

## The Transatlantic Drift and the Waning of Turkey's 'Strategic Westernness'

19. February 2018 by [Soli Özel](#)

In October 2017, a group of foreign policy experts on German-American relations published a manifesto in the prestigious weekly *Die Zeit*. In their carefully calibrated text entitled 'In Spite of it All, America' the twelve prominent personalities made a case for Germany's imperative to continue to engage the United States, despite the presidency of Donald Trump<sup>1</sup>. They were, in short, die-hard Atlanticists who, although worried about the advent of Donald Trump and fully cognisant of the troubles in the Alliance, believed that the United States were still indispensable for European security. The need to change many aspects of the relations was evident but ultimately Germany and by extension Europe had to stick with America.

The signatories to the manifesto were quite alarmist about the danger that the decline of the liberal world order and its multilateralism, global norms or values posed for a country like Germany and hence for Europe. They did not shrink from carefully highlighting and strongly criticising what they considered to be Germany's complacency or deliberate foot dragging particularly on the issue of defence spending that was a major, but far from the only, cause of the deterioration in transatlantic relations. The economic powerhouse of Europe has long been unwilling to raise its military budget and was in the minds of the Americans and some Europeans a perfect free rider.

Many European members of NATO similarly failed to fulfil their pledge to spend two percent of their GDP on defence. The disproportionate sharing of the burden by the United States was vociferously put on the agenda by Donald Trump but the reproach was not originally his. On his departing tour of Europe, the former Secretary of Defence in both the Bush Jr and Obama administrations, Robert Gates, insistently warned the European partners about this matter.

The issue of defence expenditures was such an irritant that Gates put the future of NATO on the table and suggested that the USA simply may not see NATO as worth supporting any longer.<sup>2</sup> Gates added, 'the blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress — and in the American body politic writ large — to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defence.'<sup>3</sup>

Trump's strongly held views, his reluctance to invoke article 5 of the NATO Treaty, his overall nonchalance about the Atlantic Alliance, the utterances he made during his campaign about charging the Atlantic partners for protection and his overall unilateralist, narrow-nationalist approach to international affairs made the threat of a Transatlantic rift a more immediate concern. In fact, on two occasions in the past year the German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed the view that Europe would have to learn to stand on its own two feet after having met President Trump in Washington. Later in the year following the NATO and EU summits she said that 'the times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over... We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/world/europe/germany-united-states-trump-manifesto.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/11/world/europe/11gates.html>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/28/merkel-says-eu-cannot-completely-rely-on-us-and-britain-any-more-g7-talks>

The signatories of the memo were obviously alarmed by the conduct and policy preferences of President Donald Trump and the evident drift in the Western alliance. Indeed, the tensions that were latent, in the wake of the end of the Cold War, within the Western Alliance that incorporated and embodied the liberal civilisation had become more obvious as time moved on. Such tensions were exacerbated when the United States, the custodian of the liberal world order gradually started to shed its responsibilities to uphold that order.

What arguably changed with the Trump Presidency was the blunt questioning of the usefulness to the United States of 'history's most successful alliance'. What used to be a matter of manageable discord suddenly turned into a potentially destructive problem. Prompted by the abrupt shift in tone the American administration used towards Europe and the worrisome consequences of such a shift, the authors of the manifesto concluded their text with a strong plea to safeguard the transatlantic partnership:

*'Making progress with the Trump administration wherever possible, moderating conflicts and avoiding escalation, expanding the spectrum of trans-Atlantic partners beyond the current U.S. administration — these are all core aims of a U.S. strategy that can preserve the trans-Atlantic partnership with and if necessary against this American President, and function beyond his time in office. The United States has proved its capacity for self-correction repeatedly. America remains the indispensable power for those countries that stand for freedom and democracy and strive for an open world order. But Europe — and thus Germany — must do more to support and preserve these values. More European self-reliance is imperative.'*

### **Is the rift solely one about security and burden-sharing?**

Under President Trump, the shedding of leadership responsibilities by the United States nearly turned into an abdication and therefore questioned not just the coherence and functionality of the Western Alliance but also its very viability. Yet it would be unfair to put all the blame on Donald Trump for the crisis in transatlantic relations and the visibly widening gap between Europe and the United States. To be honest, the drift itself was long in the making.

The divergence in American and European approaches to global problems as well as security matters has been pretty apparent for some time. Moreover, the European countries themselves had widely differing views on how to handle security problems on the Continent. The Eastern Europeans were seen as more reliable allies by Washington as the distinction made by Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld prior to the Iraq War between the derided 'old' Europe and 'new' Europe indicated. Andrew Michta points out that 'since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been searching for its existential raison d'être, but various formulas such as 'out of area', 'smart defence' and 'comprehensive approach' have come up short in large part because of allies' divergent views of security."<sup>5</sup>

These problems were compounded by America's shifting security and strategic priorities at a time of diminishing resources. As a result, Washington concentrated in areas other than Europe particularly after the disastrous Iraq War. President Obama, in his valedictorian tour of Europe encouraged the Europeans to stick together, be proud of their accomplishments,

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<sup>5</sup>Andrew Michta, *A Common Threat Assessment for NATO?*  
<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/68017>

fight against the surge of populism and said that he had ‘come to the heart of Europe to say the US and the entire world needs a strong, prosperous, democratic and united Europe.’<sup>6</sup>

Yet, according to journalist Jeffrey Goldberg who tailed him for four months and wrote a lengthy article about the way the President saw the world, Obama did not have a Eurocentric view of America’s strategic future. ‘For Obama, Asia represents the future. Africa and Latin America, in his view, deserve far more U.S. attention than they receive. Europe, about which he is unromantic, is a source of global stability that requires, to his occasional annoyance, American hand-holding.’<sup>7</sup> In the same interview Obama also treated Russia as a ‘regional’ power but conceded that the Ukraine was part of Russia’s sphere of influence, implying that there was not much the United States could do to alter the situation on the ground there.

In fact, Kori Schake who analysed Obama’s policy of retrenchment observed that, a) the major threats to the US are no longer European in origin; b) that US armed forces find coalition warfare more and more difficult and decreasingly helpful; and c) that the most important reason to take the current burden sharing debate more seriously than previous ones is that pressures for austerity are likely to endure, not only in Europe but also in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the United States could not be counted on to always fill the gaps that emerge in European defence in the future.

In the same vein, François Heisbourg suggested that ‘it is reasonable to assume that the US is in the midst of a lasting paradigm shift.’ In fact, he went on to argue, ‘in future, US diplomats and armed forces will be far more engaged in Asia than in Europe, NATO will become an essentially regional organisation for the defence of Europe and its immediate neighbourhood.’<sup>9</sup>

It is clear therefore that even before Donald Trump became President, transatlantic relations were in dire need of an overhaul. This American ‘retrenchment’ under President Obama, that almost by necessity followed the ambitious, ill-thought out and ill-executed expansionist policies of the Bush administration brought forth the urgency of a dialogue between transatlantic partners. This was to be undertaken in order to redefine their relationship and determine how the burdens of common security would be borne. What complicated matters on that score was that within Europe there were indeed several axes of security. The surging East-West divide within the European Union already made it hard to come up with common positions in the continent. That Rumsfeldian distinction between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Europe suggested during the run-up to the Iraq war persisted.

Divisions occurred between the allies over policy towards Iraq under the Bush administration, the 2011 military intervention in Libya, under Obama. Now, during the Trump administration the decision to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement, the possible repudiation of the Iran nuclear deal, and the move to recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s capital exacerbate the disaccord that exists between the partners on consequential matters.

Europe, as is becoming ever more evident, is in turn far less united, especially when it comes to foreign and security policy and the role of the United States. Indeed, Poland and the Baltic States will always be eager to count on the protective umbrella of the United States rather

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/25/barack-obama-says-world-needs-a-united-europe>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>

<sup>8</sup> Kori Schake, *US Retrenchment and Europe*

[http://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2012/rp\\_089\\_km-6278.pdf](http://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2012/rp_089_km-6278.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> François Heisbourg, *The defence of Europe: Towards a new transatlantic division of responsibilities*  
[http://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2012/rp\\_089\\_km-6278.pdf](http://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2012/rp_089_km-6278.pdf)

than relying on European NATO partners. Some other central eastern European countries, most notably Hungary, will hedge their bets by developing cosier relations with an increasingly more assertive Russia.

As Andrew Michta suggested, ‘security optics in Europe these days are arguably more regional than at any time since the end of the Cold War, with France, Italy, and, to an extent, Germany preoccupied with the Mediterranean and Africa, and the post-communist democracies in Central Europe and the Baltics consumed by Russia and the deteriorating security situation along NATO’s eastern flank.’<sup>10</sup> Therefore, transatlantic rifts are always also intra-European rifts. This is especially likely to be the case now, because EU Member States are divided about the type of EU they want to build and are struggling domestically with Euroscepticism.

Under these circumstances the future configuration of NATO and answering the question whether or not the organisation will finally be able to redefine itself more purposefully in the post-Cold War era will determine, to a large extent, the future of transatlantic relations as well. That the United States will not be as engaged with Europe as in the days of the Cold War is quite clear. Therefore, the authors of the ‘Atlanticist’ manifesto will need to curb their enthusiasm and work on a more realistic model for the future of the relations.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that at long last Europe will be able to fend for itself. The belief that the failed attempts of the 1990’s at building a so-called European security architecture can be turned right already led to the creation of PESCO.<sup>11</sup> But it is doubtful that the current efforts even if they are more successful than before will be sufficient and successful to alleviate Europe’s security concerns and challenges in the absence of American military commitment. Therefore, as Hans Kundnani and Jana Puglierin argue, ‘While the Atlanticists overlook the deeper shift taking place in U.S. foreign policy, the “post- Atlanticists” are unrealistic in a different sense: They radically underestimate the ongoing significance of military power and the dependence of Europeans on the United States in security terms. ‘Post-Atlanticism’ is nowhere near as straightforward as they seem to think.’<sup>12</sup>

The growing sense within NATO that finally the two major security threats for the West are clearly identified may help start bridging the gaps and find a common approach even if on the basis of a lowest common denominator. NATO’s latest summit in Brussels did identify aggressive Russian behaviour and transnational Islamist terrorism as the two security challenges that will need to be tackled. Trump’s National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy both identified Russia as a competitor and the latter document stated that ‘Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.’ Moreover, the document also acknowledged that ‘Our competitive advantage has eroded in every domain of warfare.’<sup>13</sup>

Under such circumstances the Euro-American alliance would present itself as the most plausible and beneficial alternative in the times ahead. For this to happen though the Transatlantic partners must recognize the true nature of the challenges ahead and in earnest

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Michta, *What Europe needs to do - Five Priorities for Europe’s Transatlantic Strategy*  
<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/09/22/five-priorities-europes-transatlantic-strategy/>

<sup>11</sup> Senem Aydın Düzgit, *PESCO and third countries: breaking the deadlock in European security*  
[http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Pesco\\_and\\_Third\\_Countries\\_AD%C3%BCzgit.pdf](http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Pesco_and_Third_Countries_AD%C3%BCzgit.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/atlanticist-and-post-atlanticist-wishful-thinking>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2008NationalDefenseStrategy.pdf>

try to find ways to overcome their differences. In a globally more challenging security environment whereby emerging powers challenge the existing ranking of power, the advantages of strengthening the Alliance as opposed to each going their own way are easy to see.

In fact, a recently published report by Chatham House concluded that while there are some areas of structural divergence that should be watched and are of concern, relations between the US and Europe are not undergoing serious, lasting structural divergence. The fundamentals in the transatlantic relationship remain strong, and the long-term prospects are mostly positive. However, the waters could be choppy in the shorter term, and this period will need to be carefully managed.<sup>14</sup>

### The 'decline' of the West

The troubles in Transatlantic relations are taking place in an environment whereby the grip of the West in the world system is declining and more consequentially the concept of the West as a civilisation is being challenged from within, no less by its leader the United States. It is not just the West as a geopolitical construct that is being challenged. On that there has been inevitable setbacks, the emergence of challengers and failures due to the inability to define the strategic purpose and perspective of the collective West in the post-Cold War era.

This era that was defined by the unquestioned supremacy of the West in power terms, be it economic, political or military is coming to an end. The financial and economic crisis of 2008 not only weakened the USA and Europe economically, it also took away from them the legitimacy to manage the economic affairs of the world. At a time when many previously subordinate powers are emerging both economically and strategically in what the late Zbigniew Brzezinski called the 'global political awakening'<sup>15</sup>, the hegemonic status of the West could not be maintained as if nothing has changed.

Moreover, the liberal order that the West has built over time, institutionalised in the world system in the wake of the Second World War and universalised after the end of the Cold War is in a deep crisis. The rising tide of populist movements throughout the Western world, the weakening of democracies and the rise of demagogic, illiberal leaders with a strong propensity towards authoritarian rule are symptomatic of a malaise in the liberal order. The inequities that accumulated in the age of globalisation when market forces were expected to cure the very problems that they created, the decline in the fortunes of working and middle classes in advanced democracies seriously undermined the legitimacy of these systems domestically.

The widening gap in income between the top quintile and the rest – not to mention between the top 1% and the rest -- and the accompanying nonchalance on the part of the 'winners of globalisation' about the plight of those 'left behind' provide the material basis for the populist anger. This anger in turn, triggered a venting off of cultural resentments that the cultural fragmentation and the loss of a sense of the 'Commons'<sup>16</sup> of the 1990's exacerbated.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2018-01-18-transatlantic-relations-converging-diverging-wickett-final.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Global Political Awakening*. The New York Times: December 16, 2008: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/16/opinion/16iht-YEbrzezinski.1.18730411.html>

<sup>16</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The twilight of common dreams: Why America is wracked by culture wars*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995. See also, Martin Gurri, "In a healthy society, the supreme task of the elites is to elucidate the master narratives binding together the regions, classes, and ideologies that make up a modern nation...what might be called a *shared truth* about the world that informs both personal attitudes and political action... All of that is gone with the wind", Martin Gurri, "The revolt of the Public

These two dynamics that gained strength in the post-Cold War environment turned into a torrent in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. The fact that the big banks, financial institutions, insurance companies (and their very wealthy managers) paid almost no price for that calamity, whereas the working classes and unprotected middle classes bore nearly the entire burden of the austerity measures; a near collapse of trust in elites followed. This erosion of trust is at the roots of the populist surge in the West. That, combined with the decline in the relative economic power of the West in the global economy that promised a less certain and prosperous future for its middle classes, as well as the multiple strategic failures of the United States in containing developments or imposing its will weakened the Western strategic position as well.

To that domestic record that weakened liberal democratic systems in the West and unleashed a raging populist backlash one could add the failures of the West in sustaining world order and the violations of that order by its creator and custodian, the United States. In this respect, the Iraq War arguably did much harm to the legitimacy of the global power structure since the United States broke the rules of the system, weakened institutions and perhaps just as importantly failed in its endeavour to bring order and justice to Iraq and the wider Middle East. In fact, that failure was responsible for the rise of Iran as a domineering regional power in the Gulf and the Levant.

There were other setbacks for the West as well. Russia challenged the West successfully first in Georgia and then in the Ukraine and most recently in Syria. China continued to and under the increasingly tight grip of Xi Jinping asserted its power in its 'near abroad'. The protest movements that shook the Arab World in 2010–11 and their aftermath were mismanaged by Western powers. While these belated revolts against thoroughly delegitimised regimes heralded the bloody unravelling of the Sykes-Picot system in the Middle East, the bloodbath in Syria and the manipulation by regional powers of that conflict could not be prevented. In fact, it was left to Russia's military intervention to terminate major combat in the ongoing civil war.

The political fragility of the Western system in the age of globalisation was also demonstrated by the depth of the domestic crises that the refugee flows from conflict zones had generated in the Member States of the EU as well as in intra-EU relations. Unable to stabilise an insurrectionist Middle East or to rigorously intervene to stop the bloodletting the United States and its allies appeared wanting in their claim to be the order setters of the world. Finally, the possibility of a potentially nuclearised war in the Korean Peninsula threatens the stability of Asia and beyond that, of the global order.

This reality-based perception of the decline of the West started to gain ground in the 1990s and certainly after the turn of the century as a major redistribution of economic power took place globally. Already in 1994, the late Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore began to challenge the self-congratulatory mood of the West identified with the 'End of History' thesis of Francis Fukuyama. In a famous interview with Fareed Zakaria, then the Managing Editor of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Lee rejected the universalism of Western culture and attributed the striking economic success of East Asian countries to a specifically Asian culture that put family and kinship before individuality<sup>17</sup>. By the turn of the Century the gap in income between the developed West and the non-West was narrowing and this trend accelerated in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008.

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and the age of "Post-Truth" <https://thefifthwave.wordpress.com/2017/05/31/the-revolt-of-the-public-and-the-age-of-post-truth/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1994-03-01/conversation-lee-kuan-yew>

In short, under the security umbrella of the United States during the unipolar moment, Brzezinski's 'global awakening' was gaining momentum. China's successful integration with global markets, the speedy recovery of major Asian economies after their meltdown in 1997 were seen as harbingers of an 'Asian era'. Both demographically and economically the passing of the torch was becoming obvious and the trend would be a lot clearer, more striking and much more challenging to the liberal democratic Western order than could be imagined earlier, in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis.<sup>18</sup>

### **Turkey and the 'West': rupture, muddling through or convergence**

Turkey is a member of NATO. The Turkish Republic was founded upon the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and continued its predecessor's policies of Westernised modernisation. During the Cold War Turkey became an integral part of the Western security system. After the end of the Cold War, particularly after the Iraq War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union Turkey's strategic importance would acquire new dimensions. In addition to its geopolitical position, Turkey's domestic order became a globally valued asset. A secular democracy despite its shortcomings, integrating with the global economy in a predominantly Muslim society, a member of NATO and in pursuit of EU membership Turkey cut a very attractive profile in a world where violent Islamist extremism was rapidly being identified as the major security threat of the new era; a fact that the 9/11 attacks against the United States confirmed. But at the end of the Cold War this was not a certainty and Turkey feared abandonment by its allies now that the main security threat that kept the allies together was no longer existent.

In fact, the European members of NATO were not as forthcoming as one would expect from allies during the Gulf War crisis of 1990-91. NATO's poor performance in solidarity during the Gulf War was disappointing and alarming for the Turkish political and military leadership. After that experience, Turkish security policy was driven by the desire to accumulate military capabilities in order to reduce dependence on allies. As such, Turkey and its European partners in NATO began to diverge in strategic choices and security practices.

For Washington, Turkey moved from being a flank member to a frontline member as it sat at a critical crossroads to the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus, all zones of instability and insecurity. In contrast, the Europeans tended to view Turkey's close proximity to all these regions not as an advantage but as a potential liability. This strategic blindness partially accounts for the European Union's denial of candidate stature to Turkey in its Luxembourg Summit of 1997 that was corrected two years later in no small part due to Washington's intense lobbying.

In the first half of the 1990s, Turkey also sought to put its geographic location into lucrative use as a transit country for connecting oil and natural gas from the newly independent Central Asian republics to world markets. Ankara eventually received Washington's endorsement of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project that finally materialised in 2005. Interestingly, Turkey's NATO membership was played up to gain advantage in an economic competition. In 1998, Foreign Minister İsmail Cem argued that Turkey's edge as a transit country lay in its NATO membership whose security assurances would naturally cover the BTC pipeline, despite the obvious advantages of a route through Iran.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Wolf, *The new world disorder and the fracturing of the west*  
<https://www.ft.com/content/54104d98-eedd-11e7-ac08-07c3086a2625>

<sup>19</sup> Serhat Güvenç and Soli Özel, *NATO and Turkey in the post-Cold War world: between abandonment and entrapment*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14683857.2012.741845>

Turkey's Western and particularly European vocation received a boost in 2002 when the Union decided to extend a date to Turkey for accession negotiations at its Copenhagen summit that year. This summit on the eve of the Bush administration's Iraq war, took place after a major electoral victory by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), that stemmed from Turkey's genealogically anti-Western Islamist movement. AKP claimed to have shed its Islamist past, pursued economic, political and administrative reforms and pursued EU membership in its first years in power with admirable determination and discipline.

Those years were also a period of extraordinary success for Turkey as an economic phenomenon, a strategic actor and politically a valuable example of democratic transformation. Turkish foreign policy based on the doctrine of 'strategic depth' with its guiding principle of '0 problems with neighbours' drew a lot of attention around the world. Turkey's mediation efforts in Middle Eastern conflicts were greatly valued just as its foreign policy positions were nearly completely harmonised with those of the European Union. The country's rising profile and global popularity were awarded by its election as one of the European non-permanent members of the UN Security Council.

In time though, two influential members of the EU, Germany and France, declared their unwillingness to have Turkey as a member and as the economic crisis rendered Europe weak and vulnerable. Moreover, the referenda in the Netherlands and in France that took place in 2005 and signified a backlash against immigration above all else, all but sealed the fate of enlargement for some time to come. Under those circumstance Turkey's chances for membership were significantly reduced. Yet Turkey at that time was continuing to prosper economically, slowing down on democratising reforms and in the wake of the Arab revolts was looked upon as a potential 'model' for the transformation of Arab countries. The political turbulence of that period, the ascent to power of Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in different countries with which the AKP had historically close relations and the changing strategic configuration in the MENA region as Syria descended into a horrendous civil war, encouraged Ankara to pursue a policy for regional hegemony.

This new situation further articulated a tendency to act more autonomously from the United States that first became evident in the post-Cold War period but remained subdued. Tarık Oğuzlu calls the foreign policy orientation that grew out of this condition, 'Turkey-centric Westernism'. For him, 'the changes in the nature of international political order since the end of the Cold War, and more recently since the 11 September 2001 attacks, appear to have enabled such mid-sized powers as Turkey to play more influential and independent roles in their own regions.'<sup>20</sup> The relative decline in the power of the United States, the passing of the unipolar moment and the gradual shaping of a more multipolar international system provided the conditions for Turkey to pursue its national interests at times in defiance of its major ally, the United States although the importance of Washington in Ankara's calculus remained steady.

In time, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan responded to the rapidly changing strategic environment with a simple slogan: 'The world is greater than five'. Erdoğan was thus questioning the legitimacy of the UNSC dominated global multilateral arrangements. It must be acknowledged though that his ire was directed mostly to the Western world in that configuration. He was challenging the institutional arrangements that formalised the distribution of power in the world as it stood at the end of the Second World War. Not only was he rejecting the West's dominant position in that world order even though Turkey was a member of the Transatlantic Security System, but he was also demanding that emerging

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<sup>20</sup> Tarık Oğuzlu, *Turkey and the west: The rise of Turkey-centric westernism*  
[http://www.academia.edu/2368893/Turkey\\_and\\_the\\_West\\_International\\_Journal\\_Article](http://www.academia.edu/2368893/Turkey_and_the_West_International_Journal_Article)



powers such as Turkey be acknowledged as rightful participants in the premier league of power games.

Erdoğan's currently defiant position, in its rhetoric, is vehemently anti-Western as well. Such posturing brings forth the perennial question about Turkey's strategic orientation. There is no doubt that Turkey's relations with its Western partners today are at a historically low level. The disappointment with both Europe's and America's response in the wake of the attempted coup of July 15, 2016 partially accounts for this condition. Ankara complains that Western partners are not sensitive to its existential security concerns and in turn is oblivious to the way domestic developments under Emergency Rule are seen and judged in Western European countries.

Turkey's quest for EU membership is currently all but buried because of measures associated with Emergency rule and incarceration of journalists and civil society activists. Most recently, the French President Emmanuel Macron told his guest, President Erdogan during their joint press conference that under the circumstances there was no way Turkey could accede to the European Union. The German government withdrew the country's soldiers and aircraft from the NATO base in Incirlik and moved them to a base in Jordan after Turkey refused permission to German MP's to visit their troops.

The relations with the United States are in a crisis mode and many analysts judge them to be at a breaking point. The alleged mastermind of the coup attempt Fetullah Gülen lives in the United States and is not being extradited. Central Command supports and arms PYD/YPG that are the Syrian extensions of Turkey's nemesis, the Kurdish separatist PKK that has been fighting the Turkish state since 1984 and that the US and the EU recognises as a terrorist organisation. Because the YPG (People's Protection Units) were the fighting force on the ground that Central Command relied on, the US does not recognise that the PYD/YPG is a terrorist organisation. The jury at the trial of a state bank employee for Iranian sanctions busting found the defendant guilty and a verdict is expected in a couple of months. There are American citizens and Turkish employees of American diplomatic representations in jail without an indictment.

In addition to the conflicts of interest on the ground in Syria, Turkey just signed an agreement with Russia to buy two batteries of Russian S-400 missiles. The *Economist* notes that, Turkey is a partner in the F-35 programme and is due to take delivery of 116 of the stealthy fighter jets that will be the mainstay of NATO's combat air capability for the next 30 years. Turkey will be in a unique position to hone the S-400 against the F-35, knowledge that Russia may well take advantage of. Some national-security commentators in America argue that 'Turkey should either cancel the S-400 or be told it cannot buy the F-35. The resulting confrontation could lead to Turkey marching out of NATO.'<sup>21</sup> Many prominent personalities in the US are questioning Turkey's reliability as a NATO member, while many others question the wisdom of the choice Centcom made in favour of the Kurds.

In the heat of the discussion over S-400s the fact that Turkey signed an agreement on November 8, 2017 with fellow NATO members France and Italy to develop its national air and missile defence systems should not be overlooked. It is also a fact that Turkey participated 'in nine out of thirty EU-led operations (and) has so far been the biggest contributor to European operations after France, Germany, and Britain.' Therefore, the newly launched mechanism

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<sup>21</sup> The Economist, *Turkey and NATO are growing apart*,  
<https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21736190-they-will-probably-have-stick-together-turkey-and-nato-are-growing-apart>

PESCO 'could provide a novel way to foster mutual trust between the EU and Turkey and possibly contribute to breaking the vicious cycle of blockage with NATO.'<sup>22</sup>

These crises, recriminations and conflicts harm Western cohesion. They also put into question Turkey's strategic identity. From the waning decades of the Ottoman Empire through the Turkish Republic, Turkey took a Westernising direction. Its socio-political and strategic identities were meant to be Western. As the old elites gave way to the new, more nativist ones Turkey's quest for socio-political Westernization was waning but its Western strategic identity was not being fundamentally questioned. With recent developments and as Russia masterfully drives a wedge between Turkey and its Western partners, and therefore comes close to breaking the NATO alliance this might change. There is a strong tendency among Turkish elites to retain sufficient autonomy to do as they please and even to act as a lone wolf.

As such, the AKP government that at the beginning of its time in power pursued EU membership and was extra careful to maintain correct relations with the West, articulates a position that became familiar after the demise of the Soviet Union but was later dropped in favour of EU membership. This position, Eurasianism, was at times latent and at times active in Turkish foreign policy thinking in the post-Cold War period. This 'Eurasianist' approach that moves beyond Oğuzlu's 'Turkey-centric Westernism, wishes to break with the West. It first emerged in the early 1990s as the Cold War ended and the post-Soviet space was opened for strategic competition. It remained dormant for a long time while Turkey was pursuing membership in the European Union and then seeking to become the 'order setter' of the Middle East. As both these projects failed for different reasons, the ruling AKP adopted aspects of the Eurasianist approach.

As Toni Alaranta suggests, 'there are many variants of Eurasian thinking in Turkey; three common characteristics can nonetheless be identified: one is the conviction that the end of the Cold War bipolar system crucially changed Turkey's position in world politics. Second, the assertion that the "Anglo-Saxon civilization" is in deep crisis; and finally, the claim that Turkey's traditional Western orientation has become dysfunctional and that "Eurasia" offers a meaningful strategic alternative.'<sup>23</sup>

This aspiration is unrealistic. Turkey does not truly have a viable Eurasianist option but in trying to pursue it, Ankara may inadvertently turn itself into a sidekick of Moscow and find out that in this unequal relation it cannot adequately protect even its core national interests. Therefore, it is high time for Turkey to reassess its options and recalibrate its orientation. Unlike the immediate post-Cold War period with the 'return of geopolitics' the Western strategic identity no longer imposes high democratic standards. So, Turkey and the EU as well as the US can work their differences out, establish a better communication and converge on a realist approach to their security and strategic interests with scant regard to values and principles that presumably differentiate the West from others.

As a recent report prepared for the EU's FEUTURE (The future of EU-Turkey relations) project concluded, 'Turkey's gambit with Russia is unlikely to go any further. That Ankara's resources are insufficient for its hegemonic aspirations or its desire to be an autonomous

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<sup>22</sup> Senem Aydın-Düzgüt, *PESCO and Third Countries: Breaking the deadlock in European Security*, [http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Pesco\\_and\\_Third\\_Countries\\_AD%C3%BCzgit.pdf](http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Pesco_and_Third_Countries_AD%C3%BCzgit.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Toni Alaranta, *A "Eurasian Turn" in Turkish Foreign Policy? Not Likely*, <http://turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/594-a-urasian-turn-in-turkish-foreign-policy?-not-likely.html>

actor have been laid bare in the course of the past six years. Turkey will need its alliance links in order to be able to pursue its security interests properly. A future of cooperative actions in security matters is, therefore, likely... Jihadi terrorism is now hurting Turkey as well. The likelihood of indigenous salafi Jihadism growing as a threat is high. Therefore, on this issue as well as on cyber security and energy security there should be more ground for cooperation<sup>24</sup> between the EU and Turkey.

As for the United States, there are indications that in the debate between those who favoured continuing the alliance with the Kurds and those who thought it unwise to alienate Turkey, the latter are gaining the upper hand. As Washington gears up to contain Iran's influence and military presence in the Middle East and particularly in Syria cooperation with Turkey will be essential. Somehow the two partners will have to find a way to detox their currently poisonous relations. The United States will have to show more sensitivity to Turkey's concerns and in return Ankara will have to dampen the rampant anti-Americanism in public discourse. If relations can be recalibrated and a new *modus vivendi* can finally be reached, Turkey will have to put some distance between itself and Russia.

The crisis of the West is real. In addition to declining economic and political/ideological power of the West globally, this crisis is both one of burden sharing as it relates to security and defence and one of eroding values and principles. The structural imperative of the West hanging together in order to rise to the challenge of Asia and the 'global awakening' is a necessary but not sufficient condition to forge a common approach for an uncertain future. Yet it must be done. Turkey, if it maintains its strategic Western identity, and under proper circumstances can play an important and indeed potentially critical role in that endeavour.

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<sup>24</sup> FEUTURE Online Paper, *Evolution of the EU's and Turkey's Security Interests, Threat perceptions and Discourse*, April 2017