU as a political-security player has augmented the transatlantic ability to promote security governance in two respects. Firstly, it has enabled deeper and more extensive US-European cooperation in non-military aspects of security, for instance amplifying the impact of coercive transatlantic diplomacy (particularly when sanctions are part of it), but also providing larger venues for consultation and action on challenges as diverse as non-proliferation, terrorism, maritime security, energy security or organised crime (Peterson et al. 2005, Peterson and Steffenson 2009, Schmidt 2008, Alcaro 2011). Secondly, the EU has been an invaluable asset in enlarging and improving multilateral security arrangements, in cooperation with the US but also as an independent driving force for change (Bouchard et al. 2013).

## 2.2 Multilateral Treaties and Institutions

The multilateral (institutional) security system was a focus of transatlantic action mostly in the 1990s. The US and European countries concentrated their energies on two issues, one regional and the other functional in nature. The first was the security of "wider Europe," in which all former Soviet space was included; the second regarded arms control and non-proliferation regimes. A considerable overlap existed between these two focal points, since both affected the West's relations with post-Soviet Russia. The creation of pan-European mechanisms for security cooperation – attained, on paper, by the conversion of the old Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) into a full-fledged organisation (OSCE) and the establishment of a permanent platform for NATO-Russia dialogue – ultimately served the purpose of committing Moscow to Europe's security governance and cooperation with the West. The same applied to arms control arrangements such as the attempt to upgrade the 1990s Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, the OSCE-managed Open Skies agreement (in force since 2002, it allows for mutual aerial surveillance), or the US-led Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) arrangements that removed all Soviet-era nuclear weapons from Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine (Shields and Potter 1997).

The CTR initiative was a major success in terms of European security but also of non-proliferation, and fit well into the broader picture of feverish activism on arms control that characterised the 1990s. Some historic results were achieved, notably the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995 and the entry into force in 1997 of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Progress was more modest in other instances, sometimes because treaties fell short of the necessary amount of ratifications (such as the agreement

prohibiting all nuclear tests), sometimes because membership gaps reduced their effectiveness (as is the case with the Ottawa convention banning anti-person land mines or the treaty banning cluster bombs). Arms control was given a late boost in 2010 when the US and Russia struck the so-called New START agreement on the reduction of deployed nuclear warheads and delivery systems.

On non-proliferation issues, the West could count on a generally, albeit certainly not universally, responsive international audience, since non-proliferation and arms control had been mainstreamed into the international normative discourse since the 1920s. Not so regarding the use of force. Here, the Western role in shaping the normative context legitimising armed intervention has been highly controversial, and yet no less crucial.

Once again, the Balkan wars stand out as a turning point, because it was in that context that Western leaders stated that humanitarian concerns could be given priority over the century-old non-intervention norm and intervened in Kosovo absent a UNSC mandate. Humanitarian intervention never managed to get acceptance beyond the West (Matthews 2008), but it nonetheless sparked the international debate that eventually produced the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm (Bellamy 2011). With R2P, formally endorsed at the 2005 UN World Summit, the principle has been established that sovereignty implies a duty to protect civilians and can therefore be set aside if that duty is neglected. While R2P's implementation remains problematic (not least due to the use the West has made of it, as discussed below; Tocci 2014), the norm has wrapped international security discourses and practices with yet another distinctively liberal/Western layer – in origin, if not in essence (Doyle 2011, Tocci 2014).

In part, the Western push to expand the legitimate space in which force could be used was an attempt to offset the UN Security Council's rigidities and inconsistencies. That notwithstanding, the UN has remained a critical term of reference for the EU and, in a more ambivalent fashion, for the US as well. Thanks to Western financial support, UN peacekeeping, particularly in Africa, has greatly expanded (Dobbins et al. 2005). The EU has anchored its crisis management role to the UN, in that it has made UNSC endorsement a formal condition for EU military missions. Following the rift over Kosovo, NATO has established formal relations with the UN and has ever since acted under a UN mandate. Western support has also been crucial for the evolution of international criminal justice, although transatlantic cohesion on the issue has been wanting, with the US preferring ad hoc mechanisms (such as the courts for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda) and the EU supporting a permanent institution such as the International Criminal Court (ICC).

## 2.3 Informal Arrangements

Beyond the expansion and adjustment of formal security arrangements, both transatlantic and multilateral, US and European action aimed at strengthening security governance has played out also in the dimension of non-institutionalised cooperation. The latter has taken the form of "coalitions of the willing" and contact groups.

Because it is associated with the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the coalition of the willing has generally earned a poor reputation. However, the Iraq war represents more an exception than the rule, in the sense that the coalition that supported the invasion was conceived of as a *replacement* of a multilateral option. Other instances of informal coalitions, designed to *integrate* or *complement* formal arrangements, have a better record. Largely the result of the effort that US policy planners made to adapt to the post-9/11 security environment, these initiatives are meant to tackle multi-faceted, unconventional threats such as international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). These measures, which include the US-led Proliferation



Security Initiative (PSI) or the US-Russian-launched Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), represent a relatively new architecture of security governance. They aim to promote cooperation between law enforcement agencies and close loopholes in domestic criminal systems, thereby fostering convergence and outlining the initial contours of an international policing system (Winner 2005, Ronzitti 2009, Alcaro 2009). More importantly, they have generated a growing sense of international ownership and contributed to routinising international consultation on nuclear proliferation and terrorism at the highest level, as attested by the establishment, again upon US initiative, of the bi-annual Nuclear Security Summits.

Coalitions of the willing also take the form of “minilateral” mechanisms of consultation dealing with regional crises (Naím 2009). The US and Europe set the pace in the 1990s when they formed the Contact Group (including the US, France, Germany, Britain, Italy and Russia) to oversee the pacification of the Balkans (Gegout 2000, Schwegmann 2003 and 2005). Contact groups have since become a regular practice. Examples abound: there are groups on Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Syria and other issues still. Sometimes contact groups work as forums for coordinating crisis management efforts among a large number of stakeholders, including both states and international organisations. Otherwise, they can be smaller groups that decide strategies and policies (like the “original” Contact Group), oversee negotiations (like the Middle East Quartet) or directly engage in negotiations. Into this latter category fall the Six-Party Talks on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and, most notably, the P5+1 group dealing with Iran’s nuclear issue, comprising all five UNSC permanent members, plus Germany and the EU. The transatlantic partners bear responsibility for the development of this important pillar of the security governance architecture: with the notable exception of the Six-Party Talks, a transatlantic component is present in basically all instances of contact groups. But for the West the importance of this instrument extends beyond improvements in international crisis management. Contact groups have also created avenues for the US and Europe to engage with non-Western powers.

Managing relations with emerging global players, particularly countries with a history of antagonistic relations with the West such as Russia and China, has been a lingering concern. Long before the 2014 Ukraine crisis it had become clear that the strategy of co-optation of Russia through the inclusion of it in the Group of Seven (G7) had run its course – as had the narrative of Russia’s democratisation that had underpinned the process (Alcaro and Alessandri 2010). Far from being co-opted, an ever more authoritarian Russia has fought back against what it considers undue Western influence and progressively defined its international profile in opposition to the US. China’s relations with the West have been less troubled, and yet the People’s Republic’s spectacular economic rise lends the latent US-Chinese competition in Asia-Pacific an even greater magnitude than West-Russia confrontation in Europe. In light of this, the importance of contact groups in terms of security governance is twofold, as they are not only a crisis management instrument but also a tool to manage relations between the great powers. Contact group members are expected to take the initiative, make choices and start actions, whereby responsibility for regional security is eventually extended also to countries with a limited tradition of pro-active crisis management, such as China. Moreover, selective cooperation on issues of mutual concern – such as Iran’s or North Korea’s nuclear plans – helps maintain a sense of mutual commitment and ease tensions between great powers.

Concluding this overview with a reference to great-powers relations seems only appropriate. The incipient multipolarity poses a significant challenge to the endurance of a security governance architecture which, by and large, still rests on the European, transatlantic and multilateral pillars of the liberal order (Peterson et al. 2012, Herd 2010). Causal connections, however, are hardly that linear in international relations. In fact, the liberal order is challenged not only from outside, but also from within. Sources of tension can be traced as much to its Western core as to its allegedly restive non-Western components.

## 3. Transatlantic and Multipolar Challenges to the Liberal Security Order

### 3.1 The Challenges from Within: Transatlantic Paradoxes

#### *US Power and the Liberal Order*

A first source of tension within the liberal order, and the system of security governance that relies on it, originates from Washington. The manner in which the US, alone and in cooperation with its allies, has contributed to post-Cold War security governance does not reflect a consistent design.

Under George H.W. Bush (1989-1993), the US briefly toyed with the idea of a “new world order” in which world powers would engage in non-adversarial relations and cooperate in the framework of the UNSC.

The Bill Clinton administration (1993-2001) viewed multilateralism as serving the cause of liberalism rather than a straightjacket on interstate rivalries, as Bush the elder did. A corollary of Clinton’s view was that the US could derogate from the multilateral canon on the use of force for the sake of the liberal cause, as it did in Kosovo in 1999. Clinton, for instance, could hold high the banner of the liberal cause because in the 1990s the pursuit of the US interest largely overlapped with the cause of liberalism. NATO’s enlargement and intervention in the Balkans contributed to Europe’s democratisation and pacification. Yet they also tightened the US grip on the continent – indeed, one of the consequences of NATO’s enlargement has been the marginalisation of frameworks such as the OSCE, in which the US does not enjoy the same hegemonic position it has in NATO, as instruments of security governance in Europe.

The George W. Bush administration (2001-2009) had less faith in the potential of liberal order institutions to ensure peace and serve US security interests, particularly in a new threat environment characterised by Islam-rooted terrorist groups ostensibly willing to inflict indiscriminate damage on US targets. Instrumentalism informed Bush’s view of multilateral institutions: agreements that constrained US room for manoeuvre, such as the ICC or the treaty banning all nuclear tests, were rejected; multilateral security bodies, including the UNSC and NATO, were used at will and if necessary dispensed with (Daalder 2003, Krauthammer 2003). Unsurprisingly, coalitions of the willing and informal arrangements led by the US proliferated under the younger Bush. Bush’s pursuit of unconstrained liberty of action, particularly during his first term, was a deviation from an established US post-WWII pattern balancing foreign policy independence and self-restraint. Yet, it was also in keeping with the older tradition of privileging US national interest over any alliances and international commitments (Zaborowski 2008). Bush brought this precept to an extreme conclusion, but the inherent tension between US national interest and the multilateral liberal order both predated and outlasted his presidency.

Barack Obama has a more nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of US power and the merit of multilateralism. His understanding of security governance is that it can only work if responsibility is extended to players other than the US. His view of formal alliances, international institutions and multilateral arrangements is accordingly fundamentally pragmatic (Indyk et al. 2012, Laïdi 2012). They are a tool to spur allies to supplement US capacity to shape events and to engage and call on competitors to complement that capacity. He has nonetheless made it clear, in words and more so in deeds, that multilateralism remains a means which the US can legitimately abstain from using. The US does not ask for permission to fly armed drones in sovereign countries’ airspace, nor has the transatlantic bond prevented the National Security Agency (NSA) from amassing information about European citizens. And if it comes to the use of force over Iran’s nuclear programme, the US will take the decision

in full autonomy, as it will keep on doing on anything related to its security so long as its hard power remains dominant.

Viewed from the perspective of security governance, these oscillations tell a straightforward story. While reflecting a lack of consensus in US foreign policy circles as to America's post-Cold War global role (Brzezinski 2007), they in fact confirm that the nexus between US power and the multilateral liberal order is not so much contingent but structural, and as conflictual as it is mutually constitutive. US power is augmented by and maintained through multilateral institutions and formal alliances rather than constrained by them. Without the systemic incentives provided by membership in NATO, for instance, US allies would have hardly been able to keep troops in Afghanistan for over ten years (Kreps 2010), nor would the US strategy to curb Iran's nuclear plans be effective without the involvement of the EU and the Security Council (Alcaro 2011). In both these two cases multilateral action has not come at the expense of US interests. In fact, it has mostly unfolded along US objectives, even though not at the speed or to the full extent that some in the US had wished.

The above makes the liberal order look schizophrenic. Based on multilateralism, the rule of law, a logic of absolute gains and a degree of democratisation of the international system (albeit not of its units), the liberal order is in theory conceived to be self-reliant. In reality, it is a both a reflection and an extension of US power. The paradox of American power – one of the many – is that the US is in itself an obstacle to a more perfect realisation of the liberal order, while at the same time being its ultimate guarantor. The consequences of this paradox are twofold. One is that regional organisations informed with liberal values but centred on US power may turn out to be brakes to, rather than promoters of, broader multilateral arrangements, as has been the case with the marginalisation of the OSCE by NATO in Europe and the Alliance's quarrel with the UN at the time of the Kosovo war. The second consequence is that the liberal order is regarded by non-Western powers as excessively privileging US interests, whereby the seed of a permanent conflict is planted.

### ***Europe, Multilateralism and US Power***

The tension between US power and the liberal order reverberates through the other partner in the transatlantic relationship, Europe. Albeit with varying intensity, strong commitment to multilateralism is in the DNA of all EU member states (Bouchard et al. 2013). The EU itself is an offspring of the liberal order – in fact, the EU's governance model, with its unique blend of intergovernmental and supranational policy-making, even transcends the liberal normative institutional framework, which is defined by rule of law-based cooperation among fully sovereign states. European readiness to accept constraints on national prerogatives has sometimes set them apart from the US on issues spanning the pact banning all nuclear tests, the ICC, or the anti-personnel mine and cluster bomb treaties. Reflecting their preference for cooperation and engagement is also the traditional reluctance of EU member states to support the use of force (again, with significant variations according to individual member states), particularly if not sanctioned by the Security Council. So deep is the link EU member states see between multilateralism and security governance that "effective multilateralism" became the catchphrase of the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), the very first time the Union embarked on a strategic thinking exercise (Biscop 2005, Ortega 2005). Thus far, however, the EU's record in making multilateralism an "effective" security governance mechanism is mixed at best. On the one hand, the Union has stood out as an active promoter of multilateral security arrangements; on the other, however, it has failed to equip itself with a capacity to provide security independent from US power, thereby perpetuating the latter's paradoxical relationship with the multilateral liberal order.

Admittedly, the EU has made an effort to transcend its nature as a purely civilian (Duchêne 1973) or normative (Manners 2002) power and has added a military pillar to its multilateralism-based approach to security governance. But whatever progress the Union has made in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its military corollary, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it remains a distant cry from being a political and military power (Nuttall 2000, Merlingen and Ostrauskaite 2006, Howorth 2014). The EU treaty explicitly states that NATO remains the cornerstone of the security policy of those EU member states that belong to it. CSDP missions, the majority of which are civilian rather than military, have generally been of a modest nature and of debatable impact (Howorth 2014). What is more important, the EU is unable to provide protection for all its own territory, a task with which most EU member states entrust NATO. Against this backdrop, the EU's stated foreign and security policy ambitions are dismissed as fanciful and its strategic thinking as almost non-existent.

The problem with this criticism is that it takes the EU's stated ambition to be a full-fledged security provider at face value. In reality, the EU is not so much a foreign and security policy actor in its own merit, as it is a foreign and security policy instrument – admittedly, a *sui generis* one – in the hands of its member states. As a collective entity, the EU certainly punches below its potential weight in the foreign policy field (Zielonka 1998, Hill 1993), but the reverse is true for each of its twenty-eight member states, the majority of which are small countries both territorially and demographically (Manners and Whitman 2000, Hill 1998). The EU's political-strategic feebleness is the flip-side of the increased political influence and vaster strategic outlook that its member states have gained thanks to their membership in the EU itself.

The case of the EU's largest countries, Britain, France and Germany, is telling in this regard. Their national strategic documents, which are a more precise map of European strategic preferences than the ESS, are filled with references to the EU and multilateralism. Yet multilateral settings (the EU, but also NATO and the UN) are either foreign policy options (in the case of France and Britain) or enabling frameworks (for Germany) for a nationally defined foreign policy. Unsurprisingly, these countries have opted for "minilateral" cooperation in the context of small contact groups when it has come to major security issues, such as the Balkan wars or Iran's nuclear programme (Janning 2005). Minilateralism provides them with the best of the trade-offs: they are free to act outside the rather cumbersome CFSP procedures and nonetheless able to access EU assets. The minilateral practice has the additional advantage that it facilitates engagement with the US. Critically, however, it also makes it easier for the US to influence EU policies.

European countries are not always comfortable with US desiderata, yet they are often willing to abide by them. This stems from the fact that their approach to security governance is ultimately (though not only) a function of their relationship with America. This is as true for the small countries whose defence is entirely entrusted to Washington via NATO as it is for the larger countries. For France and Britain, tightened security ties with the US are a prerequisite to the success of their recent attempt to boost their capacity – including via strengthened bilateral cooperation – to contain risks emanating from the Mediterranean, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (Simón and Fiott 2014). NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya is a most compelling evidence of this: while it was the French and Britons who took the initiative and carried out most sorties, without US intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assistance, as well as air-refuelling support, the operation would have gone nowhere. Germany is also dependent on the US because the US commitment to Europe's security allows Berlin to reach out to Russia without prejudice to its relations with *Mitteleuropa* countries (Lagadec 2012).

Reliance on the US may reflect either a genuine conviction or a fatalistic assessment. It is however always an opportunistic or, to use more neutral terms, a calculated decision. EU countries have no capacity, and therefore

no desire, to emancipate themselves from US security tutelage. To do so, they would have to supranationalise EU foreign policy and turn the EU into a military power. This prospect is illusory. Consensus among EU governments for a truly integrated EU foreign policy has been decreasing for years, and it was never that broad in the first place. Moreover, even if it did exist, EU governments would have to overcome huge domestic obstacles to commit resources to defence. Today, the opposite is occurring: European governments, most of which are desperate to consolidate public finances devastated by the 2008-09 recession and the ensuing Eurozone crisis, are reducing military spending. They have not even coordinated the cuts, which has further diminished their potential for collective military action.

The EU, in short, is not meant to increase European hard power. It is instead an instrument at the disposal of its member states to support rule of law-based multilateralism, a governance method that in theory annuls the impact of hard power. In these terms, the EU's attachment to multilateralism entails an element of counterbalancing of US power, though a very soft form of it. But individually EU countries are unwilling to cut their own reliance on US safeguard guarantees, to which they see no real alternative. The European paradox is that the EU countries' striving to reduce the role of power and augment that of rules in international relations – something they do particularly via the EU – is offset by their determination to remain committed to the US bond or, which is the same, dependent on US power. In fact, their unwillingness to invest more in defence spending, or to effectively pool resources at the EU level, even reduces their ability to influence US policies through the only formal setting, NATO, in which they theoretically share equal status with Washington. The less capable they are militarily, the less appealing it is for the US to resort to NATO for anything which is not directly related to defence of allied territory and deterrence.

### 3.2 The Challenge from Without: The Paradox of Multipolarity

The last, and arguably the most troubling, source of tension within the governance system resting on liberal order institutions originates from outside the West. Multipolarity, i.e. the notion that the world is entering a transition phase characterised by the absence of hegemonic powers (Laïdi 2014:351), has been long predicted as the natural result of two distinct but converging trends: the gradual erosion of the US's unchallenged world pre-eminence; and the rise of new players capable of playing hardball on a global level, notably China and a resurgent Russia (Waltz 2000, Mearsheimer 2001). According to this view, multipolarity will strain the capacity to act of multilateral liberal order institutions, while also undermining the legitimacy of the liberal discourse, because the West will no longer be able to support it with its power (Kupchan 2012). The inevitable competition among great powers will undercut the logic of absolute gains underlying multilateral cooperation, and international relations will again be dominated by geopolitics (Mead 2014).

There is plenty of empirical evidence supporting this argument. Rising powers have increasingly challenged Western and US influence in their neighbourhood, which these powers perceive as both critical to their security and functional to their international clout. Russia has twice used military means to prevent Georgia (in 2008) and Ukraine (in 2014) from moving closer to Euro-Atlantic frameworks. It has retaliated against the deployment of US missile defence components to Eastern Europe by suspending the CFE treaty. And it has joined forces with China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) ostensibly to tackle unconventional threats in Central Asia but in fact to keep US influence away from the region. China, for its part, has so far avoided taking an openly confrontational course. Yet Beijing's ambition to extend its military reach into the Pacific, its greater assertiveness vis-à-vis Japan over the Senkaku islands and in the South China Sea's territorial disputes, as well as the lingering Taiwan issue, all point to a clash with the US Pacific system of alliances and partnerships.

Multipolarity is having an impact in regions other than the rising countries' respective neighbourhoods. In the Middle East Western efforts to end Syria's brutal civil war and solve the nuclear dispute with Iran also hinge on cooperation with Russia and China. In Africa and South America China has become a major player, competing with the West for influence and access to resource-rich countries. Russia and China have expanded their international networks, often filling the gaps in the West's systems of partnerships, and have learned to profit from the reduced capacity for military action of post-Iraq America. Their clout is not limited to the spoiling power deriving from their veto-wielding status in the UNSC. They have now a greater ability to shape events according to their own preferences. Russia, for instance, managed to shelter a key ally such as the Syrian regime from a US strike by proposing an internationally monitored removal of all of Syria's chemical weapons. Similarly, China has fought against Western attempts to sanction the Sudanese government – which is a key partner in Beijing's network of relations in Africa – because of its alleged responsibility for atrocities against civilians in Darfur.

Thus far, great power competition has unfolded below the threshold of direct military confrontation. Yet Russia's and China's governments may well be preparing for potential limited conflict if US influence in their neighbourhood is perceived as an intolerable challenge to their domestic standing. Both have considerably raised their defence budget and have engaged in cyber warfare (in 2007 Estonia was targeted by a massive cyber-attack originating from Russia) or other hostile actions (such as China's extensive industrial cyber-espionage). Resistance to further expansion of Western influence features prominently in China's and Russia's narrative of international relations, which they perceive as ultimately revolving around sovereignty (China) and power (Russia). Just like their partners in the BRICS group – India, Brazil and South Africa – they are uncomfortable with the Western liberal discourse concerning peace and security, generally suspected to be a rhetorical cloak used to wrap armed interventions in the interest of the West only. The BRICS itself is often interpreted as an exercise in counterbalancing Western power, even if the group focuses more on economic than hard security issues.

From the above it follows that in the mid- to long-run the fissures created by multipolar competition in the multilateral security architecture will not only empty it of authority and capacity to action, but cause the entire edifice to collapse. Such a straightforward conclusion, however, is certainly premature and could turn out to be incorrect.

In absolute terms, US power is still preponderant (Lagadec 2012, Jones 2014, Kagan 2012). US military spending vastly outmatches that of the four major BRIC countries combined (Perlo-Freeman and Solmirano 2014). Measured in qualitative terms, US hard power has an even greater edge, as US armed forces have a longer combat experience, more sophisticated technologies, and better trained and equipped soldiers. Equally important, the US has allies and partners all across the globe, and their number is increasing. For all its problems, NATO has attracted new members, not shed them, while the US "pivot" to Asia is premised on the enlargement and strengthening of its political-military partnerships with Asia-Pacific countries, from Australia to the Philippines. In fact, the rise of China in East Asia has engendered a counterbalancing dynamic against China itself, with Southeast Asian states increasingly looking at Washington as a check on Chinese assertiveness.

Neither Russia nor China may count on anything comparable. Their armed forces are improving, but do not pose a conventional threat to the West or the US analogous to the Soviet Red Army. They have fewer and less resourceful allies than the US. The other BRICS countries cannot be counted as such. India's rise to power status has actually coincided with a timid rapprochement with the US (Kumar 2009, Ganguly 2014), culminating in the 2005 US-India civil nuclear cooperation agreement. Brazil, if anything, has an interest in tightening ties with

the West rather than antagonising it (Sorj 2014); after all, its plans to modernise the navy – the most important component of its military strategy – rely on transfer of technologies and weapon systems from France (Wrobel 2009).

Moreover, China's and even Russia's antagonism towards the West has limits. Russia's ultimate objective is to build a power base independent from the US in its neighbourhood and carve out more room for manoeuvre on a global level. While it has scored some points on both accounts, it is far from reaching the objective. Moscow's sway on former Soviet republics is based on a combination of coercion and co-optation of (mostly authoritarian) regimes, which is no guarantee of a stable relationship. The case of Ukraine is an eloquent testimony to the limits of its power. Russia has mutilated it territorially and destabilised it politically, but cannot control it. China, for its part, has a troubled neighbourhood which, along its eastern borders (on land and at sea), is more a check on its power projection than a launch-pad for it. Finally, and critically, China and Russia, much as India and many other emerging countries, face huge domestic challenges. President Vladimir Putin's first priority is to invigorate popular consensus for his personal power (Hill and Gaddy 2013), much as China's Communist Party is mostly concerned about bolstering the legitimacy of the single party regime (Lanxin 2014). Assertiveness or even aggressiveness in foreign policy can help them do so, but only to a limited extent. For both the Russian and Chinese regimes, the price of failure could be catastrophic, even fatal.

But the fundamental point is that Russia and China are not only constrained by US and Western power. They also profit from it, as other countries do. International security today is still less characterised by multipolar conflict than it is by functional threats such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, regional crises and piracy. Where these threats intersect with the security of China, Russia or the other BRICS, a dynamic of convergence with the West materialises. "Multipolar" competition does not reduce the importance of these forms of selective cooperation. It enhances it instead. Russia, for instance, has been careful to compartmentalise its cooperation with the West on Iran, Afghanistan and even Syria during the crisis over Ukraine. The BRICS format itself is not really a check on Western power. It is a means to manage inter-BRICS relations – which entail a good deal of competition, particularly along the Russia-China and China-India borders – and then to engage the West from a position of strength. The BRICS also allows countries with a colonial past such as India, Brazil and South Africa to dodge domestic accusations of being too close to former imperialist powers. What has been said above about the Europeans rings true for the BRICS too: they have no capacity, and therefore no desire, to replace US power.

Thus, non-Western powers have a stake in the consolidation of the multilateral liberal order (Ikenberry 2011 and 2014). For Russia and China, the permanent seat at the Security Council is the jewel in the crown which they put on when they enter the international stage. Brazil, India, South Africa all long for the same status. True, the BRICS like the "order" more than they do the "liberal" part of it – in fact, Russia and China only like the former and are extremely wary of the latter. Non-Western powers generally have a defensive conception of multilateralism as a tool to bolster state sovereignty and discourage Western interventionism. But they cannot avoid engaging with liberal discourse and practices altogether. Brazil, India and China have all raised their peacekeeping profile and included human security in their official foreign policy narrative (Wrobel 2009, Kumar 2009, Feng et al. 2009) and Brazil has even tried to recast R2P in more restrictive terms under the "Responsibility while Protecting" rubric. Reconciling the differences with the West has so far proven almost impossible. Yet it is on the practices that controversies arise, not on the discursive framework, which remains defined mostly in liberal terms as the emphasis remains on rules, human security and increasingly on democracy (Tocci 2014). In addition, for non-Western countries it makes more sense to present opposition to unwelcome Western policies in terms formally consistent with the principles enshrined in multilateral security institutions, most notably the UNSC. Working within multilateral settings lends Russia's and China's occasional resistance to Western initiatives legitimacy,

increases their ability to recruit supporters for their own policies, and – critically – provides them with a layer of control over issues on which they actually cooperate with the West. There is no deterministic dynamic linking the incipient multipolarity to the eventual destruction of the international liberal order.

## 4. Transatlantic Relations, Multipolarity and Security Governance

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The US's unresolved relationship with multilateralism, European willing dependence on US power, and the emerging multipolarity all weigh heavily on the liberal security order and the governance mechanisms linked to it. These elements of tension, however, coexist with inverse dynamics. US power also expands and diffuses through the liberal security order; the Europeans offset their dependence on US power with a strong multilateral drive enshrined in and promoted by that triumph of multilateral practices that is the EU; and the rising powers, wary of the liberal core of the structure, nonetheless appreciate the order that emanates from it.

The tension resulting from these contrasting dynamics produces an inherently shifting context, which in turn determines the variations within the structure of security governance. Centrifugal and centripetal dynamics reflect the balance in the distribution of hard power but also, critically, the evolution of the threat environment. During the Cold War the threat environment was mainly defined in conventional military terms and the distribution of power between the main rivals was more or less even. The combination of these two variables often resulted in stalemate in the UNSC, but it also facilitated rules-based arrangements on a bloc-to-bloc or bilateral level. Multilateral cooperation was strongest in a time, the 1990s, in which US power enjoyed undisputed pre-eminence in a considerably low (and still conventional) threat environment. Later, the combined effect of a US-dominated balance of power and the emergence of “unconventional” threats such as regional crises, WMD proliferation and jihadi groups brought about increasing recourse to flexible, ad hoc forms of joint actions, usually organised around US interests.

Today, these threats continue to punctuate the security landscape, but US power has declined relative to that of non-Western countries. The security landscape is therefore changing again, though its final outlook is a matter of dispute. In a first potential scenario, multipolar antagonism prevails. The US uses its hard power and alliances to contain Russia and China, constraining their ability to control their neighbourhood and pushing back their sway in other regions. International security fragments along discreet, relatively coherent regional blocs set against one another (Buzan and Wæver 2003). The international liberal order loses its global outreach, although it maintains a universalistic zest (in the sense that the West continues to refer to it as the only possible global order, to which illiberal powers will eventually have to submit). An alternative scenario is premised on the imperative to avoid great-power conflict. The idea of global security governance prevails, defined by a constant balancing act between containing tensions and increasing selective cooperation between great powers. Multilateral cooperation is discursively framed as presiding over order and security rather than advancing liberal values, but continues to provide universal rules of behaviour.

As discussed in the previous section, there is no pre-determined path leading to either scenario. Threat environment and distribution of power are systemic undercurrents of change, which in the current circumstances do not deterministically set units on any specific course of action. Agency is therefore what will drive change along a more competitive or a more cooperative pattern. Because actors do not act in a void and exert reciprocal influence on one another, agency is always the result of interaction. However, such interaction does not take place on a level playing field, as the units occupy different systemic positions, to which a varying



capacity to impact the system corresponds. US power still occupies the central position, meaning that the US not only moves *within* the system but is also able to *move the system* to a greater extent than anyone else. Consequently, its role in shaping the structures ostensibly aimed at governing the system is of paramount importance. Allies and rival countries influence US agency in a different manner. Agency of rival or enemy states, in a way directly proportional to their power, contributes to orientating US agency towards a more or less antagonistic approach. US allies are followers rather than equal partners, and consequently the level of influence they have on US agency is a function of their capacity to support it rather than presenting alternatives to it. Its dependence on US power means that Europe is incapable of orientating relations with rising powers in a way which the US opposes. But the specifics of European power, hard and soft alike, are critical to determining the *transatlantic* capacity to shaping security governance.

In a scenario of multipolar competition the Europeans are unable to make full use of the EU's largely soft power to promote security. Since European strategic thinking is a national exercise and EU security and defence cooperation is modest and intergovernmentally based, the Union only thrives in a rules-based system while it struggles in one defined by interests and based on power. If global security governance is reduced to managing antagonistic multipolar relations, the EU has little say in it – but so do its member states, because individually they lack critical mass. At a regional level, the EU remains a component of European security governance, but in an ancillary position with regard to a NATO recalibrated as an anti-Russia alliance. NATO enables the US policy of containment, but at higher political and financial costs as Washington is confronted with a plurality of European countries that do not perceive Russia as a direct threat and remain unwilling to invest heavily in defence. In the Asia-Pacific chessboard Europe's contribution to security governance is nearly non-existent. In fact, if the US pivot to Asia evolves into a policy of containment of China, the Europeans may turn out to be a liability for the US, as EU commercial interests in China can run counter to Washington's goal of weakening Beijing.

Europe has more to contribute in an environment defined by multilevel and selective engagement of non-Western powers. It can do so individually through unilateral endeavours and collectively via the EU. Because multipolar relations are not adversarial, the EU can use its collective economic power with greater leeway, either as an instrument to coerce with sanctions and other restrictions or as an instrument of persuasion via rewards. This flexibility allows it to sustain US effort to press Russia or China when necessary but also to triangulate between them in an effort to bridge differences and ease tensions. In Europe, the EU's role is complementary rather than ancillary to NATO, with the latter focussed on deterrence and defence (rather than containment) and the former freer to modulate between pressure and engagement. So long as confrontation with Russia is carried out outside a full containment policy, European diverging views on the matter are easier to handle. In Asia-Pacific Europe's role remains marginal, but EU-China diplomatic exchanges and trade are less threatening to US policies.

In conclusion, the transatlantic capacity to shape governance structures diminishes considerably if multipolar relations acquire an antagonistic tenor because in this case Europe's weaknesses – limited hard power assets and lack of strategic cohesion – are amplified. Europe's shortcomings are less relevant, and its assets (provided by both individual countries and the EU as a whole) more effective, if multipolar competition is downgraded, a pattern of functional engagement is preserved and the liberal security order remains the framework for multipolar interaction.

## Conclusions

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Historically, the system designed to ensure international security has its roots in the evolution of the European-centred balance of power into the transatlantic-promoted liberal order. After an early, and ultimately failed, start in the 1920s, the latter was eventually established in the aftermath of WWII on both a global and a regional (European) level. Its main components – the UN, multilateral security treaties, NATO, European integration – remain by and large the pillars on which security governance rests today. Since the end of the Cold War there have been momentous adjustments on a regional level, with the creation of a foreign and security policy dimension of the EU as well as its and NATO's enlargement. Informal arrangements, in the form of coalitions of the willing and contact groups, have been devised to fill in the gaps in the institutionalised governance system, particularly in the wake of 9/11.

The whole edifice of the liberal order would likely crumble if it were not for the combined force of US and European support. The structure of Western power, however, is not dual: power does not emanate in equal or relatively similar fashion from the US as it does from Europe. Western power has a hierarchical structure, with the US at the centre as unchallenged leader and European countries revolving around it as half genuinely, half fatalistically committed followers.

This hierarchical nature of Western power has, somewhat counter-intuitively, deepened in the years elapsed since the disappearance of the Soviet threat. The EU has been a means to foster multilateral cooperation, and thus reduce (but not annul) the role of hard power in international politics, not a driver for creating an autonomous European hard power. NATO's enlargement has expanded Europe's security dependence on the US and consolidated the latter's grip on the Old Continent. The emergence of asymmetric, functional threats has extended European security dependence on the US to areas outside NATO's remit, as the Alliance itself has been used to invigorate support for US-led actions aimed at tackling some of those challenges. Dwindling European military spending reduces the Alliance's relevance in US eyes, but does not nullify it altogether. For the US, the alliance with the Europeans continues to generate valuable political support and greater legitimacy for its own foreign policy.

Because the liberal order is so dependent on Western (US) power, two problems have emerged in conjunction with the rise of non-Western countries, particularly China and Russia. One is regional, the other global. The expansion of US-dominated systems of alliances and partnerships in Europe and Asia-Pacific has left little room for other forms of pan-regional security governance. Thus, NATO's enlargement in Europe has ultimately made the OSCE irrelevant. The proliferation of regional groupings in Asia-Pacific has anything but diminished the appetite of a number of Asian-Pacific countries for keeping, or developing, strong security ties with the US. As a result, clashes with the two main powers left out of the systems – Russia and China – have intensified, especially with Russia. The Chinese and Russian governments have joined forces to keep the US away from Central Asia, and have made some inroads into other regions where US or Western power is not as established as in Europe and Asia-Pacific, such as the Middle East and Africa. Regional tensions have reverberated on a global level, hampering the ability of the UNSC to meet its responsibility for peace and security. Non-Western diffidence towards the West liberal peace discourse, generally perceived as a justification for Western interventionism, never abated; following NATO's intervention in Libya, ostensibly carried out under the R2P rubric, it has solidified.

In light of this, multipolarity has been sometimes compared to an incurable disease that will eventually kill the liberal order. Yet, the evidence does not support this conclusion. In fact, the US, Europe and even the most restive

among the non-Western powers have all a stake in its endurance. Along with areas of competition come also issues of converging interests, with functional threats such as nuclear proliferation, al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, regional crises and piracy affecting the security of all. Great powers have found a way to cooperate on these issues, often in the context of informal groups, like the P5+1, but with an eye on the institutional dimension.

Thus, in spite of tensions emanating both from its transatlantic core and outside of it, the international liberal order remains the only terms of reference for Western and non-Western powers alike. Governance within this system, therefore, is structurally possible. The crux lies in the balance between the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics at play in the system itself. If the latter prevail, the transatlantic ability to shape security governance diminishes, largely as a consequence of Europe's modest hard power and lack of strategic cohesion. On the contrary, if centripetal dynamics prevail, the Europeans can make use not only of their individual assets to address functional threats but also exploit the soft power potential of the EU, whereby US power gains greater outreach and impact. Because US power is still so strong and the US-European partnership still enduring, the capacity of transatlantic relations to shape security governance has not vanished. Multipolarity has made the use of that capacity a more complicated exercise, but not necessarily a less effective one.

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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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