



A SPLIT IN THE WEST: EXAMINING EUROPEAN AUTONOMY AND ITS CHALLENGES

by
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The world order seems to be unraveling. The [uncertainty](#) in the transatlantic relationship is a major factor that may shape international security in the coming time. Notwithstanding its substantial role in the founding of global systems after the Second World War, the U.S.-Europe relationship has been revealed as dichotomous with both sides taking [diverging](#) political trajectories. While they may still work together on shared concerns, their ideological rift has been exposed. The policy positions on each side, therefore, may not always be synchronous on all security issues.

The public opinion in Europe has moved increasingly in favor of becoming [more independent](#) of the U.S. in strategic affairs. With Washington's commitment to transatlantic unity in question, this has become a necessity. Such development is contingent on whether the European leaders can [rearm despite](#) a resource crunch, and position the U.S. as a secondary security provider instead of primary. If Europe seeks to maintain a liberal order, the responsibility of preserving liberal values will mainly fall on its [own shoulders](#). It may be faced with challenges and tasks such as dealing with an isolationist America, prioritization of welfarism and environment within the region, and traversing through new strategic relationships, mainly in Asia.

A Multipolar World

The post-War global political order rests on the pillars of [liberal values](#), system of rules, and mutual respect. A fundamental shift has been underway as a unipolar U.S.-led global order, which emerged after disintegration of the USSR, is apparently in decline. The retreat or isolationism of the U.S. creates large spaces in the international arena for other powers to move into, making the world increasingly multipolar, akin to Huntington-style global [society of civilizations](#). This also makes the current rules-

based order vulnerable to influence exerted by the newer powers seeking to replace the U.S. If the Europeans are able to [consolidate themselves](#) enough to act a 'pole' of global influence, the current world order would not have to be solely dependent on Washington's leadership. It may be better for the U.S. to have Europe take more charge, act independently on its core security interests, and also share the onus of preserving an international system led by rules. Many scholars perceive that instead of preserving the existing global order, the U.S. is now actively disrupting and dismantling it, due to a perception that it is disadvantageous for America. The Trump administration's distancing from the Ukraine issue, withdrawal from climate pacts, and radical imposition of tariffs on friendly nations are some visible signs. Certain additional issues could remain contentious between the U.S. and Europe in the coming time. For instance, the Washington has taken a stance [rather contrary](#) to the Europeans about hate speech and disinformation, placing both sides polar opposite of each other. These areas, like [governance of information](#), would need considerable dialogue and diplomacy. It is a test of the European Union to be able to assume larger powers and responsibilities in a multipolar world, such that it is able to stand ground for the values that are considered integral to its polity. That may be only possible with a robust defense and economy.

Competition for Resources

An inevitable result of the ongoing transformation of the global order is spiked insecurity among the world nations. The example of Ukraine is a harsh reminder about the [transient nature of "security guarantees"](#) in international relations. Due to insufficient military or nuclear capabilities, Kyiv has been [humiliated](#) on international platforms. As trust in the global order erodes further, smaller and middle powers will be presented with hard choices about managing their relationships with larger powers. Most nations will feel the heat regardless of their capabilities, particularly [smaller states](#) which have relied on the current rules-based order to sustain themselves. Increasingly, nations will be compelled to invest financial resources for [strengthening defense](#). But as newer challenges surface, like climate-induced



vulnerabilities and disruptions, populations will expect [spending on critical public infrastructure](#), essential services, and technological solutions. Urban flooding, increased temperatures, sea-level rise, frequent natural disasters, and access to clean water are all factors that will shape the preparedness of nations against a very real and unstoppable threat. This [competition in resources](#) is likely to be observed across the world as nations end up with constant fear of escalation in global politics, while actively combating climate change with the potential to cause systemic destabilization. Even [internally](#), Europe may be expected to prevent oligarchic opportunism, and lead the way in careful balancing for allocation of resources where defense spending continues to increase alongside investment in resilient futures, which is critical for human survival. A failure in such prioritization could mean a blow to citizens' movements everywhere and erosion of their representation in national decision-making, thereby weakening the liberal order. It may be in Europe's interest to prevent a reversal of progress in social welfare, inclusion and capacity building for self-actualization among its citizens, which has also meant greater consideration for sustainable environment.

What can be the Focus?

For resolving the Ukrainian crisis, it may be essential to cooperate with the Americans at least [in some capacity](#). It can be hoped that Washington's approach will find some nuance eventually. However, it is clear that dependence of Europe on the U.S., for its own security in the region vis-à-vis Russia, is not a safe bet anymore. The leaders in Europe recognize the moment for what it is, a major shift in international relations. Their understanding of gaps in self-defense, [commitment to Ukraine](#), and the responsibility to preserve liberal values will be elemental in rebuilding European defense. It may be required now to take the public into confidence, initiate programs to devise innovative solutions, and act from a position of autonomy.

This opens up possibilities of [newer partnerships](#) with other nations based on shared values and complementing strengths. The global center of gravity is shifting towards the Indo-Pacific, and

Europe may find it useful to develop key engagements with countries such as India, Japan, and Australia, and major multilateral groups [like ASEAN](#). All these players are middle powers in the region with significant human resources, large markets, industrial capacities, and interest in regional stability. They may also share a common dislike of political and economic coercion by large powers. Similarly, deeper partnerships with the Middle East may be beneficial given the role of its countries in providing energy security to the global economy. This [diversification](#) is almost necessary even if these new relationships may not be as hand-in-glove as it has been with the United States.

Way Forward

A key aspect of the European soft power, and perhaps dormant potential, is the network of [European universities and institutes](#), which have been top centers of learning. Considering that they will provide the human resources for the desired rejuvenation of European defense and economy, it may be crucial to [engage them](#) into the conversation. Ensuring [safe spaces for development](#) of scientific as well as political discourse will be a [mammoth task](#) of paramount importance, necessary for sustenance of the values-based system and Europe's recognition as a global heavyweight. The problem of [deficiencies in Europe's industrial](#) and technological base can be addressed through greater mobility of funds for research and development. Increased funding across all disciplines will be indispensable to that effect, in an effort to bring young people from everywhere into Europe's new experiment.

If the political and policy elite are able to convince the world that Europe will be the center stage for rigorous knowledge-creation and promising economic activity, capital may start appearing from within the region and outside. Many individuals and institutions would be willing to be part of a process that could be described as Europe's reawakening.

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