

# ISSUE BRIEF

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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY PROGRAM

## The Strategic Rationale for Promoting Transatlantic Values in a Globalized World

Imagine for a moment if in the autumn of 1945 the great leaders of the transatlantic community had let the ravages and cynicism of war strip them of their vision, ambition, and hope for a better future for mankind. Who could have blamed Jean Monnet, Harry Truman, Robert Schumann, George Marshall, and others if they had decided that the idea of forging an enduring Atlantic community of shared security, prosperity, and values was just too difficult to achieve and too hard to explain to their embittered and weary citizens? Yet without their sheer will to overcome Europe's history of chauvinistic bloodshed and America's instincts for insularity, the world would be far less safe and free.

*"Today the transatlantic community must adjust to the consequences of its own successes in forging a more open and free world."*

The challenge facing future generations of transatlantic leaders is far different but no less daunting or complex than that faced by the founding Atlanticists. Then, mass graves and bomb-scarred cities in Europe gave powerful evidence of the transatlantic community's tragic failures of leadership and statesmanship. Today the transatlantic community must adjust to the consequences of its own successes in forging a more open and free world. The end of the Cold War and the spread of Western ideals, innovations, and investment around the world have unleashed new forces and dynamics that have rapidly transformed societies far from the North Atlantic. Globalization has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty and oppression and produced confident emerging powers around the world. But it has also created a more competitive international landscape that leaves many in the Atlantic community fearful of the future and resigned to a world of diminished Western influence.

### About the International Security Program

For decades, the Atlantic Council's International Security Program had shaped and influenced the debate on international security by facilitating dialogue through critical analysis and policy-relevant programming concerning the greatest security challenges facing the United States and the transatlantic community. On the occasion of the Council's 50th anniversary, the International Security Program will officially be renamed the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security and will expand the breadth and depth of its programming and expertise to address the new array of security challenges and opportunities facing the transatlantic community. The Scowcroft Center will build on the Atlantic Council's rich transatlantic heritage by developing strategies for the United States and its European allies to strengthen and broaden their security relationships with key allies and partners from outside the Atlantic area to best address both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. For more information about the International Security Program or the Scowcroft Center, contact the Center's Director-designate Barry Pavel ([bpavel@acus.org](mailto:bpavel@acus.org)) or Deputy Director Jeff Lightfoot ([jlightfoot@acus.org](mailto:jlightfoot@acus.org)).

Contrary to the narrative of pessimism and decline that has taken hold in the West, a more competitive and globalized world also offers opportunities for the Atlantic community to remain at the forefront of shaping the international environment. Globalization has produced more enlightened, connected, and empowered individuals, making the fast-

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emerging international order ever more favorable to the advancement of Western values and ideals. The next generation of leaders in the Atlantic community should leverage these historic trends by putting the defense and advancement of Western values and ideals at the forefront of a more integrated policy of international engagement. Doing so will ensure that a world where the West accounts for a relatively smaller share of the world's economic and military might remains friendly to Western values and ideals.

## Overcoming the West's Crisis of Confidence

A cloud of pessimism and inertia hangs over the West, supported by trend data pointing toward a relative decline in the hard power metrics of the transatlantic community. Looking toward 2025, the West is projected to comprise only 16 percent of the world's then 8 billion citizens, while Asia will account for 61 percent of the world's total.<sup>1</sup> Trends in the economic realm also point toward a relative decline of Western influence, with Asia projected to account for 30 percent of global GDP in 2025, easily surpassing the European Union's 20 percent share of the world total.<sup>2</sup> And on the security front, both the US and European governments have begun to slash their defense budgets in response to extreme budgetary and fiscal pressures.

Even as the West faces a relative decline in demographic, economic, and military power, the international landscape is becoming increasingly competitive, with nations vying for scarce resources, space, and talent. Meanwhile, aging institutions created for a different era are ever less capable of addressing a future strategic environment where emerging powers demand greater authority but shirk the burden of leadership's responsibilities.

The perspective on the home front is equally gloomy. What began two years ago as a Greek fiscal crisis has now become a test of European integration, putting at risk both the Eurozone and the notion of European solidarity that was forged from the ashes of the second world war. The United States has no cause for smugness over Europe's travails as its own leaders fail to find common ground to address a level of indebtedness and political paralysis that is in many ways more worrisome than that of Europe. As a result, citizens in the transatlantic community are losing faith in their institutions and their leaders, as well as their hope and ambitions for a better world.

It is hard to believe that not even a decade ago, European Union summits focused on expanding the boundaries of its membership and some European countries even sought to

build a European superpower as a balance to an unconstrained American colossus. Those heady days may be gone. But their spirit, their optimism, and their ambition to build a better world need not follow them into the dustbin of history. The populations of Europe and North America must resist the false temptation to turn away from the world to focus solely on the internal challenges of the moment. For if the West's future leaders neglect the opportunity for and the burden of global leadership, they will find that they have lost influence not only of global events but of their national destinies as well.

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The next generation of transatlantic leaders must transcend the pessimism of the moment and articulate a vision and a strategy for how the West can best succeed in the world of the future. Fortunately, globalization has also produced positive trends in the international system that can form the foundation for a new strategy of transatlantic leadership. The emergence of new powers in the international system, the increasing influence of empowered individuals, and the gradual weakening of the nation state in an urbanized and mobile world offer the transatlantic community a tremendous opportunity to shape the decades to come. It is up to the next generation of transatlantic leaders to take advantage of these trends by putting the promotion of common transatlantic values of respect for human rights, individual liberty, and market economies at the forefront of their foreign policy.

## The Strategic Case for Promoting Values

The promotion of values in foreign policy has traditionally been viewed as a moral consideration, secondary to the promotion of interests among great powers and states. This assumption may have been true in the more classic Westphalian system that began to unravel at the conclusion

<sup>1</sup> National Intelligence Council. "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World." [http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF\\_2025/2025\\_Global\\_Trends\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_2025/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf), (November 2008), 16.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission. "The World in 2025: Rising Asia and Socio-Ecological Transition." [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/the-world-in-2025-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/the-world-in-2025-report_en.pdf), (2009), 9.

of the Cold War. However, this assumption is likely to prove ever less valid in the coming decades as individuals, cities, corporations, and other non-state actors account for a growing share of influence and power. The strategic rationale of upholding, defending, and promoting common transatlantic ideals will grow as a complement to its moral imperative. Fortunately for the transatlantic community, the creation of a more democratic and values-based international system is both consistent with emerging global trends and has a historical track record of furthering peace and stability.

*“...if the emerging powers that are likely to play a growing role in shaping the international politics of the coming decades respect the rights of their citizens, provide transparent and accountable governance, and interact peacefully with other states, the West need not feel threatened by their rise.”*

The transatlantic community's relative loss of demographic, economic, and military power in a rapidly evolving and competitive global landscape need not be a strategic setback or result in a less benign international environment. After all, if the emerging powers that are likely to play a growing role in shaping the international politics of the coming decades respect the rights of their citizens, provide transparent and accountable governance, and interact peacefully with other states, the West need not feel threatened by their rise. Indeed, it is of paramount strategic importance to the transatlantic community and its like-minded allies and partners to ensure that its common ideals and values serve as the norms, standards, and practices of the international community for the decades to come. Failure to do so will likely result in a more chaotic, unstable, and anarchic international system in which the transatlantic community will have relatively less hard power to protect its interests and values in a world more prone to conflict. The current generation of leaders must take advantage of the plurality of influence they still maintain in the international community to shape the system to the best extent they can. The challenge for the next generation of leaders is to preserve and extend those democratic values and ideals in new and innovative ways.

It may seem counterintuitive to argue that the transatlantic community will be able to strengthen and promote its values,

even as emerging powers from outside the Euro-Atlantic area exert greater international influence. But it seems less so when one considers the powerful trends in international politics that will prove increasingly fertile to the promotion of transatlantic values in the coming decades. The powerful attraction of ideology and of the nation state to mobilize the masses toward an end is increasingly consigned to a bygone era. As evidenced by the upheaval of the Arab awakening and the emergence of protests in London, Santiago, New York, Moscow, and elsewhere, individuals are ever more aware of their rights and ever more capable of exercising them. Across a wide variance of cultures and beliefs lies a near universal demand for dignity; a general insistence on effective, accountable, and transparent governance; a need for the humane provision of security; and a desire for a level playing field and economic opportunity.

Oppressive states that do not respect the dignity or individual rights of their citizens will become increasingly imperiled, and those that do will gain ever more influence and shaping power. The benefits may not be immediate but they will pay dividends in the medium to long term, when the transatlantic community may have far fewer hard power assets at its disposal. As the world's greatest repository, defender, and promoter of human rights, individual liberties, and market economies, the transatlantic community should recognize that this crucial component of its DNA will be a core long-term asset, and should ensure that it remains the foundation of its future international engagement.

Finally, there is historic evidence of the strategic benefit of promoting an enlargement of the democratic family of nations and its tenets of respect for human rights, individual liberties, and market economies. The West's collective abandonment of this vision and commitment to its realization for Central and Eastern Europe in the interwar period and Cold War left the transatlantic community far less safe, stable, and secure. The end of the Cold War and the sustained commitment by NATO and the European Union to seeing through democratic reforms and the Euro-Atlantic integration of Central and Eastern Europe has produced the greatest era of peace, prosperity, freedom, and stability the region has ever known.

## **The Way Ahead**

As the next generation of leaders in North America and Europe readies for the formidable challenge of reinvigorating transatlantic leadership based on the promotion of its common values, they should learn from the successes of their forefathers. The transatlantic community's greatest achievements in spreading its values and shaping a more benign external environment have come through strong, visionary US leadership, European political ownership and cross-border collaboration, and an outward looking posture.

The transatlantic community functions best in any of its endeavors when the United States adopts a visionary, robust position of leadership and allocates the means and effort to see that vision through to reality. This is true in the political, economic, or security realm. The Marshall Plan, the creation of NATO, the reunification of Germany, and the enlargement of NATO after the Cold War are all the product of strong US leadership and commitment to expand the zone of freedom and democratic states within the transatlantic community. The same will be true going forward. The transatlantic partnership will only continue to evolve in ways consistent with US foreign policy priorities through sustained American leadership, investment, and attention. To advance a values-first transatlantic strategy of global engagement, future generations of US leaders will have to remain heavily engaged with Canada and Europe, even as they focus additional resources and attention on the Asia-Pacific region.

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But American vision, commitment, and leadership will amount to little if European political leaders do not make the case to their publics that Europe cannot afford to abandon the burden or ambition of global leadership. Just as the great moments in transatlantic history can be credited to strong US leadership, they could not have succeeded without the courage of European politicians to lead their publics into important transatlantic efforts. If Europe’s relatively small states wish to maintain their global influence and relevance in a world of 8 billion, its leaders and citizens must collaborate ever more closely to exert maximum influence as a collective whole and as a pillar of the transatlantic community. This is particularly true in the area of military investment, where far more ambitious pan-European defense projects are needed to ensure that Europe can remain strategically relevant and capable of defending and advancing its values and interests. The strains of solidarity witnessed in the Eurozone crisis show just how important and difficult a task the next generation of European leaders will face in leading their publics toward greater collaboration in an ambition for global leadership.

*“...even as the Atlantic community works more closely with global partners, the next generation of transatlantic leaders must address the unfinished business and continued democratic and human rights shortcomings of key states and regions within the Euro-Atlantic area.”*

Finally, the transatlantic community has been most effective at advancing its values and ideals when it has maintained an outward-looking orientation and posture. This will remain true for the next generation of leaders, who must build new partnerships with like-minded states around the world to advance the norms and practices of democratic governance and respect for human rights outside the Euro-Atlantic area. Global allies and partners such as Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and others should be more closely integrated into the transatlantic community’s efforts to defend and advance common values. But even as the Atlantic community works more closely with global partners, the next generation of transatlantic leaders must address the unfinished business and continued democratic and human rights shortcomings of key states and regions within the Euro-Atlantic area. After all, the Atlantic community can only prove effective in advancing its common values and ideals around the world if it sets a powerful example at home.

The next generation of transatlantic leaders is faced with a daunting challenge but also a tremendous opportunity. With the right mix of leadership, ingenuity, and collaboration, future leaders can keep the Atlantic community at the forefront of shaping an ever more malleable world on the basis of common transatlantic values and ideals. But it will not come easily. Much like the founding fathers of the transatlantic community, they will have to transcend cynicism, pessimism, and the constraints of history and politics. Just as before, the next generation of leaders will have to forge collaboration and compromise where it did not exist and surpass boundaries that lesser visionaries believed to be insurmountable. The original Atlanticists and their successors bequeathed to the next generation of leaders the greatest community of common values, shared interests, and capacity for global leadership the world has ever known. It is up to the next generation of leaders to leverage this rich inheritance to forge a safer and more free international system by seizing the unique opportunity history has offered it to advance its shared values and ideals in a transformed world.

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