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**European Union: A Must-Have Partner or a Mirage?**

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## **Introduction**

Similarities and differences do matter in the scope of international relations. When those aspects of similarities and differences over the transatlantic relations are narrowed down, it is inevitable to come across the changing patterns of foreign policy. Specifically, when the mutual relationship between the United States (hereafter, the US) and the European Union (hereafter, the EU) is taken into account, a question is revealed about how can differences in interests be converged in a manner of joint cooperation in foreign policy areas?

In the realm of transatlantic relations, the context in which the foreign policy decisions are taken is highly important. For this reason, it is necessary to understand whether the end of the Cold War has implied any structural change for the distribution of power. More specifically, how does unilateralism and multilateralism differ in terms of affecting the power? Can the EU be a counterpart of the US in a way of sharing and constructing common interests hence exerting its own presence and influence?

In order to answer these questions appropriately, first, I will discuss the theoretical inferences for power conception. Second, I will try to illustrate how those theoretical inferences affect the perceptual outlook over the context of transnational relations. In the light of these commitments, I will try to envisage how the international actorness of the EU can be shaped through its relation vis-à-vis the United States. In the last part of this paper, I will try to bring into light certain policies whereby the EU can strengthen its stance in foreign affairs and exert its influence.

### **Changing Context of Power?**

The efficiency of power is embedded in the constraints of the international system. Accepting the assumption that the system is anarchic, power equations are regulated through the capabilities of actors. Parallel to this, evaluation of the type of relationship between the US and the EU by Kagan (2002) in terms of the capabilities of using power and in what terms the US and the EU differentiate to pursue their foreign policy priorities. In line with these questions, his main argument revolves around the transatlantic power gap by which he means that material and ideological differences across Atlantic reinforces each other in a way of widening the gap in foreign policy patterns (Kagan, 2002: 6).

The way that Kagan perceives power emerges as an important argument to assess. For instance, he states that Americans perceive power as a means for “the principles of a liberal civilization and a liberal world order”(Kagan,2002: 11). This conceptualization of power purports the indispensable need for hard power in terms of militaristic capabilities and renders power both as a means and an end in itself. Hence, Kagan distinguishes between the unilateralism and multilateralism approaches of distribution of power in international affairs. He identifies the US as the sole actor to conduct international relations in a system of unilateralism. Along with this argument, Kagan posits that since the EU is not strong enough to struggle for unilateralism, the Union promotes multilateralism which costs little than struggle for unilateralism (Kagan, 2002: 12). However, one can challenge this argument by highlighting the changing context of power. In this regard, I would argue that Kagan is predominantly evaluating from the lenses of realistic propositions which does not really fit the current circumstances of

international relations and its possible effect over transatlantic relations. So, rather than arguing that the US will reign within unilateralism, the current context reveals that multilateralism evolves as the milieu in which the transatlantic relations of the EU and the US can mutually reinforce the structure of the relationship. As he thinks that the nature of the relation is based upon the power problem, I would rather argue that the problem transpires due to the inability of sustaining cohesion to converge the different tools of exerting influence. Hence, the problem is more likely to be related to how to sustain cooperation across the Atlantic. Presumably, Kagan would say that cooperation under anarchy will not occur if not one state behaves as a hegemon (Linklater, 2001: 8). But, cooperation does matter when the international system has changed in a manner of including multiple actors and multiple threats rather than an offensive security approach inherited from the cold war that could only be tackled with enhanced military capabilities. In other words, power across transatlantic relations can be constructed by taking into account the changing milieu of the international system. In the current conditions, power is distributed in a configuration that reminds a multifaceted three-dimensional chess game in which military power is mainly unipolar and likely to remain so for a while, but on the middle chessboard, economic power is already multi-polar, and actors like the US, Europe, Japan and China are gaining importance (Nye, 2008). It is for this reason that the transatlantic relations between the EU and the US are rooted in the multilateral links like the Group of Eight or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, namely the OECD (Wallace, 2001: 17). Similar to Kagan, Wallace (2001: 17) also regards the gap between perception and reality in regards to the power conception between both sides but he takes this gap one step further by explaining the

reasons. But as an important contribution, he takes into account the gap between transgovernmental cooperation and domestic debate that concludes as a mutual democratic deficit (Wallace, 2001: 18).

Nevertheless, trying to understand the power conception based upon mere theoretical insights will be flawed. Regarding the broader environment wherein power is exercised will be beneficial to understand why power takes another shape within another context. In other words, how and why did transatlantic relations change before and after the Cold War?

### **A Cornerstone: Cold War and Transatlantic Relations**

Systemic changes affect the ways in which the Europe and the US perceive each others capabilities. Thereby, valuable contribution made by Serfaty (2004) to the pattern of transatlantic relations by introducing the Cold War period as an important mechanism for the US to exert its influence over Europe by supporting a united and stronger Europe as a consequence of a containment policy.

Transatlantic relations continued through the transatlantic institutional order, namely the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Serfaty, 2004: 136). The evolution of two NATO and the European integration overlapped with each other in terms of the interests they pursued. In other words, the European integration project and NATO followed the enlargement process in order to construct a security environment. So it will not be wrong to argue that the nature of the relationship between the US and the EU was predominantly shaped by the interests of the US to sustain its presence in the bipolar system. That is why Kagan is not wrong to argue that the US has been the dominant actor vis-à-vis the EU. Nevertheless, he underestimates the mutual character of the transatlantic

relationship and the changing roles of the actors. In fact, how long can the US continue on influencing the extent of the European Union (Serfaty, 2004: 138), rises as a crucial question in which the answer would estimate three possible roles on behalf of the Union. Serfaty (2004: 138) examines these roles as a *counterfeit* that is an ineffective EU, a *counterpart* that can share the burden of leadership or a *counterweight* that can be an obstacle for the US. Which would be the most suitable role for the EU is a tough question, but not without an answer. As a matter of fact, I propose three dimensions to take into account in order to tailor the appropriate role for the EU in its transatlantic relations. In a nutshell, first the need for a convergence of different perceptions to the effectiveness of power, second the structural change with the end of the Cold War and the September 11, 2001 attack as a building block for the nature of transatlantic relations, and last, the debate over new / old Europe.

***Europe as a counterpart: Three-dimensional perspective***

The effectiveness of power is related to the conceptualization and the perception of threat. As Wallace (2001: 17) argues, the American overemphasis on political and military matters and quest for potential adversaries has encountered an overemphasis of economic matters by the Europeans which consequently lead to the different perceptions of threats. Kagan (2002: 12) also highlights that Americans and Europeans fail to agree on what constitutes tolerable and intolerable threat. More importantly, he assesses this as a power problem wherein the EU is not capable of coping with the threats such as terrorism or rogue states; rather, the EU chooses to tackle the political challenges such as ethnic conflict or migration, partially because the EU is weak in utilizing hard power tools (Kagan, 2002: 13-14). It is for this reason that Kagan would perceive the EU more

like a counterfeit that is “a dangerous illusion that might prompt a voiceless and powerless Europe to speak and act before its time” (Serfaty, 2004: 138). Of course the EU as a counterfeit is a debatable argument since the context of Cold War is passé. As it is argued by Moisi (2003: 2), tools of hard and soft power are gradually more intertwined; hence, a precise conception of military force has vanished and the traditional perceptions of territory and boundary have been left behind. Consequently, Moisi would oppose what Kagan would consider for the EU as a counterfeit. At this point, Wallace (2001: 19) would also claim that the US perceives the EU as an alliance which can share the burden of common US-defined interests. Accordingly, the EU would perceive this relation as a Hobbesian type of alliance wherein the cooperation is not likely to be prolonged without a benign hegemon, the US.

Apart from this, as a second dimension, I would argue that the structural change in the distribution of power by the end of the Cold War divulged a new phase in transatlantic relations. In fact, as Wallace (2001: 19) would point out too, cooperation under unilateral tendencies of the US could only be tolerable within the milieu of the Cold War wherein the existence of a tangible threat could validate that presumption of the US. But the post Cold War era corroborates the need for an EU that is capable of handling the challenges both for the EU and the US through multilateral channels. In essence, Moisi (2003: 1) points to the September 11 attack as a short-term catalyst that displays the American foreign policy pattern as more prone to a Bismarckian approach which refers to the efficacy of hard power tools to confront terrorism. As Serfaty (2004: 140) asserts, Europeans perceive this Bismarckian toolbox as a negligence of the origins of the threats which can not possibly be prevented through the use of force. Thereby, two

different approaches appear in line with what Kagan and Wallace refer to as the gap between perception and reality. As a result of these two different perceptual outlooks, different toolboxes emerge. At this point Kagan (2002: 27) would argue that the problem is systemic and the future power shifts would possibly lead to the escalation of transatlantic tensions. But the multiplication of threats and the difficulty to control the direction of threats necessitate the evolution of a multipolar system. In this system, the transatlantic relations could be balanced between “Europe’s postmodern instincts and the US’s revisionist instincts” (Moisi, 2003: 3) and the relation could be enhanced in a manner of mitigating the US’ Bismarckian rhetoric. This will create a positive effect to facilitate Europe’s presence in the international arena with what Moisi (2003: 3) calls as “responsible revisionism” in order to tackle both challenges such as illegal migration or failed states and the threats such as international terrorism or rogue states. In this regard, as opposed to Kagan (2002: 21), it is not Europe that tries to multilateralize the US but the system that renders the US vulnerable to tackle the multiple threats that are hard to deal with mere hard power tools. It is for this reason that the nature of the transatlantic relations should be based upon a Europe that is a counterpart of the US.

As a third dimension, the EU should take into account the distinction between the old/new Europe. Although Moisi (2003: 2) considers this distinction as “intellectually false”, one should take into account what this distinction implies for the balanced assessment of transatlantic relations. First of all, as the new Europe refers to Franco-German condominium, old Europe refers to the Balkans or the eastern-most parts of Europe (Moisi, 2003, p.2). Hence the question that should be asked is *to what extent will the cohesion between core and periphery be fortified?* I think that this is a vital question

to solve the problem of what Wallace (2001: 32) emphasizes as the gap between transgovernmental cooperation and domestic understanding. Since it is possible for the EU to be faced with the problem of *too big to manage* with its scope and size, it might be arduous to maintain convergence of the different voices of member states into a single voice. For instance, Wallace (2001: 32) argues that, along with the United Kingdom, Denmark and Austria other peripheral countries perceive the EU as an entity that threatens the national autonomy. On the other hand, as the cases of Bosnia and Kosovo illustrate, both the tension within the EU about how to prevent conflict and the inadequacy of a transatlantic consensus revealed that mere soft power tools and rejection of hard power is not enough for the prevention of crisis. Taking the lessons from these post Cold War developments, it is important to note that the nature of transatlantic relations requires a balance between counterweight and counterpart that necessitates a Europe with enhanced military capabilities. Hence, as Serfaty (2004: 144) would argue, the general tendency about the old / new Europe distinction is that neither side of the Atlantic desires a return to the old Europe that is weak, but for a new Europe that is united and stronger.

As these three dimensions that I propose suggest, the type of the relationship across the Atlantic requires a closer integration that can be flexible to adopt their capabilities in times of conflict and as well can be designed in a way to open the channels for reinforcing a mutual perceptual outlook about how to converge the different toolboxes to tackle the current problems. Hence what I tailor for the EU is a role of a balanced counterweight and counterpart where the EU can adopt its capabilities to be used more

effectively. Below, I will suggest how this balanced role can be achieved through reformations.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Systemic transformations in international relations bring the problem of transforming power in a manner of maximizing efficiency. As I argued above since the transatlantic relations have been sustained via NATO throughout the Cold War, it is important to highlight in what sense NATO contributes to the transatlantic link post Cold War and whether NATO is credible or not.

In this regard, the EU should find ways to integrate the objectives of European Security and Defense Policy to the agenda-setting of NATO. To this end, what I advocate is that the Euro-Atlantic relationship can be transformed into a partnership by expanding the availability of toolboxes that the European Union originated. For instance, the tool of civilian crisis management can find its impression in NATO. Moreover, this adaptation can have a facilitative effect to reduce the expectations-capabilities gap through the rapprochement of the toolboxes between two entities' agendas.

In addition, as another important factor, the European Union has to fortify its internal mechanism for the convergence of member-states' voices. In this regard, the Union has to renovate its intergovernmental intentions into transgovernmental propositions. In fact, what I suggest by transgovernmentalism includes new roles for the institutional setting of the EU. Accordingly, for a more balanced relation vis-à-vis the US, the EU should speak with one voice. To realize the effectiveness of this, I propound coordination between the three pillars of the Union. For instance, the European Community pillar should entail a close relationship with the Common Foreign and Security Policy Pillar as well as with

Javier Solana, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. These close relations should entail to develop mutually reinforcing information flow both with the European Community pillar and Justice and Home Affairs pillar. This is highly needed because the upcoming policies by the so-called Mr. Europe can find their legitimacy through consultative mechanism within the European Parliament. Hence, the gap between transnational cooperation and domestic understanding can be diminished. On the other hand, another consultative mechanism should be developed with the Justice and Home Affairs pillar. Since the European Union is not a mere hard power actor that only deals with tangible threats, the processes and possible challenges for the agenda-settings of the High Representative should be assessed within Justice and Home Affairs.

As Wallace (2001: 26-27) argues, the US' concern of military dimension and the EU's concentration on the economic and social aspects of international politics lead to a malfunction for coordinating the development of NATO and the EU. However, one can argue that with the Obama administration, the hard power toolbox can be converted to more constructive toolbox that consists of soft power elements like diplomacy or the efficacy of institutions for multilateralism and hence pave the way for the EU to exert its influence. But as Moisi (2008) observes, in the realm of transatlantic relations, it is far from viable to expect too much from a single man. In line with the different perceptual outlooks of the EU and the US, Moisi (2008) purports that although the US with Obama appreciates a multipolar world, it is not possible to give up on its role of "primus inter pares" and deny the American exceptionalism that bestows a unique role to the US. Even if they accept, can the EU be eligible to back up its soft power with military capabilities

to assist the US? (Moisi, 2008) For this reason, as a long-term project the European Union should reform its military capabilities not in a manner of contradicting the US' hard power but complementing it through modifying NATO to hold the purpose of providing technical and military assistance to the EU. Moreover, the so-called old Europe, which refers to the Balkans and east Europe should be incorporated into NATO through programs to enhance human security conditions in their home countries. This can be achieved with the partnership of Justice and Home Affairs Pillar and the NATO. Hence, the Euro-Atlantic partnership can gain a more humane visage of transgovernmental relations.

As Moisi (2008) claims, the current financial crisis is also a crucial test that has serious policy implications across the Atlantic. In this sense, the European Union should develop advisory mechanisms to propose economic policies and consultative mechanisms so European and American experts can evaluate economic and fiscal policies at the global level. By doing so, the transatlantic relationships will gain a constructive characteristic. On the other hand, the intergovernmental setting like the OECD or the G-8 will be rendered more effective with the backing up of these linkages.

Finally, I would argue that these arrangements both within the internal settings of the EU and at the transatlantic level will contribute to the amelioration of regulating the multilateral system of international relations. An EU that is a counterpart of the US will appease the transnational tensions that occurred in Kosovo or Bosnia and will contribute to a more robust system that is capable of eliminating threats through the rapprochement of power perceptions with closer transgovernmental linkages.

## Conclusion

Transatlantic relations have always been under the constraint of what the system required the actors to do. Especially the bipolar milieu of the Cold War shaped the transatlantic relations within the lines of national interests of the US which led to the favoring of European integration. The dispersion of threats and the inability to determine the exact sources of threats like terrorism has challenged the traditional perception of hard power and revealed the importance of more soft power instruments to foreign policy designations as well as diminished the either/or distinction to the conceptualization of power.

The transformation of distribution of power capabilities has affected the nature of the transnational relations between the EU and the US. But especially, from the perspective of the EU, it is a momentous process. The EU can have a role of a balanced counterpart in a manner of strengthening its global influence through the settlement of a multilateral system that consists of transgovernmental linkages. For this purpose, I tried to tailor the role of Europe as a counterpart based upon three dimensional constructions. The first dimension is the facilitative effect of the EU to converge the different perceptions to the effectiveness of power. Second, the structural change with the end of the Cold war and the September 11 attack as a building block for a new outlook for transnational relations. And last, the distinction between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ Europe.

Because the system renders the actors to imply a multilateral outlook, transatlantic relations are likely to be shaped with the growing rapprochement between the EU and the US through transgovernmental networks. This is particularly important for the EU to renovate its foreign policy patterns. For this reason I first emphasized that the EU has to

develop closer linkages the NATO in a way of incorporating the so-called old Europe hence sustaining the EU to be ever united and stronger. Also I argued that the internal institutional settings have to be modified for diminishing the gap between transnational cooperation and the domestic understanding. Also in the realm of economy and finance, I proposed that the Union should develop dual mechanisms as advisory and consultative ones which can contribute to the efficacy of intergovernmental settlements like the G-8 and the OECD.

Overall, the transatlantic relations should be assessed within the context of power equations and the nature of transatlantic relations that is shaped by the systemic transformations of power capabilities. However, the reasons and the policy recommendations that I put forward as solutions to the amelioration of the transatlantic relations can be upgraded by looking at the certain issue-specific areas where the interests of both parties diverge, so that one can try to illuminate how the possible solutions can be maintained via the transgovernmental networks that would fortify the sustainability of the balanced partnership. This will contribute to the convergence of interests and lead to a more robust multipolar system.

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