

# The EU as a Global Actor: Grand Strategy for a Global Grand Bargain?\*

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## Abstract

Like it or not, the European Union, in the wake of Lisbon, has become an international actor. It now faces two major external challenges. The first is to develop a strategic vision for a potentially tumultuous emerging multi-polar world. The European Council's December 2008 'Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy' recognized that, over the last five years, the threats facing the EU had become 'increasingly complex', that 'we must be ready to shape events [by] becoming more strategic in our thinking'. The second challenge is to help nudge the other major actors towards a multilateral global grand bargain. Such a bargain will be the necessary outcome of the transition from a US-dominated post-1945 liberal world order, towards a new 21st-century order accommodating the rising powers and sensitive to the needs of the global south. Without such a comprehensive and co-operative bargain, the emerging multi-polar world will be rife with tensions and highly conflict-prone.

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## Introduction

Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them.

Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

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The EU appears consciously to eschew ‘greatness’. The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty gave the Union the perspective of having a small measure of inchoate greatness ‘thrust upon’ it. For the better part of a decade, the Treaty review process had struggled hard to create two new top-level positions explicitly designed to give the EU greater presence and influence on the world stage (the Presidency of the Council and the position of High-Representative-Vice-President). The European Council on 19 November 2009 nevertheless decided in its wisdom to reject an impressive constellation of highly qualified candidates for these key positions and instead to appoint two minor officials who were practically unknown in their own countries. Irrespective of the (undoubtedly considerable) personal qualities and political competence of the new incumbents, Herman van Rompuy and Catherine Ashton, it was the *signal* conveyed by these appointments which was received with such bewilderment around the world. That signal – from the heads of state and government of the EU’s 27 Member States – amounted to a message that the Union per se would not be setting any agendas or taking any major initiatives on the world stage. There would be no new telephone number for Henry Kissinger. The German press even invented a word for the phenomenon, *Selbstverzweigung*, indicating the determination to remain a dwarf (Graw, 2009). EU foreign and security policy, the message read, would stay firmly in the hands of the Member States (meaning, for all practical purposes, Germany, France and the UK) (Parker, 2009).

‘Euro-realists’ from both academia and the commentariat had a field day explaining to those who had hoped for more high-profile appointees that no single individual – however technically qualified or politically astute – could possibly have made any difference to the EU’s position on the world stage since ‘no amount of institutional tinkering can circumvent the need for national governments to agree in order that policies be adopted’ (Menon, 2009). This argument is only partially true. Of course, the adoption of foreign policy preferences requires agreement among the Member States. But that agreement can be considerably facilitated by having in post, in Brussels, individuals of genuine stature, with a deep knowledge of the issues, possessed of strategic vision and who are able clearly to formulate the available options, and persuasively to indicate a way forward. The EU has been here before. After the Amsterdam Council took the initial decision to create the post of High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy in 1997, an intense debate took place in many Member States over *the level* of the putative appointee. Should it be a mid-level career bureaucrat, as the UK and others appeared to want? Or should it be a mover and a shaker, like former President Giscard d’Estaing, as it was

alleged France was hoping.<sup>1</sup> In the event, the ‘debate’ remained inconclusive and it was Javier Solana’s qualities as Secretary General of Nato – the high-profile but consensual team-player with genuine diplomatic skills – which decided the outcome in terms of personality rather than hierarchy (Barros-Garcia, 2008). There was a similar debate in 2000–01 over the level of appointees to the Political and Security Committee: should it be mid-career diplomats who could be kept on a tight leash by national capitals, or high-level ambassadors who might begin to formulate policy from Brussels? In the event, some Member States chose the former, some the latter. Progressively, however, the PSC has become a key posting for career diplomats. In the case of both the HR-CFSP and the PSC, the institutional arrangements have proven instrumental in taking EU foreign and security policy forward (Ephron, 2002; Kurowska, 2009; Juncos and Reynolds, 2007; Howorth, 2010). The demands of history and of ‘events’ have proven compelling.

This article seeks to make the case for the EU *achieving greatness*. Not greatness in any traditional, great power sense. The objective is not the projection of power, but the achievement of *influence and impact* in an increasingly turbulent and rapidly changing world. I shall argue that the EU could play such a role by contributing proactively, intelligently, strategically, subtly – and successfully – to the creation of a more stable, secure, prosperous and harmonious world order. This will involve forging multilateral bargains which can drive history forward in co-operative and consensual ways. Robert Hutchings has trail-blazed the notion of a ‘global grand bargain’ as the high stakes objective for the 21st century, involving the engineering of ‘nothing less than a new international system’ (Hutchings and Kempe, 2008). Contributing to the forging of such a bargain is a vital historical responsibility which is within the EU’s grasp if only it were to go about it in the right way (Peral, 2009).

## I. The EU as Global Actor, Power Transition and Grand Strategy

The EU cannot be considered a ‘world power’ in any conventional sense. It lacks both political and constitutional unity. It does not enjoy ‘sovereignty’ in the traditional Westphalian sense, either internally or externally. Its ambitions, both internal and external, are constrained by an ongoing tension between the Union itself and its Member States. It has no seat at the United

<sup>1</sup> The ‘Giscard-for-HR story’ has entered EU folklore. In reality, it was unlikely in the late 1990s that Paris would really have wanted a heavy-hitter, just as it appears to have been true with the 2009 decision that the French government was loath to imagine a powerful Frenchman (Bernard Kouchner, Hubert Védrine) in the HR-VP post because of the potential for constant conflict with the *Quai d’Orsay*.

Nations or direct presence in any of the major inter-governmental organizations except the WTO. It does not boast a standing army or the capacity to project military force in ways which could affect the global balance of power. In purely geo-political terms, Europe has a further in-built disadvantage. One part only of the smallest of the main continents, the EU covers just 2.8 per cent of the earth's land surface, yet contains no fewer than 27 states.<sup>2</sup> Contrast that with Asia, which covers almost 30 per cent of global land surface and contains 41 nation-states; or North America, with 13 per cent and just two states; South America also with 13 per cent and 20 states; or Australia with 4 per cent belonging to a single nation-state. Europe has by far the highest ratio of separate political units to surface area. In the globalized world of the 21st century, this is not a recipe for maximum international impact. In addition, the EU suffers from demographic decline, resource penury, energy dependency and colonial baggage, all of which relativize both its power assets and its normative message. Nevertheless, it does have the potential to influence in a positive direction the course that international relations and world history will likely take in the 21st century.

The debate on Europe as a global actor has been highly polarized. On the one hand, we have seen a profusion of authors detecting the emergence of a genuine global 'superpower' (Haseler, 2004; Leonard, 2005; McCormick, 2007; Rifkin, 2004; Reid, 2004; Schnabel, 2005). For these analysts, by and large, the EU's 'success' derives from conscious political purpose and preferences. On the other hand, there are those with minimal expectations who, however much they might personally wish it were otherwise, see little in the EU's performance on the global stage other than political muddle, thin rhetoric and even mythology (Zielonka, 1998; Allen and Smith, 2007; Menon, 2008; Manners, 2010). Here, the argument is essentially driven by a focus on the tensions between the parts and the whole. In between, there is a group of scholars who believe that the EU *can* influence certain world outcomes, but only around the margins and only as a 'civilian power' through the deployment of normative instruments (Smith K., 2008; Telo, 2006; Laïdi, 2008b).

One problem with these debates is that they are, quite naturally, predicated on a reading of the EU's international performance *to date*. That performance must be measured against the backdrop of a global system which, for 40 years (1949–89), remained essentially *bi-polar* but stable; and for a further 15 years (1989–2004) appeared to be *uni-polar* and increasingly unstable. The key metric against which to think about the challenges now facing the EU, will be that of an emerging *multi-polar* system which threatens to be anything but

<sup>2</sup> The same surface area actually contains 34 states, including the Western Balkans, Switzerland and Norway.

stable. The ‘lessons’ of the EU’s performance as an international actor *to date* could well prove to be utterly irrelevant to its future behaviour. As Paul Valéry noted, ‘the trouble with our times is that the future is not what it used to be’. The dynamics of the new era are likely to be very different from those of the past 50 years in several important ways.

The geo-strategic context in which the EU’s assets will be put to the test is ominous. History is at a crossroads. The global order is in transition. US power, a stabilizing factor for 60 years or so, is clearly on the decline – relatively. There is a debate about how fast and how far it will decline, but no real questioning of that relative decline itself. Throughout the course of history, whenever power transitions have taken place, violence and war have normally ensued (Organski, 1968; Gilpin, 1981). This has been a feature of the Westphalian order for the past 450 years, but it goes back to Thucydides if not further. Traditionally, the rising power has sought to *overthrow* the existing order, which has always reflected the preferences of the dominant power or powers. Why should things be any different this time? There are four main reasons why, all of which offer the EU the opportunity to influence the course of history in a positive direction. Power itself is being radically re-defined.

First, the world has now enjoyed almost 65 years of multilateral institutionalism and the progressive accumulation of a corpus of international law which has sought – with marked success – to regulate relations between states existing under anarchy (Joyner, 2005; Armstrong *et al.*, 2007). The EU has blazed that trail as effectively as (if not more effectively than) any other actor. Second, we have an intensifying system of what Nye and Keohane have called ‘complex interdependence’ (Keohane and Nye, 1977) – the thickly woven, deeply intermeshed and structurally inter-related global networks of investments, exchanges, flows of every conceivable type – and even interests – between nation-states and other actors. The globalization literature tells us there is a debate between those who believe ‘we’ve seen it all before’ – at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries (Hirst and Thomson, 1996); and those who insist that today’s globalized world is very new and very different from anything in the past (Held *et al.*, 1999; Friedman, 2005). I believe there is in fact little valid comparison between the structural features of the global flows of 1909 and those of 2009. In many ways, in terms of forging complex interdependence, the EU is in a class of its own.

Third, the bloody violence of war in the 20th century (from the First World War to Korea) demonstrates conclusively that territorial *aggrandisement* no longer pays. And the recent wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that military power *alone* has very little utility when it comes to solving complex socio-political problems (Mueller, 1989; Smith, R., 2005;

Bacevich, 2008; Preble, 2009). Military power can be useful as discourse. The presence of two aircraft carrier groups in the Taiwan Straits sends a clear message to Beijing. A B-52 bomber capacity on Diego Garcia constitutes a signal to all of South Asia. But the moment that force actually has to be *used*, things get much more complicated. As Henry Kissinger, musing on nuclear weapons, remarked: 'What in the name of God is strategic superiority? What do you *do with it*?' (Kissinger, 1982, p. 1175). Thomas Barnett has warned of the pointlessness, in the 21st-century world, of deploying naked military might – what he calls the 'Leviathan Force' – without having in advance fully thought through what happens next (Barnett, 2004). The EU has understood this dilemma better than most. Fourth, the 'international community' has arrived at a historical turning point where failed states have become more worrisome than strong states, where collective security becomes more relevant than territorial defence, where human rights become as important as states' rights, where soft civilian instruments of intervention become as crucial as military instruments and where multi-level bargaining trumps muscle-flexing (Van Crefeld, 1991; Kaldor, 2007). Once again, in this radically new approach to IR, the EU has much to bring to the table.

In this rapidly evolving global order, what constitutes power, what constitutes influence, and how should global actors behave with respect to each other? Charles Krauthammer, in his 1990 article on the 'uni-polar moment', essentially argued that US dominance of the post-cold war world would not last because, in classic realist fashion, other powers would soon begin to balance against America (Krauthammer, 1990). Dozens of academics and policy analysts have subsequently debated the issue of whether or not balancing is happening, and if not, why not (Walt, 2006). The *uni-polar* thesis – according to which US dominance is alive and well and living all around the world (and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future) – has been most persuasively advanced by Dartmouth political scientists Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth (2008). The January 2009 issue of the journal *World Politics* consisted of a lively debate about the characteristics and implications of uni-polarity. One conclusion which emerges from this debate is that the enduring uni-pole (the USA), far from being a status quo power (as dominant powers in most world systems have tended to be), is more likely to emerge as a *revisionist* power. We had a foretaste of this under George W. Bush. For those who believe that it is 'the system' which dictates policy, more of the same is likely to come – no matter who is US president.

The *bi-polar* option has been expounded by the leading international economist C. Fred Bergsten who argued in 2008 that the US should 'give true priority to China as its main partner in managing the world economy', even if this means displacing Europe (Bergsten, 2008). Since his article appeared,

the notion of a G-2 (a Sino-American condominium) has become the subject of intense discussion (Economy and Segal, 2009; Pei, 2009; *The Economist*, 2009). The *non-polarity* thesis has been put forward by the President of the US Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, who foresees growing international chaos as US preponderance is replaced by an unstructured congeries of influences exerted by a host of players: states, regional regimes, NGOs, INGOs, MNCs, institutions, militia, individuals, large cities, media outlets, international criminal gangs, to name but a few. Such an order, he argues, 'will have mostly negative consequences for the US – and for much of the rest of the world as well' (Haass, 2008). So far, from a European perspective, the picture looks pretty bleak.

If we turn to those who detect *multi-polarity* as the system of the future, things do not get much better. Neo-realists have always argued that unbalanced multi-polarity is the most dangerous and war-prone international system (Waltz, 1979). Robert Kagan (2008) argues that, with the return of Russia as a consequential power after the Georgia War, 'the world has become normal again'. He foresees the emergence of seven major powers all vying for status and influence, a rivalry overlaid by new forms of 'the old competition between liberalism and autocracy' and by 'an even older struggle' between radical Islam and modern secularism, all ushering in 'an age of divergence'. His prescription is for the democracies to come together to shape history – otherwise 'others will shape it for them' (Kagan, 2008): the West versus the Rest? Another vision of the multi-polar world is provided by the quinquennial survey of the US National Intelligence Council (NIC, 2008) which predicts a world of 'major discontinuities, shocks and surprises' and offers four illustrative scenarios featuring: (1) a 'World Without the West' in which rising powers supplant the West as global leaders; (2) a 'BRICS bust-up' in which a dispute over vital resources sparks a new World War, initiated by China and India; (3) an 'October surprise' in which the world pays a terrible price for not dealing soon enough with climate change; and (4) 'Politics is not always local' in which global networks eclipse governments in setting the international agenda. Most of this is particularly disturbing for Europeans, who were warned in 2006 by their own Institute for Security Studies that the world of 2025 will be smaller, more volatile and more dangerous than that of today and that, in that world, the EU's current strengths and assets will have been significantly diminished (Gnesotto and Grevi, 2006).

The only relatively bright spot on the horizon in this brainstorming around the nature of polarity in the 21st century comes from Giovanni Grevi, who has coined the notion of 'inter-polarity' as the synthesis of multi-polarity and interdependence. He sees multi-polarity on its own as an inadequate metric with which to gauge the future and insists that every existing and rising power

(not to mention the rest of the world) will be mightily constrained in the coming decades by the interconnectedness of all main policy areas (economy, energy, security, environment) and that the 'existential interdependence' of all these issues argues inexorably in favour of co-operation. Multi-polarity must join hands with multilateralism to capitalize on positive issue-linkages and drive the move towards a more harmonious world order (Grevi, 2009). Grevi's analysis offers a ray of hope for Europeans confronting the challenges of power transition in the 21st century.

What of the transatlantic relationship, that 20th-century life-jacket for Europeans in distress? In recent years, the books and policy papers have tumbled off the printing presses like autumn leaves. Positive titles like *Friends Again? Repairing the Damage; A Recast Partnership; Revitalizing the Transatlantic Security Partnership; Rewiring the Transatlantic Relationship* all speculate on the capacity of the EU and the US, under President Obama, to kiss and make up and to embark on a new beginning. Then there are the negative titles, *The End of the West; Allies at War; Parting Ways; Growing Apart, The Atlantic Alliance Under Stress; The Great Divide* – all of which emphasize the damage done to the transatlantic relationship by eight years of Bush administration unilateralism and neo-conservative agenda-setting. President Obama began his global diplomatic odyssey in Europe with three visits in the first semester of 2009. But was this just an accident of the international timetable given that the scheduling of the Nato 60th anniversary summit was set in 1949? How much does Europe *matter* for America?<sup>3</sup> And where does the old continent stand with respect to its main ally as we enter the second decade of this – to date – extremely turbulent century? In November 2009, Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney issued a dramatic wake-up call to Europeans, arguing that 'the real threat to the transatlantic relationship comes not from the remaking of America's global strategy, but from European governments' failure to come to terms with how the world is changing and how the relationship must adapt to those changes' (Shapiro and Witney, 2009, p. 7). One is reminded of Frances Cornford's 1910 comment on the poet Rupert Brooke: 'A young Apollo, golden haired, stands dreaming on the verge of strife, magnificently unprepared for the long littleness of life'.

There can be no return to the past. The cold war relationship was aberrant, but so were both the Clinton years (EU preoccupied with its own navel) and the Bush years (US on a unilateral crusade). With Barack Obama, the US and the EU can make warm declarations about shared values and how, together, they can help solve most global problems. But, as Obama made clear in

<sup>3</sup> For a full picture of US policy towards Europe, see Philip H Gordon's Statement of 16 June 2009. Accessed at: «<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2009/124870.htm>».

Strasbourg on 3 April 2009, this can only happen if the EU acts as a serious *strategic partner* for the US:

So I've come to Europe this week to renew our partnership, one in which America listens and learns from our friends and allies, but where our friends and allies bear their share of the burden. Together, we must forge common solutions to our common problems. So let me say this as clearly as I can: America is changing, but it cannot be America alone that changes.<sup>4</sup>

The chips are really down. The age of US strategic focus on the EU is over. The US has many strategic partnerships to foster around the world, and the prospect of a US–China condominium is not simply fanciful, as the world discovered at the Copenhagen Climate conference in December 2009. It is by no means clear, despite the smiles and the diplomacy of the European tours, that President Obama sees the EU relationship as a major priority for the US. But what he *does* want is an EU which can – collectively – bring something significantly useful to the transatlantic table. The age of automaticity in transatlantic relations is over. Henceforth, the EU's relations with the US will have to be *negotiated* at every juncture (RAND-Venusberg, 2008). For this, the EU needs clear strategic vision.

Throughout 2008, an unprecedented number of high-level seminars and workshops took place as experts and officials debated the updating of the European Security Strategy of 2003, in line with the European Council's December 2007 request. Many analysts came to the conclusion that what the EU most needed was a 'grand strategy', most succinctly defined by Yale historians Paul Kennedy and John Gaddis as 'the calculated relationship between means and large ends' (Biscop *et al.*, 2009; Biscop, 2009; Howorth, 2009a). The original title of this article, delivered as the *JCMS* lecture to the European Union Studies Association biennial meeting in Los Angeles in April 2009 was 'The EU in the New World Order: Does Europe Need a Grand Strategy?' My answer then was resoundingly in the affirmative. However, having subsequently attempted to make the case to various audiences on both sides of the Atlantic, I have come to the conclusion that the *term* 'grand strategy', when applied to the EU, confuses and misleads more than it clarifies. US audiences imagine the EU embarking on a campaign to balance against America (Howorth and Menon, 2009). European audiences just become rather nervous. The *concept* remains valid and there is no doubt that the EU needs much greater strategic thinking – especially in terms of the application of means to large ends. The EU will not emulate the US. Any hypothetical strategic objectives will be constructed and pursued in a very

<sup>4</sup> Accessed at: [«http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-President-Obama-at-Strasbourg-Town-Hall/»](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-President-Obama-at-Strasbourg-Town-Hall/).

different manner. But constructed they will be and pursued they must be. Harsh reality and ‘events’ will demand no less. Some ‘larger’ EU Member States still believe that, unlike their ‘smaller’ partners, they can play hardball on the world stage *as nation-states*. They have not yet understood that *all* EU Member States are small states and that even the largest of them can achieve little on its own. History’s tectonic plates have shifted several times in the past 20 years (fall of the Berlin Wall; 9/11; Russo–Georgian War; financial meltdown). Remember Ozymandias . . .

Javier Solana was correct in his op-ed piece to mark the 10th anniversary of ESDP: the EU *was* ‘ahead of its time in 1999’ (Solana, 2009). It was ahead of its time in initiating a *new approach to international relations*. It was ahead of its time in responding to crises, instability and insecurity around the world, not with aircraft carriers and expeditionary combat units, but with the vast panoply of crisis management instruments which has become its hallmark. The problem was that there was all too little co-ordination and no strategic thinking. There are four main reasons why the EU should adopt a more calculated strategic approach and begin at long last to think in terms of ‘large ends’.

First, the very fact (highlighted earlier) that the EU, politically and institutionally, does not enjoy the attributes of a unitary state should motivate its leaders urgently to find ways of overcoming what is a major strategic disadvantage. Given the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the logic of a more strategic approach becomes compelling. The European Council’s December 2008 ‘Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy’ recognizes that, over the last five years, the threats facing the EU have become ‘increasingly complex’, that ‘we must be ready to shape events’ by ‘becoming more strategic in our thinking’, and that this will involve being ‘more effective and visible around the world’. Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty will help, but there is still a great deal more to be done.

The second reason derives directly from this last point: the world’s *other* principal players, all of which *are* unitary states, behave in a clear strategic way. The US has long relied on a quadrennial *National Security Strategy*. China, Russia, India and Brazil are pursuing clear-cut and long-term strategic goals (Ayres and Mohan, 2009; Kang, 2007; Brainard and Martinez-Diaz, 2009; Zagorski, 2009). Even some of the second-tier rising powers such as Indonesia, South Africa and Australia are increasingly behaving like strategic players. The big players may make strategic mistakes – even tragic ones – but at least they are lucid about their aims and objectives. They are, in short, playing chess. The EU, to date, has essentially been playing ping-pong. This is all the more regrettable in that the sort of chess game now being engaged in by the other players is *not* of the traditional Westphalian type, dominated by military power and territorial acquisition. It is a game which involves the

deployment of a vast range of instruments in new and unprecedented ways – a game in short for which the EU is comparatively well equipped.

The third reason has to do with a new approach to alliances, partnerships and instruments. Strategists throughout history have sought to compensate for relative disadvantage by combining with other powers to achieve common objectives (Walt, 1987). Traditionally these combinations have taken the form of military alliances, normally against rising or potentially dangerous powers. But today, such *military* alliances – like *military* instruments themselves – are increasingly perceived as less useful for achieving strategic objectives than other forms of co-operation – around trade, energy, development, environment, regional stabilization and nation-building. The EU, in both declaratory and real terms, is objectively well placed to engage in such new strategic partnerships. Indeed, there is significant evidence that other major actors, including the growing ranks of regional regimes, are looking to the EU for something of a lead in this respect (Grevi and Vasconcelos, 2008). Stabilization and reconstruction require, above all, the deployment of a vast range of governance and nation-building instruments – including military instruments – that the EU countries can only muster collectively. No single EU Member State can hope to change the world for the better. Together, the EU-27 may just have an outside chance. But, unless all these instruments and partnerships are co-ordinated via a strategic plan, they will be sub-optimal in impact. The future will be dominated by large strategic players. But the game they are playing will be different, and that is where the EU's role can be crucial.

However, a European strategic approach requires the appropriate integration of the military component. There are those who still argue that the EU's 'normative power' or 'civilian power' around the world is the surest guarantee of its global influence, and (for most of these authors) that the acquisition of hard power military assets will result in a reduction or even a perversion of that influence (Manners, 2009; Smith, K., 2000, 2008; Telo, 2006; Laïdi, 2008a; Zepp-LaRouche, 2008). This is not how the issue is perceived by the other major global players. For whatever reason – and the reasons vary considerably – the EU is now *cautiously welcomed* as a power combining civilian and military capabilities by, among others, the US (Nuland, 2008; Biden, 2009), China (Zhongping, 2008), India (Salma Bava, 2008), Brazil (Garcia, 2008), the UN (Ojanen, 2006; Wouters *et al.*, 2007; Tardy, 2008), ASEAN (Corner, 2008) and the African Union (Vines and Middleton, 2008). Furthermore, those same actors, by and large, do not consider that the EU's normative power, its much hyped soft power, *on its own* confers significant influence. The 'debate' over 'normative power Europe' is largely an irrelevance. *Of course* the EU will continue to pursue norms-based effective multilateralism; *of course* it will continue to promote a world in which human

rights, human security, international institutions and international law will replace the jungle. But if those objectives are actually to be achieved, the EU must have the entire range of policy instruments, including a significant measure of hard power (Haine, 2009). ESDP exists. It exists for very powerful historical reasons. It functions as a vital underpinning of the EU's normative ambitions around the world. The EU is, and will remain, a *military actor* – albeit a military actor of a new and very different type (Howorth, 2007).

The fourth reason why the EU needs a strategic approach is that the US umbilical cord has now been severed. The most significant consequence of the end of the cold war – the relative *military* disengagement of the US from the European strategic space – dictates that Europeans, whether they like it or not, can no longer assume that Uncle Sam will bail them out. Indeed, the reverse is the case. Nato was originally designed as an alliance geared to delivering American security guarantees to Europe; but it has gradually transmogrified into a body geared to delivering European support for US global strategy (Medcalf, 2008). Both in Europe and in the rest of the world, Europeans increasingly need to be clear about what it is they are attempting to achieve. They cannot reach that level of lucidity if they remain at sixes and sevens over 'America policy', each trying to outdo the others in quasi-slavish – or quasi-hostile – attitudes towards the USA. Most likely, and most often, European strategic objectives will mesh with American ones. The strategic partnership with the US will probably be the most important of all the EU's key partnerships. But the formulation of European strategic objectives should follow European logic and European logic alone. Some of Nato's current problems derive from a confused attempt, on both sides of the Atlantic, to pursue a 'transatlantic strategic logic' *which may simply no longer exist as such*. Unless the EU is able to co-ordinate its input into Nato's current strategic concept exercise, it will remain a passenger in an alliance still dominated by the US (Shapiro and Witney, 2009). In the medium term, it is vital to establish a new direct bilateral EU–US politico-institutional architecture (Howorth, 2009b). The transatlantic relationship can no longer be managed via Nato.

## II. For a Multi-Polar World, a Global Grand Bargain

Many analysts conclude that the world is becoming (if it has not already become) *multi-polar*<sup>5</sup> (Renard, 2009). However, that statement, in and of

<sup>5</sup> The main argument used against the multi-polarity thesis is that the US will remain for some time *the* consequential power across all policy areas. This is true, but it misses the point that the US now exhibits many structural weaknesses and can no longer call the shots. It simply has to accommodate the rising powers (Jaffrelot, 2008).

itself, means very little. In previous centuries, multi-polarity meant seven or eight Westphalian states (self-designated as ‘Great Powers’) playing zero-sum balancing games with one another at the expense of global stability (Carr, 1981; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2002). Today, multi-polarity is a totally different phenomenon. As we have just seen, the context in which international relations takes place has changed beyond recognition in only a few decades. Moreover, the units today are not small European states. They are huge, continental-scale players, some of which are traditional nation-states – albeit vast ones – and some are regional regimes, of which the European Union is the most visible and the most advanced, with others waiting in the wings (ASEAN, AU, UNASUR, SCO – Corner, 2008; McClintock, 2008). What will be the nature of their interaction?

There are basically three main options. First, an unlikely – though not impossible scenario – is that they will revert to the zero-sum jostling, the militarized power-balancing of the old Westphalian system. In the context of the complex power transition we are currently witnessing, even given all the co-operative dynamics outlined earlier, such naked rivalry would almost certainly lead to war (Mearsheimer and Brzezinski, 2005).

The second option is to construct, together, a consensual new positive-sum multilateral world order – a global grand bargain. All players increasingly recognize the advantages of co-operation over conflict in a world where climate change, environmental degradation, migratory flows, regional instabilities and commercial and investment interdependence have significantly reduced the scope – and even the meaning – of national sovereignty. Hutchings sees the challenge in the following terms:

An attempt to deal with new problems within the framework of existing institutions cannot provide the required solutions. This is where the international community has been stuck for the nearly two decades since the end of the Cold War: trying to adapt those institutions to new challenges and open them to new members, while invoking a sense of common interests that were more relevant to the last half of the 20th century than to the early 21st. That effort at incremental adaptation has about run its course; a new overarching concept, a global grand bargain, is needed. (Hutchings, 2009)

The global grand bargain will involve a necessary series of trade-offs, some bilateral, some multilateral, between the rising and the declining powers. These trade-offs will be required in all major policy areas – governance, security, finance, trade, agriculture, energy, climate, development, proliferation, cultural exchanges and intellectual property. This will not involve selling off the family silver or succumbing to foreclosure on the estate. It will involve bartering some elements of that silver in order to create an even larger and

more all-embracing domain. It will, in effect, lead to the creation of a new international system (Hutchings and Kempe, 2008; Hutchings, 2009).

However, there is a third option. Some American liberals believe that the threat to the dominant liberal institutional order posed by the rising powers is (in large part *because of* the more benign international context we have just outlined) different in nature to that posed in all previous power transitions. John Ikenberry (2008) argues, for instance, that as China rises to challenge the existing liberal international order, the US, by *hardening and strengthening* that order, can co-opt Beijing into joining it without making any compromises which would significantly change its basic nature.

The United States cannot thwart China's rise, but it can help ensure that China's power is exercised within the rules and institutions that the United States and its partners have crafted over the last century, rules and institutions that can protect the interests of all states in the more crowded world of the future. The United States' global position may be weakening, but the international system the United States leads can remain the dominant order of the twenty-first century.

Ikenberry (2008) concludes that 'today's Western order is hard to overturn and easy to join'.

This approach is in line with the EU's ambition to persuade China to join the liberal international order without making any real concessions to Chinese distinctiveness. But Chinese political scientists have suggested that those attempts are doomed to fail (Men, 2009). Ikenberry's approach, though close to that of his Princeton colleague Robert Hutchings (also a liberal), is in fact incompatible with it. It is 15 years since Stanley Hoffmann wrote of 'the crisis of liberal internationalism', pointing to the inadequacies and contradictions of the liberal order as it faced a changing world (Hoffmann, 1995). Today, the chances of co-opting the rising powers without striking a 'grand bargain' are negligible. Throughout 2009, the world has witnessed an inexorable process of *transformation* of the post-1945 international institutional system in order to integrate the 'rising powers' – as the only way of ensuring the durability of a stable international order and the avoidance of major conflict. But whether we are talking about the need to grant more substantial voting rights for these rising powers in bodies such as the World Bank or the IMF, or to formalize the meetings of the G20 (including bringing in a security agenda), whether we are looking at the reform of the UNSC or the current impasse in the WTO, there can be few serious expectations that it will be possible to preserve the existing liberal international order without making substantial concessions to the rising powers (EU-ISS, 2009). These concessions will be necessary in order

jointly to engineer an entirely new international order, which will be as acceptable to the liberal west as it is to the rising powers *and* to the global south. Any serious attempt to *resist* such a global transformation is likely to provoke the *rejection* of the liberal order by today's 'excluded' and an attempt on their part to set up an alternative order in opposition to it.

Those who believe in Europe as a 'normative power' will be tempted to make common cause with US liberals in holding out for a western-anchored global order posing as the champion of 'universal values'. It is unlikely that such an approach will succeed. In the past 12 months alone, we have witnessed the humiliation of the deregulated market system, growing pressures for meaningful reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, of the United Nations, the dominance of the G20 over the increasingly irrelevant G8, the imperative of global co-operation over climate change, the return of Russia as a strategic actor, and above all the omnipresence of China as a power-broker. In a post-colonial, post-imperial world, the very concept of universal values is deeply problematic. The EU should avoid trying to project itself as a normative model. The 'brand EU' is not for export. Other actors may wish to emulate it, but that must be their choice. Rather, what the EU should seek as a basic strategic objective is a world of cultural and political diversity in which, nevertheless, stability, security, prosperity, development, environmental sustainability, solidarity and self-determination are considered in holistic terms as key elements of global interdependence – of inter-polarity.

It is in this respect that the EU can play a powerful role in nudging the balance of the argument away from confrontation and in the direction of a global grand bargain. It has most of the resources, skills and instruments needed to achieve it. Either the rising powers elect to overthrow the existing international liberal order (with all its terrible defects) and impose some new order of their own – which may clash horribly with everything the EU stands for. Or, they will agree to devise a consensual order based on recognition of the importance of effective multilateralism, sustainable development, a narrowing of global inequality, stability and collective security and a fair bargain over trade – in other words, a global grand bargain. The outcome of the game is far from clear. The EU's strategic input into that choice could very well be absolutely decisive. We are witnessing the start of a period of intense re-orientation and re-positioning of strategic resources around the globe. The comparative advantages which allowed certain European nation-states to dominate international relations from the mid-16th century onwards (trading, banking, navigational, technological and military advances) had by the late 19th century already been overtaken by other factors. The European nation-states have for over a century been living on historical capital. The creation of the EU was a visionary attempt to adapt to the new world order of the

post-1945 world. Further adaptation to the very different world order emerging in the 21st century demands far-sighted strategic vision. If the EU fails to live up to this historic challenge, if it prefers to fiddle while Brussels burns, the European integration experiment itself could gradually unravel. And Europeans could well find themselves, in the 22nd century, in the role of global migrants, in search of low-paid jobs in the thriving capitals of Asia and Latin America.

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