

OCTOBER 2024

POLICY BRIEF

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS IN TIMES OF TRANSITION

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Significant historical milestones have redefined global power structures and shaped the evolution of transatlantic relations. From the Peace of Westphalia to the end of the Cold War, international relations have undergone major transitions. The fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc created new dynamics within the transatlantic alliance, offering both challenges and opportunities for Western countries to realign their strategies in a rapidly changing world.

In the post-Cold War era, the resilience of the transatlantic alliance became evident as it adapted to shifts in global power distribution. Despite emerging challenges from rising powers such as China and renewed tensions with Russia, the alliance has managed to maintain cohesion. This period also saw a significant expansion of influence through institutions like NATO, a move that ensured the West remained not just a player, but a dominant force on the global stage, significantly impacting global power dynamics.

However, the current era marks another critical transition period for transatlantic relations. With emerging geopolitical threats, economic competition, and the shifting influence of non-Western powers, the alliance faces the urgent and pressing challenge of redefining its role in a multipolar world. The ability of transatlantic partners – including Latin America and Africa – to collaborate and adapt will be essential but critical in navigating these transitions and maintaining global stability.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of international relations is rich with major historical landmarks. From the Peace of Westphalia¹, which birthed the concept of the modern state, to the end of the Second World War, and the 1978 Reform and Opening-up of China², these landmarks are crucial for understanding the world's current reality and challenges. Each period has ushered in significant transitions and instability, creating turbulence and tectonic shifts in world history.

The End of the Cold War in 1991 certainly marked a significant shift in international relations. Western alliances, including the transatlantic alliance, have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of such changes. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, while challenging, was an opportunity for significant shifts in the global order. The transatlantic alliance has had to reinvent itself, build resilience, adapt and, most importantly, find new ways to remain relevant in an evolving global order like no other period in human history.

Renewing, strengthening, and rejuvenating the transatlantic alliance is not just a choice but a necessity if the West wants to remain relevant in the global chessboard. A new mental framework is required to address challenges, and an open mind is essential for building new opportunities. This emphasis on openness should foster a sense of urgency and the importance of the changes ahead.

This Policy Brief evaluates where the Western Alliance had moments of deep solidarity, strengthening the transatlantic relationship, and looks into the instances when divergence strained the partnerships. NATO expansion in Eastern Europe—one of the leading causes Vladimir Putin has affirmed of the current war in Ukraine³, a—ever-growing global terrorism, economic crises, democratic instability, and the rise of China are issues of particular interest addressed in this brief.

However, the transatlantic alliance must incorporate Latin America and Africa into the equation to remain relevant. With their growing economic influence, political stability, and potential for economic growth, both regions should play a more significant role in global governance. Their inclusion is not just a matter of balance but a recognition of their potential to shape the future of global governance, instilling a sense of optimism about the possibilities ahead.

THE UNITED STATES/EUROPEAN RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between the United States and Europe is a cornerstone of global governance and transatlantic relations, carrying significant weight and influence. Defence

1. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia is considered the birth of the modern state system, marking the end of the Thirty Years War and laying the foundation for international relations based on state sovereignty.

2. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the Reform and Opening up of China in 1978 transformed China into a global economic power and reshaped international economic and political relations.

3. This argument reaffirmed by Vladimir Putin regarding NATO expansion turn to the alleged promise made by members of the George H. W. Bush administration to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would not expand, "not one inch" beyond German unification. While historians still debate this argument, Putin has used this "broken promise" argument to justify Russia's actions in Ukraine. Barbara Zanchetta, Did Putin invade Ukraine because of NATO's "broken promise"?, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/did-putin-invade-ukraine-because-of-natos-broken-promise>. Access on 10/13/2024.

is the first and most relevant issue in transatlantic relations, and NATO plays a vital role in solidifying transatlantic security.

With the end of the Cold War, NATO as an alliance lost its *raison d'être*. The collapse of the Soviet Union was finalized on 26 December 1991⁴. From then on, however, NATO expanded to include former Warsaw Pact Eastern Bloc countries, including Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. This movement aimed to consolidate democracy and stability within these countries, and prevent the temptation to fall back into Russia's sphere of influence. This was an essential sign of relief and peace consolidation for the Europeans, a security guarantee as a buffer against potential Russian aggression. It also represented the continuity of the United States's presence in Europe, consolidating its commitment to European security.

For the United States, such inclusion ensured that these countries would remain anchored to the West and not under Russian influence. However, as China began its rise in Asia, the U.S. interest shifted to the Asia-Pacific. Though actions such as NATO's intervention in the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia and Kosovo, demonstrated its capacity to remain relevant in addressing regional conflicts and humanitarian crises, European countries, particularly France, were pushing for a more independent security policy, leading eventually to the development of the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)⁵. This strategy generated friction between the European Union and the United States over NATO and its defence policies.⁶

The terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al Qaeda against the U.S. on September 11, 2001 brought a new solidarity to NATO. Article 5, the collective defence clause, was invoked for the first time to show unanimous support for the United States in addressing the situation. European countries contributed to NATO's operations in Afghanistan. However, such support was short-lived with NATO not supporting the military action in Iraq. When the Bush Administration sought to invade Iraq in 2003 using a justification of non-existent weapons of mass destruction, countries including France and Germany opposed the action, significantly polarizing the Western allies. This situation showed deep fractures within the transatlantic relationship and raised concerns about the future of NATO. The U.S., however, acted with the so-called Coalition of the Willing⁷ to crush the political regime in Iraq, removing Saddam Hussein from power without discovering the existence of any major weapons of mass destruction.

The 2007 financial crisis in the United States brought new instability to transatlantic relations. The collapse of the housing market and the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States had profound implications for Europe, with financial contagion evidencing the close ties

4. The dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, marked the end of the Cold War and led to significant shifts in global alliances, particularly within NATO and the transatlantic relationship.

5. The European Union Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is a key part of the EU's foreign policy. It aims to strengthen the EU's capacity to manage international crises and contribute to global peace and security. Established under the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the CSDP provides the framework for EU military and civilian operations, focusing on peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and strengthening international security.

6. This friction between the United States and NATO derives from differing priorities, economic interests and visions regarding global security. The United States prioritises NATO as the primary framework for European security while the European Union has pursued a more strategic autonomy to reduce dependency on Washington and strengthen Europe's defense capabilities. An example of such friction over NATO was President Emmanuel Macron's allegation that NATO was brain dead. Sheena McKenzie and Lindsay Isaac, Macron says Europe is facing the 'brain death of NATO', 2019, CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/07/europe/macron-economist-nato-trump-brain-death-intl/index.html>.

7. The 'Coalition of the Willing' was a group of countries that supported and participated in the United States-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 without the explicit authorization of the United Nations Security Council. This coalition included the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Poland, and Spain. The term reflects the division in the international community regarding the legality and legitimacy of the invasion.

and significant interdependence between both economies. The crisis brought up the enormous exposure of major European banks to United States financial products. This situation generated widespread banking instability, affecting most European economies.

The greatest strain resulted from the tensions over how to respond to the crisis. The U.S. reaction was to quickly implement large-scale fiscal stimulus and banking rescue packages under the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP)⁸. Stricter fiscal rules exceptionally constrained euro area countries and prevented them from implementing similar measures as quickly as possible. While the United States pushed for more significant fiscal stimulus to boost recovery, European countries pushed for austerity measures. The 2008 crisis that hit Europe underlined profoundly an even more disturbing situation: the European Union was deeply divided internally. The split between North and South Europe showcased a continent that lacked the necessary instruments to share the benefits of common prosperity, despite all the advancements resulting from economic integration.

The 2008 crisis shifted the United States's focus towards Asia with the so-called 'pivot to Asia' strategy, a geopolitical and economic strategy to contain China's rise as a global powerhouse. On the other hand, the Europeans sought to be more assertive over their autonomy, particularly in defense, with growing discussions on establishing European military capabilities with more independence in foreign and security policy.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 promoted a rebirth of the NATO alliance, as Europeans again realized their dependence on U.S. military strength to support their defense policy⁹. The threat of Russia had not been eliminated with the end of the Cold War.

Despite this, the transatlantic relationship with Donald Trump at the White House was again strained. 'America First' caught the Europeans off guard, with Trump criticizing the Old Continent for not meeting its NATO defense spending commitments and targets. Trump also opposed the Paris Climate Accord. The Trump rhetoric caused friction in the relationship, with Europeans seeking to achieve a more independent security policy and strategic autonomy¹⁰.

With a new administration in the White House, Europeans were relieved to have Joe Biden as U.S. president. Biden reengaged with multilateral organizations and rejoined the Paris Climate Change Agreement. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the United States supported Ukraine by imposing sanctions and providing military aid to Kyiv. This action revitalized NATO, which has expanded to include Finland and Sweden to address the Russian threat.

However, the relationship between the United States and Europe is still challenging. The Europeans fear the United States will reduce its commitment to European security by shifting attention to the Indo-Pacific region. As the European Union also asserts itself as a global economic power, its interests may occasionally conflict with the United States,

8. The Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) was a United States government initiative established in 2008 to respond to the financial crisis. It stabilized the financial system by purchasing distressed assets, particularly mortgage-backed securities, from financial institutions and providing capital injections to banks to prevent their collapse. TARP initially allocated \$700 billion but later decreased to around \$475 billion. TARP is credited with stopping a more profound financial meltdown by restoring liquidity to the banking system.

9. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 revived the NATO alliance's focus on European defense and reduced dependence on the military strength of the United States.

10. Strategic autonomy refers to Europe's ability to act independently in its interest, particularly in security and defense, without overly relying on the United States. This concept also raises questions about the future of NATO and the transatlantic relationship.

in particular because of the rise of populism and nationalism. The global landscape is challenging for the future of transatlantic relations, particularly the divergent domestic and international priorities of both sides of the North Atlantic.

THE RISE OF ASIA AND TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Beginning with the Obama Administration, the United States shifted focus to concentrate more of its defense efforts in Asia. When Obama was president, the 'pivot to Asia' strategy geared towards the Indo-Pacific began shaping up more clearly¹¹. The purpose of such policies is to contain China and slow its rise as an economic and geopolitical power, with an impact throughout Asia and which increasingly influences even the relations between the United States and Europe. The Chinese government has implemented several outreach policies, mainly the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), bringing a new dimension to global trade, security, and technology¹².

The European approach to China is a mixture of cooperation and competition. Germany and France, which have more intensive relationships with China, tend to be more cautious in dealing with it. Though the EU has declared China a systemic rival and an economic partner, the Europeans understand how essential the relationship is, particularly in areas such as climate change, technology, and trade.

For the United States, China is a strategic rival in terms of technology, military influence in the Asia-Pacific region, and economic impact in Africa and Latin America. The United States, particularly after the presidency of Donald Trump, has emphasized China as a challenge to the global order. The United States aims to proselytize as many countries as possible against China by reaffirming the concept of counterbalancing China's political and economic model.

Though approaching China from different perspectives, there is a growing alignment of policies on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly in cybersecurity, electric vehicles, and technology. The United States has pushed Europe to take a more united stance against Chinese technology companies.

LATIN AMERICA'S ROLE IN A RENEWED TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE

Latin America could emerge as an essential player in reshaping transatlantic relations. Historically, it has been linked to Europe through colonial ties, particularly with Portugal and Spain¹³. The United States has significantly influenced Latin America, mainly because

11. Barack Obama's 'pivot to Asia', the so-called 'rebalance to Asia' strategy, was introduced in 2011 as a significant foreign policy shift focusing on the Asia-Pacific region in response to China's rising influence and the region's growing importance in global affairs. The strategy included enhancing alliances with countries including Japan, South Korea, and Australia, promoting regional security, and deepening economic ties through initiatives like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The strategy, however, has faced challenges, including limited resources due to ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and opposition to trade agreements.

12. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, has expanded Chinese economic influence in Africa and Latin America, challenging traditional dominance by Europe and the United States.

13. Latin America's colonial ties with Europe, mainly through Spain and Portugal, have had a lasting impact on the region's cultural, political, and economic relations with the continent.

of the Monroe Doctrine¹⁴.

With its growing middle class and abundant natural resources, Latin America is a valuable partner for the United States and Europe in a multipolar world. The EU-MERCOSUR trade deal could expedite the deepening of the bilateral relationship¹⁵. However, domestic issues within the European Union, its subsidy policies, and its need for more competitiveness in the agricultural sector, have slowed the integration process between Europe and Latin America.

Additionally, Latin America plays a vital role in the global energy transition. The region has renewable energy resources, with Brazil at the forefront of green technology and energy production¹⁶. For instance, Latin America is one of the main producers of green hydrogen.

The greatest challenge transatlantic relations face in relation to Latin America is China's growing influence in the region. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Latin America's global ties with China have grown stronger. With ever-increasing regional investments, China has become the largest trading partner of most Latin American countries. China has flooded the region with much-needed technology and infrastructure, and some countries' political leanings have facilitated the expansion of the Chinese presence.

AFRICA'S EMERGING ROLE IN TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Africa's increasing relevance in the global chessboard impacts its importance in transatlantic relations. Like Latin America, Africa has natural resources growing economies, and a relative young population¹⁷. If Africa invests in its population like China has over the last four decades, the continent could become a powerhouse for technology, economic growth, industrialization, and prosperity. This is why China has expanded its influence in the region through investments in infrastructure projects, particularly those building trading networks. Nowhere have BRI projects been so intensive as in Africa, with extensive investments in infrastructure and development.

However, it has also become a critical arena for global competition. Through Chinese investment, African countries have diversified their economies and exports, with greater access to new sources of income generation and economic growth, and improved overall prosperity. Chinese investments have, in ever-increasing ways, profoundly impacted the continent through mutually beneficial cooperation, without interference in domestic politics and internal affairs, particularly treating Africa as an essential frontier in development and accessible production.

14. The Monroe Doctrine, a foreign policy introduced by President James Monroe in 1823, stated that the United States would not interfere in European affairs and wars or with existing colonies in the Western Hemisphere. European intervention in the hemisphere (which was closed to future colonization) would be seen as a hostile act against the United States.

15. The EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement, an agreement negotiated for two decades, though seen as a vehicle for deeper cooperation between Europe and Latin America, has faced delays due to agricultural competitiveness and political concerns within the European Union.

16. Brazil's leadership in renewable energy and green technology, mainly through its ethanol and green hydrogen advancements, places Latin America at the forefront of the global energy transition.

17. Latin America average population is around 31.3 years of age, while in Africa it is 19.2. See, [https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/#:~:text=Africa%20ranks%20number%20%20among,132%20people%20per%20mi2\).&text=The%20median%20age%20in%20Africa%20is%2019.2%20years](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/#:~:text=Africa%20ranks%20number%20%20among,132%20people%20per%20mi2).&text=The%20median%20age%20in%20Africa%20is%2019.2%20years).

However, the West should give Africa more consideration. Africa is an essential player in the Western transition towards renewable energy sources. African countries, such as the Republic of Congo and Zambia, have enormous reserves of cobalt and rare minerals necessary for batteries and other green technologies. Sustainable partnerships with African countries should enable the United States and Europe to access resources to promote environmentally responsible practices.

Africa's growing population is particularly favorable for Europe. This population growth, with a young workforce, will necessarily lead to economic development, entrepreneurship, and innovation. A closer partnership between Africa, Europe, and the United States could reduce Africa's current challenges, including political instability in certain areas, poverty, and unemployment. The only negative part of this situation is that if the economic situation in Africa deteriorates, migration pressures in Europe could eventually grow and generate issues related to security in Europe.

Though Europe and the United States have had long histories in Africa, negative experiences from the past should be replaced with a positive wave of investments, technology transfer, and open trade. Europe and the United States should reproduce an initiative similar to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)¹⁸. The summit, held in Beijing, welcomes leaders from numerous African countries to increase the intensity of the transformation of the China-Africa partnership as a new model of cooperation in the Global South, particularly the effective development of African countries¹⁹.

Recently, China has announced various initiatives, including the voluntary and unilateral opening of the Chinese market to African countries, and elimination of customs tariffs for numerous African products²⁰. This unprecedented measure opened up a sophisticated global market to Africa for the first time in an unrestricted way, including for agricultural products.

The relationship between the EU and U.S. and Africa should go beyond peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and counterterrorism. Stabilizing the region, particularly in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, is critical for global security.

The greatest challenge for the United States and Europe is offering alternative development models to counterbalance China's growing influence on the continent. Based on the historical record, the historical menu—transparency, good governance, and sustainability—does not seem sufficient to secure economic independence and growth in the same way as China's current proposition.

Beijing's investment in Africa has often come with few political strings attached, allowing China to build strong ties with many regional governments. As Europe and the United States recalibrate their engagement with Africa, they should offer alternative development models that emphasize transparency, good governance, and long-term sustainability, providing

18. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), established in 2000, is a formal platform for dialogue and cooperation between China and African countries. It holds ministerial meetings every three years and high-level summits, focusing on political, economic, and cultural exchanges, development aid, and infrastructure investments. Through FOCAC, China has committed substantial financial resources to African infrastructure projects, trade agreements, and capacity-building initiatives.

19. The African Union-European Union (AU-EU) Summit differs from FOCAC based on their different focus: FOCAC is more focused on large-scale infrastructure and trade, while the AU-EU on broader issues, such as governance, human rights, migration and security.

20. China's engagement with Africa has often been characterized by large-scale investments with few political conditions, contrasting Western aid models.

African nations with choices that align with their aspirations for economic independence and growth.

THE PATH AHEAD

For transatlantic relations to remain relevant, multiple areas of interaction should be expanded – trade, investments, education, tourism, in addition to defense and security, and the United States/Europe-China dichotomy. Below is a list of possible areas where closer cooperation may expand the relationship to remain relevant and reach new levels of cooperation and shared practices.

BROADER INCLUSION OF LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Engaging Latin America and Africa as equal partners would improve and solidify transatlantic relations. Both regions should be recognized as crucial players in the international chessboard, with the responsibility to bring the Global South to the negotiating table of global governance to address issues including artificial intelligence, digital inclusion, development, climate, and infrastructure renewal.

Making Africa and Latin America co-leaders in the new global order will solidify the idea of cooperation to promote shared responsibility for a shared future.

Institutions such as NATO and the EU must evolve to reflect the realities of a multipolar world. This means considering how organizations can integrate broader global partnerships and focus on security concerns and new global threats, such as pandemics, climate change, and cybersecurity.

This is important to secure more strategic dialogue with Latin America and Africa to reflect the diverse distribution of global power and responsibility. Support for profound changes in the governance of the United Nations system, particularly the United Nations Security Council, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, is long overdue, and such regions should become equal partners.

Terrorism, political instability, and organized crime represent significant threats to the global and regional stability of Africa and Latin America, with a spillover impact on global security. Close work with the African Union (AU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) is critical to achieve effective results. Through technical assistance and logistical support, NATO and the EU could play a pivotal role in stabilizing regions including the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, Venezuela, and Central America.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND TRADE DIVERSIFICATION

China has become the largest trading partner for Africa and Latin America over the last decades. Strengthening partnerships and economic ties is essential if transatlantic relations are to be reignited. Both regions offer many opportunities, such as growing technology sectors, renewable energy potential, resources, intensive agriculture, and growing

populations. The United States and Europe should invest in free trade agreements and economic initiatives prioritizing sustainability and inclusivity with both regions. Europe and the United States should avoid a double-standard approach to trade relations and, like China, facilitate the entry of goods produced in both regions into their domestic markets.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND DIGITAL COOPERATION

The digital revolution and technological innovation are areas in which transatlantic cooperation should be significantly strengthened. Europe and the United States should enhance their partnerships with Latin America and Africa in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence to explore the region's potential frontiers for digital innovation. The transatlantic alliance should involve local governments, private sectors, and international organizations to enhance access to internet services, digital education and training resources, mainly supporting local start-ups. The greater the exchange of technologies, the quicker will these regions grow economically. Africa and Latin America should also be able to even access technologies coming from China, India and other technology producing countries and not have their development slowed due to restrictions generated from frictions existing between the United States and the EU against these countries.

CONCLUSION

The challenges and opportunities facing transatlantic relations in the twenty-first century are unprecedented. Though maintaining the ties between the United States and Europe has been challenging, the partnership between both sides of the Atlantic has solidified over time. However, for transatlantic relations to thrive, the inclusion of Latin America and Africa should demand a bold rethinking of old cooperation models. If this does not happen, China will present a palatable alternative to both regions, allowing them to achieve greater interconnection, disruptive technologies, and improved infrastructure. The recent BRICS expansion is an important sign of willingness to build a more inclusive global order.

Including Latin America and Africa in the transatlantic partnership provides the United States and Europe with fresh opportunities to expand their influence, bolster economic resilience, and enhance their leadership on global issues. However, both regions should be treated as equal partners with shared responsibilities and goals to secure their independence and global influence.

Transatlantic relations will deteriorate if the United States and Europe are unwilling to open spaces for Latin America and Africa, or if they fail to look beyond their traditional allies, and ultimately do not implement changes that reflect an evolving global order. The future of the Wider Atlantic will be more China-led, confirming its strength as the new global superpower.

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ABOUT THE POLICY CENTER FOR THE NEW SOUTH

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

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