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THE NEW TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP: BETWEEN CONTINUITY, CHANGE, AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Erik Jones

The conventional wisdom is that Barack Obama is America's first 'Pacific president'. Obama grew up in Hawaii and Jakarta. The 'pivot to Asia' is Obama's signature foreign policy achievement. And the Trans-Pacific Partnership is the cornerstone of Obama's trade policy. By contrast, Europe is – or at least appears to be – less important to the U.S. President. Obama has few if any obvious European roots. His attention to European security has been sporadic rather than strategic. And his determination to conclude the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) before the end of his administration is more rhetorical than real.

This conventional wisdom is pervasive. It is also misleading. The transatlantic relationship is bigger than any sitting president. Moreover, Obama's policies toward Europe show more continuity with his predecessors than change. Relations have changed across the Atlantic despite this continuity.

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The new transatlantic relationship is the result of a combination of deep structural factors, including the change in the global security context with the end of the Cold War, the growing assertiveness of political Islam, the rise of China, and the deepening divisions within both the United States and Europe. The implications are manifest in different contexts. You can see this most obviously in the reactions to Iraq, Libya, Syria and Ukraine. Beneath the surface, you can feel it in the growing sense of disillusionment and frustration that centers on the recent economic and financial crisis, the political transformation in the Middle East and North Africa, the deterioration of relations with Russia, and the collapse of European solidarity.

The strongest evidence of this frustration on the part of the Obama administration came in two essays, one published in *The Atlantic* and the other in *The New York Times Magazine*.¹ In the *Atlantic* essay, Obama launched a broadside against countries that “free ride” on American security and he suggested that the United Kingdom would lose its ‘special relationship’ with the United States if it failed to invest more in defense. In *The New York Times Magazine* essay, Obama advisor Ben Rhodes takes aim at members of the US foreign policy establishment who “whine incessantly about the collapse of the American security order in Europe and the Middle East”.

Transatlantic institutions offer little automatic support. There is no easy way to recreate the closeness of the past. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is ill suited to the new environment. As James Goldgeier argued in a special report for the Council on Foreign Relations, “If the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) did not exist today, the United States would not seek to create it.”² The TTIP has emerged as a source of conflict and popular discontent. Even American support for European unity risks backfiring, as illustrated by Obama’s efforts to weigh into the debate about continued British EU membership.

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¹ Jeffrey Goldberg, ‘The Obama Doctrine,’ *The Atlantic* (April 2016), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>; David Samuels, “The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama’s Foreign Policy Guru”, *New York Times Magazine* (5 May 2016), http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/the-aspiring-novelist-who-became-obama-foreign-policy-guru.html?_r=0.

² James Goldgeier, ‘The Future of NATO,’ *Council Special Report No. 51* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, February 2010), p. 3.

The new transatlantic relationship needs recalibration. Leaders on both sides need to redefine existing institutions and to rebalance the division of privileges and obligations within them. This challenge is more than the Obama administration can manage. He faces too much opposition in Congress and has too little time left in office. Hence strengthening the new transatlantic relationship will be a task for the next administration. The risk is that America will elect a president with little or no interest.

Continuity

It is ironic that Obama is not regarded as an Atlantic president, particularly in comparison with his two predecessors. Bill Clinton came into office with a clear domestic focus and with little experience in foreign affairs. Rather than promoting European security, he encouraged Europeans to take the lead on responding to the collapse of Yugoslavia. He only changed that policy in 1995 when it became clear that ‘muddling through’ was not going to work. George W. Bush was not elected on a strong pro-Atlantic platform either. Instead, he campaigned on a promise to lead a more narrowly focused foreign policy capable of responding to China and Russia while strengthening relations within the Western hemisphere.

By contrast, Obama campaigned with a strong message about the importance of transatlantic partnership and revitalizing NATO. In an unprecedented fashion, he delivered that message personally to the people of Europe:

Yes, there have been differences between America and Europe. No doubt, there will be differences in the future. But the burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together. A change of leadership in Washington will not lift this burden. In this new century, Americans and Europeans alike will be required to do more – not less. Partnership and cooperation among nations is not a choice; it is the one way, the only way, to protect our common security and advance our common humanity.³

The last sentence of those remarks sounds idealistic. Nevertheless, it represents a harsh lesson for US presidents. The United States

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³ The full transcript of Obama’s 2008 Berlin speech is available from CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/07/24/obama.words/>.

may be the “indispensable nation” (as then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it in a television interview), but it is hardly omnipotent.⁴ If anything, it is constantly at risk of overextension.

Different administrations express this lesson in different ways. For the Bush administration, the lesson was: “There is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of its allies and friends in Canada and Europe.”⁵ For the Obama administration, it is: “In an interconnected world, there are no global problems that can be solved without the United States, and few that can be solved by the United States alone.”⁶

Of course rhetoric does not always match practice. When the two come apart, however, the result is never good for the United States. The 2003 Iraq War is an important illustration. When that conflict divided Europe, the United States did not benefit. On the contrary, US policy suffered from the lack of an effective transatlantic partnership. As a result, Bush started his second administration with an explicit goal of repairing the damage. Bush sent Condoleezza Rice to Europe for her first foreign visit as Secretary of State and then made the trip himself soon thereafter.

The divisions over the Iraq War and the scandals surrounding Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib obscured much of the change in transatlantic relations from one George W. Bush administration to the next. European policy elites learned to work closely with their American counterparts despite prior differences but European publics never forgave Bush (or his close European allies) for Iraq. Obama represented an important break in that respect – because he was so much more acceptable to Europeans than Bush as a transatlantic ally. But in policy terms the transition from Bush to Obama was not dramatic. Indeed, Obama’s first “national security strategy” document borrowed heavily from Bush’s second.

The continuity across administrations builds on a shared set of preferences. US administrations prefer Europe to be united rather

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⁴ ‘Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Interview on NBC-TV “The Today Show” with Matt Lauer,’ (19 February 1998),

<http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1998/980219a.html>

⁵ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: The White House, September 2002), p. 24.

⁶ *National Security Strategy* (Washington: The White House, February 2015), p. 3.

than divided; they also prefer Europeans to work with the United States rather than at cross-purposes. The challenge comes when these two different dimensions of preference contradict each other and the US president is forced to choose between a Europe that is divided over (or around) US policy and a Europe that is united in opposition to the United States.

Consistently, US administrations have accepted opposition to US policy as a lesser evil than division among America's allies. The reason is simple: US presidents can compromise with a united opposition; where possible, they can also simply ignore it. What they find more challenging is to reconcile intra-European divisions or to organize meaningful transatlantic burden-sharing with a fragmented set of smaller countries. "Coalitions of the willing" do not make effective alliances. This is another lesson the Bush administration learned in Iraq.

The way administrations get around this dilemma is through the exercise of "leadership". That term needs quotation marks because it has a specific meaning for US presidents. Anyone who seeks to hold the office of president has to embrace and explain some conception of US global leadership. Every sitting president has to find a way to put that notion of leadership into practice. As Obama explained to the American people on the eve of US intervention in Libya:

American leadership is not simply a matter of going it alone and bearing all of the burden ourselves. Real leadership creates the conditions and coalitions for others to step up as well; to work with allies and partners so that they bear their share of the burden and pay their share of the costs; and to see that the principles of justice and human dignity are upheld by all.⁷

In other words, American leadership is about building stable coalitions and not just coalitions of the willing. Organizations like NATO are not a substitute for this kind of leadership; they are an expression of it. The same is true of the transatlantic partnership.

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⁷ See 'Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya' (Washington: The White House, 28 March 2011) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/28/remarks-president-address-nation-libya>.

This notion of leadership describes how US administrations – and the Obama administration in particular – perceive their world role. As Obama explained in his last “State of the Union” address to the joint houses of Congress: ‘America will always act, alone if necessary, to protect our people and our allies; but on issues of global concern, we will mobilize the world to work with us, and make sure other countries pull their own weight.’⁸

The challenge from this perspective is to ensure that America’s allies remain committed and that they back that commitment with resources. That is difficult enough in a formalized alliance framework. Debates about burden-sharing across the Atlantic constitute much of the history of NATO in that respect.

It is even harder to agree on burden-sharing when there is no overarching institutional framework to use in establishing benchmarks and negotiating commitments. This explains why deep structural change is more important to understanding the transatlantic relationship than the preferences of any sitting president. Those preferences have not changed from one administration to the next. The world has.

Change

The world has changed in any number of ways over the past three decades. (The techniques I am using to research, write, and publish this essay are just one set of illustrations.) For the transatlantic relationship, however, four dimensions of change are important: the end of the Cold War, the rise of China, the growing assertiveness of political Islam, and the transformation of democratic politics. On balance, these are positive developments. The end of the Cold War greatly reduced the threat of nuclear annihilation; the rise of China lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty; the assertiveness of political Islam brought an end to decades of dictatorship; and the transformation of democratic politics has given expression to a wide range of new voices. This constitutes progress. However, each of these developments has generated unintended consequences. In turn, those unintended

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⁸ “Remarks of President Barack Obama – State of the Union Address As Delivered,” (Washington: The White House, 13 January 2016), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/12/remarks-president-barack-Obama-%E2%80%93-prepared-delivery-state-union-address>.

consequences have challenged the transatlantic relationship.

The end of the Cold War was an obvious dilemma for NATO. Without bloc-to-bloc competition, the North Atlantic Alliance lacked purpose. It could engage in democracy promotion and help spread best practices for civilian control over the military but such activities did not justify the maintenance of large standing armies or complex joint operations. To remain relevant this left NATO with two options. One was to enlarge its membership and so extend its security guarantee to former communist countries; the other was to go ‘out of area’ with its military operations. In the end, NATO took up both options – expanding all the way to the edge of Russia while at the same time engaging in conflicts as far away as Afghanistan.

The “doctrine of enlargement” was more than an act of institutional self-interest on the part of the North Atlantic Alliance. It was a strategic choice of the Clinton administration to use existing institutions to create a more inclusive and stabilizing world order. This choice was not made in isolation either. The European Union engaged in an ambitious enlargement of its own – and for much the same reason. A more open and inclusive Europe promised to ensure greater stability on its borders.

The doctrine of enlargement transformed how NATO functions as an alliance. A more inclusive alliance is less concerned with the contributions of individual members, in practice if not in rhetoric. Although NATO documents stress that membership entails obligations, political stability and successful democratization have come to be viewed more as contributions to European security than requirements for membership. A more inclusive alliance also affected relations between the United States and Russia. NATO may have reconsidered its mission in line with the doctrine of enlargement, but many in Russia still perceive NATO as part of a bloc-to-bloc threat. The point is not that NATO enlargement was an explicit threat to Russia or even that NATO enlargement could have been avoided. It is enough that NATO enlargement offered a convenient pretext for political mobilization inside Russia against the West. In this way, the expansion of NATO altered relations between Europe and Russia as well.

The same is true for a NATO that operates ‘out of area’. When the Clinton administration used NATO to bomb Yugoslavia, it signaled that the alliance would play an active role in promoting Western

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interests (rather than a passive role in ensuring Western security). When the Bush administration used NATO to stabilize Afghanistan, it signaled that the reach of the alliance would extend far beyond the North Atlantic community. These signals were not lost on Russia, which has interpreted the transformation of NATO as part of a broader program of encirclement.

On a more fundamental level, the combination of enlargement and out-of-area operations signaled a fundamental change in the nature of the security threat to Europe. The old threat was from well-functioning states capable of fielding large conventional armies. The new threat is from unstable regimes and ungovernable geographic spaces. The distinction here is important insofar as there is no deterrent for instability and no sanction for un-governability.

During the Cold War, the NATO alliance was most effective when it could threaten deployment without having to carry out the threat. After the Cold War, the alliance only “worked” when it could be used. This shift from passive deterrence to active involvement requires a higher level of commitment from the member states. In turn, this high level of commitment creates incentives to lower the bar for resources to be deployed. Quantity of participation in terms of numbers of alliance partners involved (and as a demonstration of alliance solidarity) trumps quality in terms of personnel, equipment, or operational roles.

Neither the doctrine of enlargement nor out-of-area operations were effective models for burden-sharing. Instead they became formulas for overextension. This was apparent already during the Clinton administration – and the problem was not limited to Europe or the transatlantic relationship. The problem only worsened with successive administrations. That is why General Wesley Clark was so frustrated with allied interference in the bombing of Serbia; it is why Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggested that the United States could proceed without Great Britain into Iraq; and it is why Defense Secretary Bob Gates delivered his sharp warning to Brussels about the need for Europeans to do more.

The rise of China compounded the dilemma by unsettling other key US alliances. Japan, South Korea, and a number of Southeast Asian nations all demanded reassurance of US commitment to the

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region. China's rise also upset the balance within global institutions and economic relationships. Here it is enough to look at the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the Group of Seven leading industrial nations. Each of these institutions has evolved as a result of China's increasing global influence.

The reasons behind China's influence are many and complicated. What matters is that no US administration could afford to ignore the dynamics surrounding China's rapid ascent. That is why George W. Bush placed so much emphasis on China during his 2000 campaign for the presidency. It is also why Barack Obama invested so much in his pivot to Asia. Where the two administrations differ is in their attitudes toward the Middle East and not in their attitudes toward Europe. The Bush administration sought to reshape Middle Eastern politics. The Obama administration sought to stem the flow of US resources into a region that it believed it could not influence.

To understand these differences in attitudes toward the Middle East, it is necessary to look at the change in political Islam and the relationship between Islamist opposition groups and more secular dictatorships in the Middle East and North Africa. This is another complicated story that involves a range of different influences. With political Islam, this range extends from violent terrorist organizations to recognized political parties; it also extends from extreme forms of Islam to patterns of religious identification that would be regarded as 'socially conservative' or traditionalist in any other context.

The Bush administration viewed this landscape in sharp contrasts and so wagered that it could promote democracy by eliminating extremism. The Obama administration doubted that extremism could ever be eliminated and so tried to launch an encompassing dialogue instead. Neither strategy proved effective. The Bush administration created at least as many extremists as it eliminated and the Obama administration launched a dialogue that was too inclusive to be accepted as legitimate within the region.

In the end, the Middle East proved resistant to US-led transformation. The Bush administration changed the politics of the region but not in ways that coincided with American interests. Moreover, the most significant changes emerged from within the

countries of the Middle East and North Africa themselves. The Middle East could not be ignored either. Although Obama tried to pivot away from the region, he could not escape its dynamics. He drew down American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan only to find himself locked into a low but consistent level of commitment; in Iraq, he eventually had to push troop numbers back up again. And he found himself committing armed forces to Syria (and regretting having failed to commit more to Libya when it might have made a difference).

Meanwhile, democratic politics evolved on both sides of the Atlantic. At least part of this change was evident when Bush was elected president. His success rested on a confluence of populist political mobilization on the right of the Republican Party and a split of the Democratic left between those willing to compromise in order to secure the presidency and those less interested in power than protest. Bush's victory both emerged from and reinforced a polarization of American politics that has only intensified from one election to the next. The result is to make the United States ever increasingly inward-looking and so less willing to compromise in the interests of alliance politics.

That American situation finds reflection in Europe. This symmetry is the result of parallel developments and not cause and effect. Many of the same forces that divide Americans have a similar impact on any advanced industrial democracy that is connected to world markets. This can be seen in increasing populist political mobilization across Europe both on the right and on the left. Europeans have become more inward-looking as a consequence. They have also become more skeptical about relations with the United States.

Disillusionment

The inward-looking character of the two sides of the Atlantic is not only the result of the rise of populism. It is also a function of the challenges Western political leaders face and the perceptions they create on the other side of the Atlantic in response. As with any relationship, these perceptions may be based on misunderstanding. They are important nonetheless. There are many ways to characterize this problem. The illustrations below center on distraction, lack of commitment, inconsistency, division, and lack of

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solidarity (or disintegration).

The sense of distraction emerges around the global economic and financial crisis. That crisis originated in the United States and absorbed much of Obama's energy from the start. The stimulus package that the Obama administration passed in 2009 and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act were important legislative achievements. Together with the healthcare reform package, called the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, this legislation forms the bulk of the president's legacy. It also imposed a huge cost on Obama's Congressional majority. The Democratic Party lost its filibuster-proof control over the Senate in a special election to replace Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy and then lost control over the House of Representatives in the 2010 mid-term elections. From that point onward, Obama had to fight Congress simply to fund the government.

The impact of the crisis on European politics was similarly debilitating. The first wave of the crisis struck those countries outside the euro area together with those in northern Europe whose banks were most exposed to investments in toxic American assets. The British, Irish, German, Dutch, and Belgian banks were at the top of this list. Over time, the crisis spread from northern Europe to the southern periphery, and from banks to sovereign debt markets. This shift created political tensions because of European commitments not to bailout sovereign finances and because of European reluctance to accept the consequences of sovereign default. The result has been a series of emergency measures designed to square the circle of preventing default without creating moral hazard. The success of this endeavor has been at best partial; the political energy it has absorbed has been complete. Between 2010 and 2012, the European Union held more than thirty formal, informal, and emergency European Council summits.

The unfolding of these events created confusion for both parties. European policymakers could not understand how the US government could risk default over legislation to raise the debt ceiling in August 2011 or how it could allow the government to shut down in October 2013. American policymakers could not understand why Europeans were unable to respond decisively to the sovereign debt crisis – at least until European Central Bank President Mario Draghi delivered his “whatever it takes” speech in July 2012. Both sides of the Atlantic saw the other as a risk to

economic recovery and a source of volatility for the world economy as a whole.

Meanwhile, the political revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East that started in 2011 created new sources of instability. At first, neither the Obama administration nor political leaders in Europe appeared to appreciate the magnitude of the political transformations underway. Obama was slow to distance himself from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and French President Nicholas Sarkozy was reluctant to abandon Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. As the pace and scale of the change became more obvious, that reluctance gave way to a mixture of alarm and uncertainty – about the fall of long-standing allies in the region, about the rise to power of Islamist opposition groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, and about the potential for violent conflict.

Libya became a test case both for Europe and for the United States. The Europeans worried that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi would slaughter his political opponents. This concern came suddenly and was fueled to a great extent by the public statements of Gaddafi himself. The ethnic composition and tribal organization of Libyan society created the conditions for ethnic cleansing. And the swift movement of armed government troops from Tripoli to Benghazi left leaders with little time to act. European Council president Herman van Rompuy called an emergency European Council summit even as French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron decided that the time had come to act.

The challenge for the Europeans was to persuade the Obama administration to participate. Although there were strong voices in the administration like Samantha Powers and Susan Rice who argued that the Libyan case was a clear example of the “responsibility to protect” civilians from indiscriminate state violence, others like Robert Gates cautioned that Libya does not lie within America’s national interest. In the end, Obama decided to side with the Europeans. In doing so, he made sure that the US role would be limited. The result was not good. The mission quickly expanded from protecting civilians to regime change; the US role expanded as well; and – from Obama’s perspective – the European allies lost interest once the intense phase of operations subsided and Gaddafi was dead. That is where we see the lack of commitment. Now Obama looks back on the Libyan intervention as

a mistake.⁹ So do many European leaders.

Europeans tend to view Obama's vacillation over Syria from a similarly critical perspective. Here the charge is inconsistency. The US president refused to get involved in Syria initially, arguing that there was no compelling national interest at stake. Then Obama overreached by announcing a red line on the use of chemical weapons and by declaring that Bashar al-Assad would have to step down. Once it became clear that the Assad regime had deployed chemical weapons, Obama chose not to fulfil this pledge – first announcing and then withdrawing the threat of military intervention. Following a similar move by British Prime Minister David Cameron, Obama's decision not to intervene left French President François Hollande isolated. The fact that the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was able to use this situation to create an opportunity for the Syrian regime to get rid of its chemical weapons did not eliminate the embarrassment. Neither did Obama's insistence on the principle of using American military power as an instrument of last resort. In response to the rising threat of the Islamic State (ISIS), Obama reversed course again by sending special forces units into the country.

The charge of inconsistency works against Obama because the US president is a single individual. He may have conflicting advisors, but the final decision is his. European foreign policy lacks that kind of coherent "actorness". Hence it suffers from division rather than inconsistency. From the US perspective, that division is most important with respect to Russia – and specifically with respect to Russian aggression toward neighboring countries. When Russia invaded Georgia in August 2008, the European response was well coordinated. French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, responded quickly. For its part, the Bush administration encouraged the Europeans to take the lead. This did not reverse Russian influence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia but it did help to stabilize Georgia and to lower tensions in the wider Caucasus region.

When Russia began to destabilize Ukraine around the Maidan protests that started in November 2013, European unity was less evident. As the protests intensified and Ukrainian President Victor

⁹ Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine."

Yanukovic wobbled, the divisions in Europe only deepened. Although many European governments had sympathy for parts of the protest movement (and few had illusions about the nature of Yanukovic's regime), there was a lot of concern about the potential for the conflict to have an impact on European energy security either by jeopardizing vital transit routes or by antagonizing Russia. These divisions did not diminish with the collapse of the Yanukovic government – leading one senior US diplomat to dismiss the European Union as an effective actor.¹⁰ Even the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 was not enough to bring Europe together. EU leaders were able to agree a limited round of sanctions but they were unwilling to jeopardize economic relations with Russia. That only changed with the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. Soon thereafter, European leaders agreed on sweeping and punitive sanctions. That unity proved only temporary. Two years later European leaders looked for ways to draw down the sanctions even without having achieved their political objectives.

As of this writing, it is still too soon to know whether European sanctions on Russia will be lifted. The European High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, suggests they are likely to remain in place. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for European countries to seek to normalize relations with Russia. Moreover, as European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has insisted: “We can't let our relationship with Russia be dictated by Washington.”¹¹ From the US perspective, however, the lesson is less about Russia policy and more about European division. If the EU cannot hold together to protect the rules of the international system and to support a neighboring ally, then it is an ineffective partner for the United States.

A broader US concern is whether Europe will hold together as a union. For the first time in the history of the European project, the divisions among member states risk sparking disintegration. The Greek crisis in June and July of 2015 was the first such threats; the

¹⁰ “Ukraine Crisis: Transcript of Leaked Nuland-Pyatt Call,” *BBC News* (7 February 2014), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26079957>.

¹¹ ‘Juncker: We can't let EU relations with Russia be dictated by US,’ *EurActiv* (9 October 2015), <http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/juncker-we-can-t-let-eu-relations-with-russia-be-dictated-by-us/>.

British referendum is even more serious. What these crises reveal is an unprecedented breakdown in European solidarity. This situation is not in US national interests. As then-Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon remarked to an audience in London soon after the January 2013 speech in which David Cameron announced his intention to call an in-or-out referendum: “All we can say from an American perspective ... [is] that we value a strong European Union ... [W]e also value a strong UK voice in that European Union.”¹² Three years later US President Barack Obama made a more general assertion to an audience in Germany: I’ve come here today, to the heart of Europe, to say that the United States, and the entire world, needs a strong and prosperous and democratic and united Europe.¹³

Prospects

The outlook for this new transatlantic relationship is challenging. It may become even more so depending upon the outcome of the elections to replace Obama as president. The two candidates are very different. Hillary Clinton represents continuity. She will be at least as much of an Atlantic president as Obama. That should be unsurprising given her prominent role in the first Obama administration and her long relationship with the US foreign policy establishment. Donald Trump represents change. He has no foreign policy experience. Moreover, he has broken with the US foreign policy establishment.

Should Trump win the presidency, he will most likely neglect the transatlantic relationship. Such negligence will allow the powerful, long-term structural changes underway to develop unchecked. Trump will not break the transatlantic relationship, but he will allow it to suffer from lack of maintenance. Disillusionment on both sides of the Atlantic will deepen as a consequence.

¹² The transcript of Gordon’s remarks are available at: <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2013/jan/202650.htm>.

¹³ For the transcript of Obama’s speech, see: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/25/remarks-president-obama-address-people-europe>.

A Clinton victory would remove that threat. By itself, however, a Clinton presidency would not restore the transatlantic relationship. Such restoration will require concerted effort both in the United States and in Europe. Some of this effort will be to encourage NATO to evolve in a way that is both more equitable and more effective. This is a long-standing project that dates back to the last Clinton administrations. It remains a work in progress. Alongside that task, both American and European political leaders will need to restore unity within their respective continents. The polarization of politics and the rise of populist extremism is as much a threat to the notion of Atlantic community as it is to national political stability.

Most important, perhaps, political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic will need to find a way to work together in their common interest. That will require less distraction and more commitment, more consistency and less division. It will also depend upon building support for the argument that integration is not just necessary but legitimate – both in Europe and across the Atlantic. That vision lay at the heart of the old transatlantic relationship. The world has changed since that relationship was established. It is time for political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to update it.

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