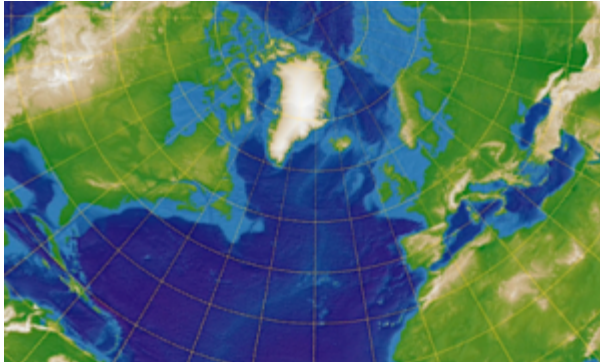


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## **The Old World's importance to the new world order**

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Is the European Union – or even its Member States – still a key ally for the United States? Is the [Atlantic Alliance](#) in decline? To be sure the alleged crisis over the planned European Union-United States Summit in Madrid in the Spring of 2010, in which President Obama [declined](#) to participate, was largely exaggerated. Yet there undoubtedly is a growing feeling of marginalisation in Europe – marginalisation in international affairs, as experienced in Copenhagen, and of marginalisation in transatlantic relations, as illustrated by the fall-out over the Madrid Summit. Whether this perception is founded is not really the point: Europeans sense a growing gap with their American ally, and Washington should be aware of it.

The recent publication by the White House, in May 2010, of the [National Security Strategy](#) (NSS) is likely to emphasise that perception. Indeed, the document only mentions the European Union twice. In comparison, the European Union was mentioned eleven times in the [1998 NSS](#) of Bill Clinton, three times in the [2002 NSS](#) and five times in the [2006 NSS](#) of George W. Bush. And do not even look for the word ‘transatlantic’, for you will not find it.

The context in which the European Union is mentioned is evolving as well. In 1998, the European Union was referred to essentially as a major economic pole and as a security-political actor with limited potential in its neighborhood. George W. Bush depicted the European Union as a full global security and political actor active in counterterrorism, nuclear counter proliferation, and post-conflict reconstruction. It is true that in the meantime, the European Union had further integrated and had created the [European Security and Defence Policy](#), triggering large (and perhaps exaggerated) expectations of European Union global power.

In contrast, President Obama shows more moderation in his assessment of the European Union. The 2010 NSS does say that ‘Building on European aspirations for greater integration, we are committed to partnering with a stronger European Union to advance our shared goals, especially in [...] responding to pressing issues of mutual concern.’ But the European Union is mentioned as just one actor among many now exerting power and influence.

The declining centrality of the European Union (and Europe) in American strategic thought can be explained by the rise of emerging powers on the global stage, notably Russia, India and China, which increasingly attract Washington’s attention, and by a more realist reassessment of the European Union’s limited power potential, in spite of the expectations generated by the [Treaty of Lisbon](#). To some extent, it is a luxury problem: if Europe is not high on Washington’s list of priorities, it is because the Old Continent no longer presents any major problems for American security. The real problem is that the European Union is not really seen as a significant partner in addressing the problems that do exist in other parts of the world.

In a changing global environment, with a new global order in the making and new global challenges, the strategic attention of Washington is increasingly [diverted away](#) from the Atlantic Alliance. Yet precisely in these challenging times collective action is required to deal with global threats, under the impulse of global leaders. And who else can be up to the task than the United States and the European Union? Surely, nobody expects Russia, India or China to share the Western project to the same extent. In such an environment, therefore, the transatlantic relationship should be renewed, not marginalised.

In order to shape a new global order based on universally shared norms, rules and values, we need a renewed transatlantic leadership for a new grand bargain in which the emergence of new powers demanding power and recognition, and the emergence of new challenges requiring global responses, can be reconciled through an effective multilateral approach. As the European Union’s own [Security Strategy](#) says: ‘Acting together, the European Union and the United States can be a formidable force for good in the world.’ A joint effort will be required if they are to retain global influence in this new world order.

The United States should therefore not forget about its ‘old’ allies. European are not simply on call for when the United States needs them, but ought to be treated as an equal partner that can bring creative strategies and a comprehensive toolbox to address global problems. Obviously, Europeans should do what it takes to be an equal partner: make full use of its new institutions under the Treaty of Lisbon, set clear strategic priorities, and proactively pursue them. Then next time Barack Obama meets Herman Van Rompuy they should have a true strategic conversation.