Where is Europe?

Heinz Gärtner

Europe is no major political factor in the American debate

Since the end of the Bush administration in 2009 there has been a debate among American academics on what kind of world will emerge. Where is Europe in this debate? Europe plays only a marginal role. The main concerns of American academics are the decline of America and the rise of China. Europe is not considered to be a major power factor in the new world. In the best case, Europe is seen as a natural ally because it consists of market economies and liberal democracies. In the worst case, it is seen as irrelevant because it lacks military capacities with global reach.

Since 2016 there is a debate on whether the liberal order has come to an end. Same scholars\(^1\) would argue that the world never has been liberal but it always was polarized, whether it was before World War I nor during the Cold War nor under conditions of multiple poles. US-President Donald Trump has put America before all other states, including Europe. This article discusses on where Europe is in the debate among US-academics and scholars.

The “unipolar moment” without Europe

The “bipolarity” of the cold war era is gone. Representatives of both the realist and liberal school start to think on what the future world would look like. For Charles Krauthammer\(^2\) “the immediate post-Cold War world is not multipolar. It is unipolar.” And the Europeans play a subordinate role: “The center of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its


Western allies.” During the period of the Bush-Administrations some scholars started to talk about an American Empire where Europe did appear as dependent countries.  

“Bound to lead” – Europe too!

Even before Krauthammer wrote his essay the liberal Joseph Nye wrote his book “Bound to Lead” as a response to Paul Kennedy’s book “Rise and Fall of Great Powers”. He argues the US in not in decline but concede that Europeans and Japan, which have been destroyed during World War II, are catching up somewhat with the US and get a larger share of the World Gross Social Product and the world export rates than in the immediate after war period. Since then Nye reiterates time and time again, that the US is the only power in the world which can provide all the dimensions of the liberal order: security, economy, global commons, human rights and liberal values.

It is only the middle chessboard – in the economic realm – where Europe has a role to play. On the top chessboard, military power is largely unipolar, and the US is likely to remain the only superpower for some time. However, on the middle chessboard, economic power has already been multipolar for more than a decade, with the US, Europe, Japan and China as the major players, and others gaining in importance. The bottom chessboard is the realm of cross-border transactions that occur outside of government control. Nye rejects the notion of a “post-American world”; he recognizes that the “America of the late twentieth century is over”. American primacy remains,

however. This means that the United States will be the “first” but not the “sole” world power. The US will most likely remain “primus inter pares” among the other great powers. The preferred outcomes will, according to Nye, require “power with others as much as power over others”.

**Parochial Europe**

Similarly to Joseph Nye, Richard Haass (2013) does not support the thesis of America’s decline. Globalization has created a “non-polar world” of American primacy, but not domination. The US has to restore its economic foundations and foreign policy at home. He argues that the US is underperforming at home and overreaching abroad. For Haass, American primacy still means superiority: the US economy is the largest, American higher education the best, American society the most innovative and adaptive in the world. Europe, in contrast, performs far below its collective economic weight in the world. This is the result of Europe’s “parochialism, its pronounced antimilitary culture, and the unresolved tensions between nationalism and its commitment to a collective union.” Europe will, according to Haass, be less significant in the half-century ahead than it was in the past half-century. For him, “we are living in a post-European world”. In the 21st century, for Haass it is rather the Asia-Pacific region that will be the centre of gravity of the world’s economy than Europe – if it can be managed peacefully.

**The 19th century belonged to Europe but not the future**

A similar observation with regard to emerging powers as Fareed Zakaria’s “post-American world” makes Parag Khanna9. Zakaria sees the “rise of the rest” in a Khanna observes the “rise of the second world”, i.e. almost all others except the US and Europe. Their analyses are not necessarily

---

as declinist as Paul Kennedy’s “Rise and Fall of Great Powers” from 1987. For both of them, the US will remain the dominant power (especially in military terms), but their argument is that the US will not be able to act alone. In his book “The Future is Asian” Parag Khana not only sees the “Asiatitation of Asia” as a first step towards the “Asiatitation of the World”. Europe heyday is a matter of the past. It was the 19th century. The 20th century belonged America; and the 21st century will be Asian. Europe is now supposedly passé and the world is entering the “Asian century”.

Europe as a consumer of American liberal values

Liberal internationalists argue that a liberal international order emerged under US leadership after the Second World War. The order is rule-based, organized around international institutions and market economies. According to John Ikenberry, in the new world order the US will find itself in the position to share power and rely in part on others. The contested and unstable US-led hegemonic order will not destroy the American built liberal international order, but rather will make it more inclusive. The strategic relationships that Americans formed in Europe and Asia became pillars of the liberal world order during the cold war. Ikenberry does not talk of an American-European built order. Europe is a consumer of the American values. The new world would be built around rules, norms of non-discrimination and market openness, creating opportunities for countries – including rising countries on the periphery of this order. Such a liberal international order would create a foundation on which states could engage in reciprocity and institutionalized cooperation. Such an order can be contrasted with closed and non-rule-based relations like geopolitical blocs, exclusive regional spheres, or closed imperial systems. The order would survive even without US hegemony.

Europe might be absorbed by China because it is from Venus

In contrast, Robert Kagan\textsuperscript{12} believes that it would make a huge difference to the future world order if the United States eventually had to share global power with a richer and more powerful but also autocratic China. “The United States and Europe must not give up on each other.” If America declined, defenceless Europe would be absorbed by autocratic China, because the Europeans as being from Venus whereas Americans as coming from Mars. Kagan uses the metaphor of ancient Rome. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the Roman culture disappeared, too.

A more benign view

Charles Kupchan\textsuperscript{13} is more benign with Europe. He sees time running out on the West’s global dominance. Power will become more widely distributed around the globe. The next world will belong to no one. Rather, the coming world will be both multipolar and politically diverse. The diffusion of global power ultimately means the diffusion of international responsibility from the Atlantic community of democracies to a broad array of states in all quarters of the globe. For Kupchan the goal would be to forge a consensus among major states about the foundational principles of the next world. The rules must be acceptable to all powers.

European “vassals”

For Zbigniew Brzezinski (2012), the American system’s capacity to compete globally depends increasingly on its ability to confront problems at home. If America falters, the world is unlikely to be dominated by a single preeminent successor, but the world would decent into chaos. Europe

remains through its cultural, ideological, and economic connections – and more concretely through NATO – a junior geopolitical partner or even a “vassal” to the United States.

**Liberals and conservatives alike**

The American debate about the world is very much a domestic one about America’s role in the world. The promotion of American interests and values has always been one central tenet to US foreign policy debate. The prevalent elements in US foreign policy have always been national security and economic interests. Liberals as well as conservatives focus on reforming the domestic political and economic structure to reinforce the basis for a strong foreign policy. Both liberals and conservatives believe that US should remain the global leader, stay engaged, and influence global and regional developments.

**Concert of Vienna and the seeds of war**

Interestingly, many of these thinkers – liberals and realists alike – seem to support a concert of powers like the one which has been established after the Congress of Vienna 1815. The Democrat Franklin Roosevelt rediscovered it and it was reinvented by the Republican Henry Kissinger. Such a concert would include both democracies, such as the US and European states, as well as non- or semi-democratic powers, such as Russia and China, as well, but could lead to a safer peace and more security among world powers. It was based on both common norms and principles as well as on a balance of power system.

It seems to be a rational model which apparently kept the peace for one century until 1914, with the exceptions of the wars of liberation, starting with the Crimean War (1853 – 1856). However, almost invisible to most of the politicians and the population – it contained the seeds of collapse in
the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century which led to the First World War. This prelude was characterized by nationalistic propaganda, demonization of other nations and governments and arms race.

In the current affairs the world witnesses the breakdown of multilateralism, the emergence of nationalistic and ethnic xenophobia, demonization of adversaries, depreciation of international institutions, the withdrawal of international agreements and treaties and arms race.

**What Europe should hold dear**

This is all what European values are about and what Europe holds dear and made it successful: effective multilateralism, support of international institutions, interdependence and interconnectedness, military restraint but peace support, engagement of adversaries, common and cooperative security.