

Has the United States Abandoned Europe?

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LACHEZAR ANGELOV, MAY 8 2013

To What Extent has the United States Abandoned European Security?

I. Introduction

The world economic and political balance has been shifting considerably towards Asia during the last four years. Rising tensions in the Middle East and Asia have provoked deep concerns in Washington about regional stability (Odierno 2012). The United States is still in a unique position as a result of its global economic influence and power projection capabilities combined with multiple alliances (Nye 2010; Marsh and Rees, 2012; Odierno 2012). The White House spends more than any other country on its military capabilities, for preserving its current superiority and fulfilling its international commitments (Nye 2010; Odierno 2012). Nonetheless, the economic crises have raised questions about cutting the American defense budget and in addition, the international security system relevant to the United States is becoming more complicated and unstable as a consequence of emerging powers in Asia (Glaser 2011; Rodhe 2012). Significant issues for the United States are evolving, especially from the Middle and Far East; these include nuclear proliferation, the Arab Spring uprisings and terrorism. At the same time, the rise of communist China has caused a visible intensification in the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region (Nye 2010; Indyk et. al. 2012). Overall, Washington's security strategy is currently transforming into a more diversified and pragmatic approach, which is a key requirement for future stability outside Europe.

The aim of this essay is to analyze the foreign policy alterations in the Obama administration since 2009 in order to assess American engagement with European security. The White House has moved away from its unilateral approach of the past, instead favouring multilateral cooperation with its allies and other significant political actors in the international system (Brzezinski 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012; Rodhe 2012). As one might expect, the security environment in Europe has been affected considerably by Washington's approach, despite the fact that the transatlantic relationship is still the cornerstone for the stability and prosperity of the West. In recent years, NATO and the European Union have concentrated their security strategies on external challenges beyond the boundaries of both organizations, which has enabled a more convergent approach with Washington's foreign policy (Mix 2012). Certainly, the United States is still a playing major role in European security, especially regarding Russia, but the White House is gradually concentrating its efforts on the Middle East and Asia, where there is a higher probability of future conflicts as well as greater geopolitical challenges (Glaser 2011; Sharp 2012).

II. American Involvement in European Security

The objective of this part of the essay is to explain the current engagement of the Obama administration in the European security domain. In recent years, the security focus in Europe has undergone a significant shift towards the periphery and beyond its boundaries.

Since 2009, significant alterations in American foreign policy towards Europe have been introduced. The Obama administration has been seeking considerable recovery of its image and soft power capabilities, especially amongst European allies, after the years of the Bush presidency (Marsh and Rees 2012; Mix 2012). Furthermore, Washington has preferred multilateralism and cooperation in its approach towards the security environment in the region (Marsh and Rees 2012, p.78). Importantly, the European Union and NATO member-states are the main allies in addressing

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global issues, such as Iran's nuclear program and the Libyan War (Mix 2012; Sharp 2012). The United States, however, is using the current stability and deep integration in Europe for exporting security, combined with expanding power projection capacities, beyond the boundaries of the continent (Marsh and Rees 2012).

In particular, the Americans are focused on the periphery of Europe in countries like the Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Russia (Hamilton and Foster 2009; Marsh and Rees 2012; Mix 2012). Consequently, the relations between Moscow and Washington are essential for the future stability and development of the security environment in the region. At the same time, the Georgian War in 2008 instigated serious damage to bilateral engagement, as with the suspension of NATO-Russia annual meetings (Marsh and Rees 2012; Mix 2012). Since the Obama administration took power Washington, it has emphasized the importance of recovering the relationship between both states with the symbolic 'reset initiative' (Mix 2012, p.9). The most visible improvements in bilateral relations during the 2009-2011 period were the revision of Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe, the cooperation in logistical assistance to American forces in Afghanistan, the signing of the START treaty in 2010 and the adoption of United Nations Security Council economic sanctions over Iran's nuclear program (Hamilton and Foster 2009; Mix 2012).

Nonetheless, from the end of 2011 the increasing tensions between the Kremlin and the White House have consisted in several disagreements. For example, the Libyan and Syrian conflicts significantly changed the position of the Russian Federation towards the West. Moscow is criticizing and threatening the renewed Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe, supporting the Syrian government against the uprising and also opposing the American oil embargo on Iran (Mix 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012). In other words, the recent changes and increased assertiveness in the Russian attitude has provoked concerns in Washington about stability on the continent. Overall, the Obama administration needs to devote reasonable attention towards the security environment on the periphery of Europe and use different strategies to constrain Russian reassertion (Marsh and Rees 2012; Brzezinski 2012).

As a result of the economic crisis beginning in 2008, many European governments have significantly reduced their defense budgets. Thus, the interoperability gap in martial capabilities between the United States and its European allies is growing significantly (Sharp 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012). The failure of technological military modernization, combined with increased domestic political pressure in Europe, considerably limits European abilities to project power outside the continent (Sharp 2012). For years, several American administrations have been insisting on burden sharing in the transatlantic relationship (Marsh and Rees 2012; Sharp 2012). According to Mix (2012, p.7), transatlantic tensions are deepening in Afghanistan as a result of deficits in 'military resources', which have provoked uncertainty about 'the equality of commitments'. Furthermore, the Libyan conflict against Muammar al-Qaddafi exposed the continuous American frustration of European dependence on its military and security capabilities (Sharp 2012).

Apart from this, NATO is used by Americans for imposing significant influence on the European security domain (Marsh and Rees 2012, p.78). In particular, after the adoption of the NATO Strategic Concept in 2010, the focus of the alliance is concentrated in regions such as Central Asia, the Mediterranean Sea, the Southern Caucasus and the Middle East (NATO 2010; Goldgeier 2011; Marsh and Rees 2012). This essential alteration has coincided with the current American foreign policy shift towards the Middle East and Asia. Primarily, Washington is interested in NATO's development as a 'global actor' (Goldgeier 2011, p.42) and in using 'Smart defense' in order to meet potential challenges (Department of Defense 2012, p.3).

III. 'The Obama Doctrine'

Europe is becoming less important in the American agenda as a result of the relative stability on the continent. The adoption of the National Security Strategy in 2010 indicated clearly the American 'smart power' engagement and dedication to security and stability, especially in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific (Nye 2010; The White House 2010; Glaser 2011; Odierno 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012).

For decades, the Middle East has been a vital part of the American security strategy. In recent years the United States' interest in security has changed significantly from Europe to the Middle East (Sharp 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012). Undoubtedly, the stability in the region is weak and the tension between neighboring countries is increasing

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(Indyk et. al. 2012). The Arab Spring additionally aggravated the security environment (Sharp 2012). The uprisings removed long-standing regimes, such as those in Libya and Egypt, with the assistance of Western governments (Rodhe 2012; Sharp 2012). President Obama relies on international support with regard to Iran's nuclear program and the Syrian conflict. Washington and its allies from Europe and the Middle East have isolated both regimes from global financial markets, supported the opposition in the Syrian conflict and imposed tougher sanctions on Iran in order to alter its attitude towards nuclear proliferation (Rodhe 2012; Indyk et. al. 2012). Nonetheless, during 2012, the White House faced difficulties and solid resistance from Russia and China in managing these complex issues. On the other hand, the Americans decided to conclude the War in Iraq and escalated the conflict in Afghanistan (Indyk et. al. 2012). As a consequence, Barack Obama's administration is concentrating its power on fighting terrorist groups, specifically Al-Qaeda (Rodhe 2012; Indyk et. al. 2012). As a result of this approach, the United States has expanded and intensified its military operations in Pakistan and Yemen. In particular, at the forefront of American power projection are effective drone attacks and Special Forces operations (Rodhe 2012). Hence, the death of Osama bin Laden and the decreasing danger from Al-Qaeda are the most notable successes of current American foreign policy in the Middle East (Sharp 2012; Department of Defense 2012).

Another essential focus of Washington's security strategy is the Asia-Pacific region. Undoubtedly, the growth of economic and political power in Asia has provoked concerns in the White House about the stability of the region (Nye 2010; Sharp 2012; Odierno 2012). The Obama administration decided to transform and reorganize explicitly American power projection in Asia (Rodhe 2012). Thus, with regard to preserving international security, the focus on Europe is gradually diminishing in contrast to the Far East (Marsh and Rees 2012; Sharp 2012). Moreover, the United States is engaged in a series of commitments in the region. Notably, South Korea, Japan, Australia and the Philippines are vital allies to Washington and in recent years their strategic importance to the American security agenda has increased (Nye 2010; Odierno 2012; Department of Defense 2012). The latest joint military exercises with Australia have exposed the renewed American responsibility in the region (Odierno 2012). Likewise, the Obama administration is seeking further partnerships with regional powers, such as India and Vietnam, in order to preserve the current balance of power in Asia (Nye 2010; Sharp 2012). As a consequence of the changing security environment, Asian countries are more willing to increase their military budgets, in contrast to European states (Sharp 2012). On the other hand, North Korea's nuclear program is significantly escalating tensions with its neighbors, especially South Korea and Japan (Indyk et. al. 2012).

During the last decade, the most considerable and apparent alteration in the region is the 'rise' of communist China (Nye 2010). As the second biggest economy in the world China is progressively building its military capabilities in order to obtain a more central place in global affairs (Sharp 2012). According to Nye (2010), China's influence and power are growing relative to that of the US, but in the near future Beijing will not be able to obtain sufficient martial forces to question American supremacy in the world. Apart from this, other regional actors, such as India and Japan, have disputed the ascent of China (Nye 2010). Brzezinski (2012) and Nye (2010) feel that the Obama administration can engage China in regional or global cooperation in addressing current issues in the international system (Indyk et. al. 2012). Overall, the United States is shifting its power projection capabilities to the Asia-Pacific region as a consequence of strategic challenges, combined with security concerns about the relationships between rising states in the region (Sharp 2012; Odierno 2012). Washington's commitment to its Eastern allies has additionally instigated a more intense engagement with the Asia-Pacific region.

IV. Conclusion

The American foreign policy shift from Europe reflects fundamental structural alterations in the international system. The European continent has been the center of global affairs for the last 45 years and now there is gradual tendency in the current American administration of transition towards the Middle East and Asia. At present, the United States is progressively shifting its focus towards potentially volatile regions, in order to guarantee world stability and American supremacy (Mix 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012). In particular, Washington is emphasizing the necessity of 'smart power' capabilities and pragmatic foreign policy, as a consequence of the complexity of current international issues (Nye 2010). The American dependence on cooperation, combined with a more cohesive approach with its numerous allies, will increase in the long-term (Hamilton and Foster 2009; Odierno 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012). Even more important to the future development and stability of European security is the relationship between the Kremlin and the

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White House (Department of Defense 2012). After all, Moscow is a key security actor not only in the European domain, but also in the Middle East and Central Asia, where the Americans have fundamental interests (Mix 2012; Marsh and Rees 2012). On the other hand, the Obama administration is still relying on the transatlantic relationship in order to address global issues, incorporated with exporting sufficient power projection capabilities beyond the boundaries of Europe (Marsh and Rees 2012; Mix 2012). The stability and cohesiveness within the continent is essential for current American foreign policy, and it provides support and burden sharing for the US' global security strategy. The multilateral approach of the Obama administration to current security concerns has proved to be an effective and cheap alternative to large-scale interventions, such as the War in Iraq (Rodhe 2012). As much as the interoperability gap between the United States and its European allies is increasing, the American shift towards prospective security challenges is likely to intensify significantly.

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