



The Faulty Logic of the European Union & Its Consequences for the United States

by Jakub J. Grygiel

Jakub J. Grygiel is the George H. W. Bush Associate Professor at The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at The Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. He is a Senior Fellow at FPRI. Parts of this paper were presented at FPRI's Study Group on America and the West and at FPRI's Manhattan Salon in April and May 2012, respectively. The author thanks all the participants for their questions and comments.

***Abstract:** The European Union is in crisis because it is based on a wrong understanding of political development. Its founding assumption is that a common market and a common currency would lead to a unified polity; that Europeans would arise out of the euro. This has not happened and Europe is fraying economically and politically. And the United States is not a disinterested spectator because a weaker and more divided Europe undermines a key foreign policy objective pursued over the last century—of a Europe whole, secure, and free. Consequently, it is premature for Washington to reorient its strategic attention away from Europe.*

Europe's crisis is economic and financial only in its symptoms. The problem is political in nature, deeply embedded in the principles undergirding the entire European Union (EU) project. Unfortunately, the solutions sought by the various European leaders, from Angela Merkel to Mario Monti, address only these symptoms, while at best ignoring and at worst aggravating the root causes. For the sake of Italy, Greece, and other suffering nations, one can hope that the economic crisis will subside, but the amelioration of the crisis will in all likelihood result in a weaker and more disunited Europe. The EU is a victim of its own poorly conceived logic of political development.

The consequences are, however, not limited to Europe. The splintering and wilting of the European project is, in fact, a serious setback for the United States. It represents, at least in part, a failure of a key century-long U.S. foreign policy goal that aimed at the establishment of a strong, united, and free Europe. It also exacerbates the fragility of a Western, trans-Atlantic alliance, the importance of

© 2012 Published for the Foreign Policy Research Institute by Elsevier Ltd.

which will only increase as the Middle East continues to destabilize, Russia hardens its authoritarian stance and China rises to challenge the United States in the Pacific. In fact, Washington's "pivot" to Asia is in large measure predicated on the assumption that at a minimum Europe is stable, secure and on its way to becoming a coherent power on its own, allowing a geographic shift of U.S. resources and attention. The EU crisis is beginning to test the reliability of such an assumption.

This article develops this argument, starting with U.S. objectives, continuing with Europe and its woes and ending with the consequences for Washington and the West.

The Eurocentric U.S. Foreign Policy

Since World War II, Europe has occupied a prominent spot in the hierarchy of U.S. foreign policy objectives. Stating this in a cogent fashion, Robert Strausz-Hupé wrote in 1952:

The United States chose Europe as the principal target of its initiative. That choice has been made and is irreversible. The preservation of the Western Community and hence the defence of Europe have precedence over all other commitments of the United States in world politics.¹

Europe was the principal and irreversible focus of American foreign policy—a fact that is striking in its simplicity and boldness, in particular considering that the United States, like any other great power in history, had been reluctant to commit to any durable strategic "friendship." The painful experiences of the previous three decades (and two wars), combined with the fear of expanding Soviet power, contributed to the realization that a continued American involvement in Europe was indispensable. World War II in particular indicated that Washington could no longer rely on the hope of hemispheric defense. The Atlantic and Pacific oceans were not moats but avenues for power projection, forcing the United States to protect its security on the shores of Eurasia, not off the coasts of North America. The "rimlands," of which Europe was one and East Asia the other, were the geopolitical prize for any aspiring global power and, most importantly, the place where U.S. national security would be decided. As Nicholas Spykman put it in his memorable phrase, "Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world."²

¹ Robert Strausz-Hupé, *The Zone of Indifference* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1952), p. 3.

² Nicholas Spykman, *The Geography of Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1944), p. 43. His classic and lengthy critique of hemispheric defense is worth re-reading. See Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (New York: Harcourt and Co., 1943). For an opposing view, see Robert J. Art, "The United States, the Balance of Power, and World War II: Was Spykman Right?" *Security Studies*, Summer 2005, pp. 1-42

The U.S. decision to provide security to Western Europe through the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO), combined with the push to improve the economic well-being of the region through the Marshall Plan, proved beneficial to all parties concerned. The Europeans were eager to have Washington firmly and formally engaged on the continent, not only to deter the Soviet menace looming on the east, but also to assuage fears of a return to traditional intra-European balancing and conflict.³ As Arnold Wolfers pointed out, at the end of World War II, the “reason for [Europeans’] fear of American isolationism is not hard to guess. Without the United States many of them cannot feel secure from another resurgence of Germany or of Japan; without participation by the United States the power of the Soviet Union could not be balanced by any grouping of countries.”⁴ The United States was there to protect Europeans both from Moscow and from one another by making the differences in security concerns among European states irrelevant. As a result, by the late 1950s, countries as geopolitically different as Portugal, Greece and Germany enjoyed a patina of strategic unity. Freed from traditional preoccupations of security, Europeans could focus on the regulatory minutiae of their growing union, expand their welfare systems and create a common market. Tensions both within Europe and between the United States and Europe certainly existed and came to the fore on a wide spectrum of issues, spanning a variety of events, from placement of nuclear missiles, policy in the Middle East and to the futile British and French attempts to hold on to their status as imperial powers. Still, the continued U.S. engagement with European security alleviated national differences in foreign policy on the continent. Western Europe was united because of Washington’s presence.

These two fears—of the Soviet Union and of fellow European states—are now often forgotten, their importance eclipsed by the more recent paeans to the alleged autochthonous construction of “Europe,” capable of transcending traditional strategic concerns and conflicts. The fact that fear of American withdrawal was at the birth of this united Europe is inconvenient to those in Brussels who present the European project as an antidote, if not opponent counter, to the U.S. influence.

The continued American military and economic involvement in Europe carried a separate set of strategic benefits for the United States. Even though in the first decade after World War II American military commitment to Western Europe was tentative and never seen as permanent or long-term, most policymakers in Washington considered a return to the interwar strategic posture risky. First and foremost, the looming presence of the Soviet Union was correctly seen as a serious

³ See Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,” *Journal of Peace Research*, September 1986, pp. 263-277.

⁴ Arnold Wolfers, “The Role of Small States in the Enforcement of International Peace,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, May 1945, p. 294.

threat to the geopolitical pluralism of Eurasia and the independence of Europe in particular. At the end of World War II, the U.S. Joint Chief of Staff wrote that the Soviet Union had been “left as the sole great power on the Continent—a position unique in modern history.”⁵ A Soviet-dominated Europe would have left only the Atlantic Ocean separating the United States from the global ambitions of the Soviet Union. Some argued, and continue to posit, that the oceanic moat would have sufficed to maintain U.S. political independence and strategic freedom. Yet, isolationism—or, to use a longer technical term, a hemispheric defense combined with off-shore balancing—was no longer seen as feasible, in part because of technological advances (especially in airpower) and in part because D-Day proved that withdrawing from Europe was incredibly costly. While abandoning the “rimland” in the 1920s may have brought short-term savings, it also resulted in enormous expenditures of blood and treasure in the long-term. By 1945, the costs of re-entry into Europe had already proved high, and potential Soviet hegemony, made more sinister by an alluring ideology and more capable by heavy industry, would only have made them higher. Hence, Washington sought to invest financially and militarily in the defense of Western Europe, with the goal of building a stable and secure Atlantic rimland as a defensive barrier against otherwise-likely Soviet domination over the entire devastated continent.

Moreover, the United States actively encouraged European integration with the same objective in mind. Only a united Western Europe could, in fact, withstand Soviet pressures and attempts to divide and conquer. And only a prosperous Western Europe could contribute to its own defense, sharing the burden of deterring the Soviet Union. The unity of these nations, starting with the original six (Italy, France, West Germany and the Benelux), would establish a power greater than the sum of their individual potentials, and thus would provide a more valuable ally in any confrontation with Moscow.⁶

Europe’s Current Troubles

Fast forward to 2011, and the European unification project is teetering. This is a moment of great tension in Europe, but also it represents a serious problem for Washington. The American tripartite mission of having a stable, secure and free Europe is at risk—or at least the first two objectives are; Europe is weakening and is increasingly divided, though is still peaceful and free. We have not

⁵ Cited in Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 67.

⁶ Such an approach was also based on a certain preference for supporting small states, rather than seeking grand bargains with other great powers. The United States, as Great Britain in the past, has valued small states (or middle powers) for both reasons of principle and power. On the other hand, the Soviets in the past, as China may be now, have disparaged small states, considering their existence only as a function of power differential. See also Wolfers, pp. 24-31.

failed thus far to achieve our goal, but we have not fully succeeded either. The partial success of a pacified and free Europe is by itself a historical marvel. But the current crisis is not a mere speed bump on the road to even greater unity, peace and freedom. Rather, it is the direct outcome of a fundamentally mistaken approach to European unity. Consequently, it needs to be seen as part of a long-term trend undermining the security—both of Europe and of the United States.

The current sovereign debt crisis in Europe is merely a symptom of a much deeper problem. The problem lies in the assumption behind Europe's economic integration that a common market would lead to the birth of one nation.⁷ In a nutshell, the fathers of a united Europe held that one market and one currency would create Europeans.

Such a line of causation demanded a technocratic approach. Missing any underlying continent-wide national unity, the establishment of a common market and a common currency had to be pursued by a supra-national elite with a very tenuous electoral accountability. Absent a *demos*, the technocrats had to take over the decision-making process.

Moreover, there could be little or no public deliberation about the process and substance of integration because there were no people capable of having such a debate. The carapace of the EU was erected first, its people would arise later. The hope, based on the assumption that a common economy creates a unified people, was that at a certain point a European *demos* would arise, thereby allowing for a functional European democracy. But until then, technocracy through regulations would have to suffice, and indeed, it proved the only way to manage European affairs.

The “democratic deficit” of EU institutions is, therefore, a direct outcome of the faith in the transformative powers of economic structures. The economic, material conditions had to be first set up, then managed by the EU elites sheltered from electoral wishes (notice the EU's reluctance to allow, and fear of, referenda); the effect would be the blurring of national differences and ultimately the birth of a European nation. One market, one currency and—sooner or later—one people.

It cannot be denied that the original impetus for such an approach was the justified fear that in the years after World War II the alternative to a European community was a European war. The tendency to present the specter of war in order to rationalize every avoidance of public debate, to circumvent referenda, and to favor unelected technocratic governments continues unabated in 2012, almost 70 years after the defeat of Nazi Germany. Over the past year, several European politicians have warned that the collapse of the euro will lead to the end of Europe

⁷ This draws on my FPRI E-Note of January 2012. Online at <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2012/201201.grygiel.europe.html>

and thus to a likely war.⁸ But the “war card” is simply not credible to a generation that has no memory of a war and has grown up amidst prosperity and absence of conflict. The most pressing menace to most Europeans is not a Franco-German war, but the end of economic growth and of state welfare. And as the crisis has deepened, these are no longer a threat but a reality through which most of Europe is currently suffering. In the end, the EU may be seen not as the main source of European peace but as the cause of its economic woes.

The EU project has created a set of rules regulating economic, political and legal aspects of social life, though it has established these rules with neither deep popular support nor attention to the realities on the ground. As Joseph Weiler put it regarding the constitutional aspects of the EU, the legal order created a “constitutional theory...which has not been worked out, its long-term, transcendent values not sufficiently elaborated, its ontological elements misunderstood, its social rootedness and legitimacy highly contingent.”⁹ A similar statement can be made about Europe’s economic order: a common market that has at least in part a common currency, is based on mistaken assumptions about joint political will and common identity, and is characterized by crumbling political legitimacy and public support.

The separation of monetary and fiscal authorities was a timid recognition of the absence of political coherence in Europe. A European Central Bank would manage the euro, but each national government would control its own fiscal behavior. There was simply no desire among national politicians, and no ability of the EU supporters, to deprive individual states of the key aspect of state sovereignty and an important measure of political accountability: fiscal policy. The result is on the front pages of the newspapers: Greece, Italy, Spain, just to name the most prominent ones, spent like they always did, but at German interest rates, thanks to the euro. In Christopher Caldwell’s words, the euro “took a set of rules that were appropriate for an order of cloistered nuns (the Germans) and applied them to a bunch of randy teenagers (the Southerners).”¹⁰

Those individual governments are certainly to blame. Their fiscal profligacy was—and is—irresponsible, even without the euro. But the project to create a uniform currency for widely disparate economies, cultures and political traditions is irresponsible as well. Not reflecting the underlying historic and cultural conditions,

⁸ See, for instance, Polish Finance Minister Jacek Rostowski’s speech to the European Parliament in September 2011, where he warned that a war is likely in ten years. Leigh Phillips, “Poland warns to war ‘in 10 years’ as EU leaders scramble to contain panic,” *EU Observer*, Sept.14, 2011, at <http://euobserver.com/18/113625>. Similarly, Merkel observed that “if the euro falls then Europe will fail.” *Spiegel Online*, July 9, 2011, online at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,784953,00.html>.

⁹ J. H. H. Weiler, *The Constitutions of Europe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 8.

¹⁰ Christopher Caldwell, “We’re Good Europeans Yet They All Hate Us,” *Standpoint* (April 2012), at <http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/4365/full>

from its very beginning the monetary union was on a collision course with policies pursued by the individual member states and with the disparate popular preferences expressed through elections or in street demonstrations. This was—and is—a recipe for political failure. Samuel Huntington put it succinctly: “Political leaders imbued with the hubris to think that they can fundamentally reshape the culture of their societies are destined to fail.”¹¹

One way to describe the challenge is by clarifying the word “Europe.” There are at least three realities behind “Europe.” First, there is the civilizational entity, characterized by a common culture based on a heritage of Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome, that is, very briefly, a culture based on reason and faith working together to seek objective truths and to protect the dignity of the human person. There are naturally conflicting aspects in this common heritage of faith, philosophy, and law—and Europe’s history is testament to such struggles. The existence of this underlying shared culture, however, permitted and indeed encouraged the rise of a plurality of national identities and of interpretations of the mix of the three “cities” mentioned above. The attachment to the particular city, region or nation was imbued in this idea of Europe, which was a rejection of large, abstract ideological constructs with claims of universal validity. The temptation of such ideologies was certainly quite strong and clashed directly with the plurality and yet unity of European culture. Since the eighteenth century, and more violently and persistently over the course of the twentieth, the elevation of a rationalist approach to political problems, and to European ones in particular, meant, first and foremost, the rejection of faith and Christianity as foundational forces of this culture. It also meant the imposition of a uniform and a-historical political structure, of which the EU is the latest incarnation. The deep roots of Europe as a civilization were discarded in favor of a construction of a new “Europe,” marked by top-down harmony through a set of universal regulations.

This is the second meaning of “Europe”: the political apparatus erected over the past six decades, characterized by a large bureaucracy, limited intra-European statesmanship and great preoccupation with the minutiae of the economic, political and social lives of its member states. One of the founding motives behind this entity is to wrest sovereignty away from the national level, deemed too dangerous, fickle and perhaps inefficient, instead elevating the continent to a supra-national, “European” sovereignty. Starting from coal and steel, this Europe took more and more functions from the member states, building a political union with increasingly greater reach (more than half of member states’ legislation, for example, is decided at the EU level) and smaller democratic accountability (the bulk of decisions are done by the EU executive branch with very

¹¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 154.

limited control by the European parliament).¹² The low turnout at European elections, which in any case are often about the national issues *du jour*, further diminishes the democratic legitimacy and power of European institutions.¹³ The EU certainly pays homage to the pluralism of European civilization by offering its documents in 23 “official and working languages” of its members—but never in history has so little been said in so many different languages.¹⁴

Finally, the third meaning of “Europe” is the euro, the common currency of 17 EU member states (plus two, Montenegro and Kosovo, that adopted the currency on their own in 2002 because their *de facto* currency was previously the Deutschemerk). Interestingly enough, in part to avoid the temptation of returning to a national currency, the euro-zone has no clear provisions for expulsion or unilateral currency withdrawal without concurrently leaving the EU as a whole. In other words, its progressive vision necessitates a one-way street; backing out is inconceivable.¹⁵

Each of these “Europes” carries inherent tensions. Each has interesting discussions and valuable contributions to the stability of the continent. Nonetheless, the big mistake has been to place such a huge bet on the transformative power of the last “Europe,” the euro and the common market, and expect that the EU and European civilization would resolve their internal debates and tensions—that indeed a new united political entity and a new European culture would arise from it. In other words, the sequence of these “Europes” has been wrong: as it is, the euro takes precedence over the other two, presumably leading to a united European polity and to a new European culture. No wonder panicked European politicians claim that if the euro falls, Europe is over. They have abandoned the idea that there is a European civilization, and that there are solid motives at the origin of the European political project. They cannot conceive that, perhaps, figuring out what

¹² Weiler, p. 266. Weiler also writes: “the classical instruments of control and public accountability are ill-suited to the practices of infranationalism. They are little affected by elections, change in government, and the new instruments introduced by, say, Maastricht.” Weiler, p. 285. See also Mark Bovens, “New Forms of Accountability and EU-Governance,” *Comparative European Politics*, No. 5 (2007), pp. 104-120.

¹³ Hence, the calls for compulsory voting at European elections. See Anthoula Malopoulou, “Lost Voters: Participation in EU elections and the case for compulsory voting,” CEPS Working Document No. 317, July 2009.

¹⁴ I am paraphrasing Dominique Moisi, “It’s Time for a United Europe,” *The Guardian*, July 22, 2009.

¹⁵ For a full legal analysis, see Phoebus Athanassiou, “Withdrawal and Expulsion from the EU and EMU: Some Reflections,” Legal Working Paper Series, No. 10, Dec. 2009, European Central Bank. The absence of provisions allowing for withdrawal from the euro-zone is proving to be incredibly costly. Unable to devalue their currency, countries such as Greece and Italy have to seek debt-restructuring, which however does nothing to make their economies more competitive. For an interesting analysis of how withdrawal may be possible, see Hal S. Scott, “When the Euro Falls Apart—A Sequel,” Working Paper, Program on International Financial Systems, Harvard Law School, Jan. 31, 2012.

Europe is in the first place—an exercise that must involve a much more open discussion about, for instance, the role of Christianity—would have been preferable. What we have left as “Europe” is a common market masquerading as one nation with the trappings, but none of the authority or power of a legitimate state.

This is, then, not a purely economic and financial problem. European leaders’ actions of the past two years address only the symptoms, and not the root cause, of the issue. The preoccupation with lowering the “spread” between, say, Italian and German debt, the efforts to infuse European banks with European Central Bank (ECB) money or the negotiations to impose a “haircut” on the Greek debt-holders deal only with the immediate crisis without addressing the larger issue: the fact that there is really no Europe to speak of. This is a political, and, perhaps even more, a civilizational, problem to which only economic solutions are applied, unsurprisingly to little effect.

The crisis is not limited to Europe, but has serious consequences for the security of the North Atlantic region. There are at least two principal reasons for this outcome. First, Europe lacks a sense of purpose that could impart unity and direction to a common security strategy. The original desire to prevent intra-European war and to defend against the Soviet menace has lost its sense of urgency and historical relevance. Enlargement, deepening and the common market are weak replacements, unable as they are to generate the unity of interest necessary to formulate and implement a coherent foreign policy.

The lack of a European foreign and defense policy is not simply a question of capabilities. While certainly there is no political will to increase military expenditures, it is the absence of a purpose that deprives the EU of a security strategy. To be blunt, the EU does not know *what* or *why* to defend, and consequently it has no motivation to garner the means necessary to do so.¹⁶ Figuring the *why* and *what* must come before the *how*. One cannot mobilize a population or train an army to defend a currency or a set of regulations.

Second, this means that intra-European international relations are not over. On the contrary, they are becoming more fluid and tense. Tony Judt observed, quite correctly, that the “logical imperative of a ‘European’ identity that distinguishes itself from undesirable neighbors with whom it shares a state is to look to an alternative pole of authority, choosing ‘Brussels’ over Rome, Madrid, Belgrade or even Brussels itself.”¹⁷ The tensions within states were mitigated by the ability to look to Brussels as an alternative.

Similarly, fears arising among states were assuaged by the presence of a common Brussels/Strasbourg where one could seek safety. Such posture became

¹⁶ For greater details on a similar point, see the presentation by Col. (ret.) Joseph Wood, panel at GLOBSEC 2012 conference, Bratislava, April 2012. Online at <http://vimeo.com/40310859>.

¹⁷ Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion?* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), p. 114.

particularly pronounced among the Central European states that joined the EU a decade or so after the end of the Cold War. Historically, these states sought a security patron to improve their tenuous geopolitical position. “After Versailles,” Judt writes, “the small states of Eastern Europe took France as their model and protector; after 1932 they turned, more or less reluctantly, to Germany; from 1944 to 1989 the U.S.S.R. was their only realist option. Now it is ‘Europe.’”¹⁸ Brussels would replace Paris, Berlin or Moscow—or so at least the Central Europeans hoped.

Part of the problem is that the EU now resides in Berlin. The grand bargain of the post-war decades was that Germany would be an economic powerhouse, but the political initiative would reside elsewhere—maybe Paris, maybe Brussels. The current sovereign debt crisis shattered that bargain, firmly consolidating in German hands both the economic power and the political initiative in Europe. Paris is attempting to keep up, but it is clearly no longer an equal member of the Franco-German partnership. Europe is Berlin, and there is a ring of worried states around a potent Germany.

The consequence is that Europe is racked by increasingly vocal divisions. A sketch of these divisions would draw a line splitting the north from the south, and more precisely Germany and its followers from the Mediterranean countries. The feeling, most pronounced in Italy and Greece but likely to spread, is that Berlin is imposing its own will upon them, by, among other means, choosing to replace elected governments with temporary technocratic ones and by forcing upon them highly unpopular austerity measures (which so far have meant mostly tax increases). On the other hand, the feeling in Berlin is that continued outlays of money are politically necessary, but ultimately economically futile, in order to keep fiscally imprudent states inside the euro-zone. The financial decisions and outcomes of almost 20 (so far) “European summits” are well known and continue to be on the front pages, and need no further elaborations here. Suffice it to say that they are generating resentment in the various European states, deepening the fissures on the continent.

European states are acknowledging the primacy of Germany on the continent. Polish foreign policy is a great example of this change. After the dark Soviet decades, Warsaw’s biggest aspiration was to re-join Europe in both its NATO and EU incarnations. The search for the support of Brussels (EU) and Washington (NATO) was driven by security considerations and economic aspirations. The honeymoon with Washington lasted 20 years, carrying through the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For a variety of reasons, including an abysmal lack of judgment on the part of the Obama administration that chose to cancel the missile defense agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic and pursued a naïve “reset” policy with Moscow, the relationship has frayed, and Poland has adopted a much more EU-centric foreign policy. Its logical conclusion was the November

¹⁸ Judt, p. 80.

2011 plea for a more active Germany. In the words of Polish Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, “I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear Germany inactivity.” Germany is now “Europe’s indispensable nation.”¹⁹ For Sikorski, Berlin’s “activity” is welcome as it represents the only hope to maintain a united Europe. But for others in Europe, on the receiving end of such activity, Berlin’s role is to be feared. German power is, in the end, a source of European division.

Consequences for the United States

The weakness and divisions in Europe are likely to cause problems for Washington. Most evident are the immediate economic consequences of a collapse of the euro, the scope of which is simply not knowable beforehand. But the challenges reach well beyond a slowdown in commercial interactions and financial flows and affect the key U.S. foreign policy objective of the past century—namely, to establish and maintain a tight transatlantic connection in order to both ensure stability in Europe and to present a united Western front against existing or future enemies. And yet, while Europeans no longer see the United States as the indispensable nation, Washington has no alternative plan for the continent. The grand vision that characterized U.S. policy toward Europe from the 1940s to the 1990s has dissipated, in part because of the mistaken view that twenty-first century Europe was a resounding success and would need no further attention or resources. The unpopularity of the war in Afghanistan and the acrimony over the conflict in Iraq have further weakened NATO’s sense of purpose. There is no clear answer now to the question of whether there is a future role for the trans-Atlantic relationship. A generic response that the trans-Atlantic alliance must maintain the “global order,” face “global challenges,” and adopt “smart defense” offers nothing but platitudes.

Off-shore balancers and isolationists within the United States may rejoice at diminished U.S. interest in Europe. Europe, as they see it, may finally be on its own, an adult power providing its own security, and not needing an expense of American resources. Yet, not only is a European common defense or strategic unity unlikely to come about for the reasons mentioned above, but also diminishing U.S. involvement further divides Europe, thereby weakening American security. As a result, the American objective of maintaining a stable and secure Europe is slipping away.

Take, for instance, the war in Libya. Irrespective of the merits and operational conduct of this intervention, the outcome of the war was to deepen the

¹⁹ Radek Sikorski, “Poland and the Future of the European Union,” Berlin, Nov. 28, 2011, online at

http://www.msz.gov.pl/files/docs/komunikaty/20111128BERLIN/radoslaw_sikorski_pol_and_and_the_future_of_the_eu.pdf

serious strategic fissures within Europe. It pitted, among others, Italy against France, putting even the Schengen agreement of a borderless region in jeopardy.²⁰ It also showed Europe's dearth of military capabilities, which no state is willing to address in part because of the demands of the "austerity age" but also because there is no clearly articulated reason to do so. Finally, the Obama administration's approach of "leading from behind" may have in the end toppled Gaddafi, but it has also exacerbated intra-European tensions by failing to provide unity and making Europeans compete with each other. It has proven again that an American absence or even diminished leadership is not replaced by European unity, but by squabbling among European capitals over the purpose and the conduct of this military intervention.

From a more long-term perspective, divergent views on Russia continue to linger in and divide Europe, putting Central Europeans (and the Baltic states) in opposition to Italy and Germany, a traditional dividing line determined as much by history as by sheer geography. The fact that the expression of security concerns about Russia seems to be receding in, for example, Warsaw is more a factor of the perceived need to rely heavily on Germany (and thus of at least appearing to follow Berlin's posture toward Moscow) than of any attenuation of Russian post-imperial objectives. On the contrary, Putin's reelection has only led to more bellicose statements and certainly portends no mellowing of Russian ambitions. In the end, there is no reason to expect that Estonia will share the same security preoccupations with Italy, or Poland with Germany. The continued existence of these deeply rooted divisions makes Europe look increasingly as it did in 1930, rather than a harmonious, post-modern geopolitical space. Indeed, the latter never existed, present only in the dreams of EU elites.

A final and important reason why Europe's troubles affect the United States is the coming contest between Washington and Beijing.²¹ A stable Europe and a united West will be all the more valuable to the United States in its "pivot to Asia" (a poorly thought out phrase used by the Obama administration, connoting not just a shift to Asia, but also a shift away from other regions, including Europe). Such a geostrategic shift will be possible and successful only if Europe is secure from external threats and concordant in its internal relations. Washington ought not to expect European help in balancing China in the Pacific; there is simply no interest or capability in Europe to project power that far, and the two powers, Great Britain and France, that used to engage in Asia are shadows of their former selves. But a Europe that is unable to defend itself and is anxious about its own internal balance of power is at best a distraction to the United States, and, at worst, a drain of American attention and resources.²² The assumption that Europe has crossed some

²⁰ BBC News, "EU moves to tighten border controls in Schengen zone," May 4, 2011, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13277695>

²¹ Aaron Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011).

²² I would also add a broader point. The more the United States faces enemies that do not share our understanding of democracy, our tradition of international law, or our appreciation

sort of threshold on its inexorable march toward peace and prosperity is simply not warranted by the facts; the accompanying presumption that Washington can safely reorient its strategic attention away from Europe is therefore equally mistaken.

There is little that the United States can do to aid Europe in its sovereign debt crisis. Nonetheless, this crisis is only the symptom of a larger challenge—one that is worth pondering and facing. Returning to Strausz-Hupé, “the failure of Europe is the joint failure of the principal members of Western culture.”²³ Such analysis of the problem indirectly suggests that the role of the United States is to prevent the failure of Europe to a large degree by revitalizing the notion, so passé and yet still so relevant, of a common Western culture or civilization. A failure of Europe—as evidenced by the fraying of the EU, the lack of confidence in a common future and the emptiness of the meaning of Europe—is a joint failure, and thus a joint effort may be required to address it.

What remains is determining how to do just that. No policy can be devised to restore a civilization, which, after all, is something beyond the realm of politics. As Christopher Dawson writes, a civilization is “not just a highly organized form of social existence with its industry and art and scientific technique... [it is] both social and religious—two worlds of reality bound together by a visible fabric of institutions and laws, and by objective conceptions of justice and authority which gave them validity.”²⁴ The material components of the West—of both Europe and the United States—are perhaps the more visible aspects in need of repair, but they are the easiest to restore. Much harder is it to reconstitute a shared sense of purpose and conviction that stem from a deep appreciation of timeless truths reflected in a nation’s own history and tradition. Without these firmly held beliefs, we may end up with a lot of wealth but no reason to have it, akin to building a house without having a family to move in. That is the risk we, the West, face: an elaborate material structure, empty inside.



of freedom of religion, the more we will need the support of like-minded allies. Europe is much closer to the United States on these fundamental issues that differentiate the West from vast swaths of the Middle East or Asia.

²³ Strausz-Hupé, p. 282.

²⁴ Christopher Dawson, ed. by Gerald J. Russello, *Christianity and European Culture* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), p. 66.