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THE UNITED STATES IN THE WORLD OF DIVERSIFIED POWERS

Questions about new trends in the US foreign policy, its objectives and rationales have always been asked whenever the world experienced strong turbulences and shocks. This is due to the dominant role America has played in the international arena ever since World War II. On the other hand, the international community has been interested in the condition of the United States and the readiness of Americans to bear responsibility for the course of events in the world. The turn of the first and second decade of the 21st century was one of those special moments for the United States. It was not only because of the worsening financial situation in the country and the world, which made America and many other countries face the most serious economic crisis since decades. The situation was special also in a political, or rather, geopolitical sense. Above all, the order which emerged after the Cold War, i.e. a unipolar world, dominated and largely shaped by *Pax Americana*[1], seemed to be passé. That order was not questioned in the 1990s when the USA enjoyed the status of a superpower with its unprecedented military, economic, technological, cultural and political capabilities.[2] At that time, one could have an impression that the United States set standards, norms and values, shaped global international relations, had a decisive impact on resolving main conflicts, and positively affected the condition of the transatlantic community. The latter was important not only in the area of European security but also for America's global rank. The above has prompted some analysts to call that period the Age of Optimism.[3] To the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the absolute indicators of American power were still impressive. Despite difficult interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States kept increasing its military capability (the annual cost of the U.S. military presence in those two countries was USD 125 billion which then equalled less than 1 per cent of US GDP). US budgetary

[1] The concept of unipolarity as an order dominated by the US was introduced by Charles Krauthammer two decades ago. He also foresaw the coming of multipolarity: "In perhaps another generation or so there will be great powers coequal with the United States, and the world will, in structure, resemble the pre-World War I era." Ch. Krauthammer (1990) *The Unipolar Moment* „Foreign Affairs").

[2] Cf. Z. Brzeziński (1998), *Wielka szachownica. Główne cele polityki amerykańskiej,* Warsaw, pp. 27-28.

[3] This phrase was used by G. Rachman (2010) in his work: *Zero-Sum Future: American Power in an Age of Anxiety* ("Foreign Affairs" May/June, No. 3) and referred to the years 1991-2008.

expenditure on defence exceeded USD 500 billion (excluding operations in Iraq and Afghanistan), nearly amounting to 50 per cent of global expenditure on defence (and more than the total expenditure of next 14 countries spending much on defence).[4] In result, the dominance of the United States' land, maritime and air forces, continued. American armed forces were the only ones able to operate in distant regions of the world, having at their disposal suitable logistics, supplies and means of transport.

American economic and technological capabilities seemed strong in spite of the already surfacing financial and economic problems: a weak dollar, turbulence in the real estate market and American mortgage debt, and finally US high budget deficit (exceeding USD 400 billion in 2008). Nevertheless, the US economy was still the strongest in the world and the most competitive one. It suffices to mention that the US GDP reached about USD 14 billion (Russia's GDP equalled only 10 per cent of that of the US) and its growth was higher than in Europe or Japan for 25 years.[5]

Nonetheless, those indicators should not mask the relative decline of American power. The US participation in global import was only 15 per cent. Although its GDP constituted a quarter of gross global product, this ratio started to decrease as Asian powers, in particular China, developed much faster than the United States. The primacy of America was also questioned in other areas. The US military capability seemed to be unbeatable, and after 11 September 2001 the number of US military bases in the world increased (American bases were established in some former Soviet republics), but the US experienced military defeats. It failed to fully pacify Iraq, a country of 24 million residents, despite its five year occupation. Although the strategy pursued since 2007 by General David Petraeus was effective, the path to its full success was still long. The situation in Afghanistan was similar if not worse. It led to questioning military effectiveness of the United States and NATO – the Euro-Atlantic security pillar under the auspices of which the military mission in Afghanistan was conducted.

The above was accompanied by the weakening of American political impact in the world, which supported a thesis of the end of the US supremacy. There is no exaggeration in saying that in the first decade of the 21st century that issue was the focus of concurrent commentaries and discussions between leading American political scientists and experts in international relations. At the end of the Cold War – during the presidency of George H. W. Bush, Sr. – the US strategy in the coming years was debated nationwide. At the end of the presidency of George W. Bush, Jr., America reflected on the change of its role and importance in the world and a highly probable end of its superpower rank. Some authors analysed causes of this process, its manifestations and consequences. Others, however, argued against categorical visions of the end of American primacy.

The debate was joined by analysts, who earlier prophesied the emergence of an order dominated by typical American values and principles: democracy and liberal-

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[4] After F. Zakaria (2008), *The Future of American Power,* "Foreign Affairs" May/June, No. 3, p. 27.
[5] *Ibid*.

ism. And thus Francis Fukuyama, departing from his "end of history," wrote about a post-American world witnessing the expansion of Asian countries, including weak states but of growing strength of impact, the norms of which differed from Western ones.[6] Zbigniew Brzezinski, who already many years ago wrote that Americans should treat the leadership of their country as a temporary situation, also took part in that debate. He argued that the United States squandered a great part of its prestige, and the Bush administration severely damaged America's standing in the world. However, he did not rule out good chances of the United States in the future. He wrote:

> At the onset of the global era, a dominant power has therefore no choice but to pursue a foreign policy that is truly globalist in spirit, content and scope. Nothing could be worse for America, and eventually the whole world, than if American policy were universally viewed as arrogantly imperial […], and […] self-righteous […]. The crisis of American superpower would then become terminal.[7]

Political scientist Parag Khanna, already popular at the time, saw the reasons for America losing its leadership both in the US and in external conditionings. According to him, the American hegemony provoked diplomatic and economic countermoves which aimed at weakening the role of the US and creating an alternative world order – a multipolar one. He further argued that America must once and for all get rid of its imperial pretensions.[8] Another political scientist and diplomat Richard N. Haass, seeing the end of American dominance, envisaged a new system in which there was no multipolarity, as many new, alternative centres of power could be involved in a constant struggle to win or sustain influence zones.[9] Fareed Zakaria, the author of the then famous book entitled *The Post-American World*, shared similar views. He argued that the United States as a world power kept declining, and that more and more countries had a say in the newly created global system. They have benefited from their good economic situation and want to be more involved in shaping the affairs of the world.[10]

Loyal to the neoconservatives and their visions Robert Kagan opposed such opinions. For him, America was still the natural leader of the democratic camp and the spread of democracy constituted its most important task.[11] Also Joseph S. Nye, a recognized American expert and journalist, argued that although American foreign

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[6] F. Fukuyama, *Epoka słabych państw*, „Europa" supplement to „Dziennik" 16 August 2008.

[7] Z. Brzezinski (2007), *Second Chance. Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*, New York, pp. 215-216. [Polish translation: (2008) *Druga szansa. Trzej prezydenci i kryzys amerykańskiego supermocarstwa*, Warsaw.]

[8] P. Khanna (2008), *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order*, New York; see also his *Waving goodbye to hegemony*, "The New York Times" 27 January 2008.

[9] R. N. Haass (2008), *The Age of Nonpolarity*, "Foreign Affairs" May/June, No. 3.

[10] F. Zakaria (2008), *The Post-American World,* New York; see also his *The Future of American Power...*

[11] R. Kagan (2008), *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*; see also his *End of Dreams…* http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6136.

policy met with widespread criticism, the attractiveness of America, its values and principles, culture and achievements of its civilisation had not been depreciated.[12]

One basic conclusion followed both from the on-going expert debate in the United States and the actual reshaping of world situation, namely, that the US ability to influence the course of events and put pressure on strong or weak countries decreased. America, although in absolute terms was still a powerful state, was no longer seen as an omnipotent superpower capable of achieving its goals either by the power of its will, or supported by its unprecedented military capabilities, or possibly by pushing and forcing others to consent. American ability to create international situations and resolve problems weakened. It was much more difficult for the United States to muster others, impose its point of view and work with them together on the international arena. This could mean that America was losing its leadership position, even if in fact it was about the leadership in the Western world only.

It was not difficult to identify the reasons. For decades, the strength of America derived, inter alia, from its values and principles, model advancements and holding on to freedom and democracy. That is, America had and used its *soft power* – as it was once described by J. S. Nye.[13] "I have always believed America is an exceptional country, but that is because we have led in creating standards that work for everyone, not because we are an exception to the rules." wrote Madeleine Albright.[14] Indeed, J. S. Nye's statement highlighting *soft power*, i.e. values attractive to other nations, was very much true even though Americans did not always lead by example, e.g. the controversial Vietnam war, the already symbolic phenomenon of political "witch hunt" in the 1950s, long-lasting racial segregation in southern states of the US, or the Watergate scandal.

The good image of the US was undoubtedly damaged by the policy pursued by the G. W. Bush administration in response to the terrorist attack of 11/9. And here a great paradox comes to light. Americans attacked Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq two years later for the sake of their core values, i.e. democracy and freedom. Even the "Bush doctrine", which specified the American strategy of the war on terrorism, aimed at promoting these values.[15] Meanwhile, the American *soft power* was weak-

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[12] Cf. J. S. Nye in interview titled *Bush nie zniszczył Ameryki*, "Europa" supplement to "Dziennik" 5 May 2007.

[13] "American values" - the mentioned soft power of America - visible both in its internal and foreign policy are discussed by J. S. Nye (1990) in his book: *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power,* New York. He developed his ideas further in his (2004), *The Means to Success in World Politics,* New York.

[14] M. Albright (2008), *Memo to the President*, New York [in Polish*: Rady dla prezydenta,* "Europa" Supplement to "Dziennik" 16 Feb 2008.]

[15] Assumptions of the "Bush doctrine" were presented in: G. W. Bush (2002), *The State of the Union Address*, Washington, The White House, January; *The National Security Strategy of the United States,* Washington, The White House, September 2002. For further details see: I. H. Daalder, J. M. Lindsay (2003), *The Bush Revolution: The Remaking of American's Foreign Policy,*

ened dramatically, if not destroyed. The United States has lost much of its moral power which has been part of the US political identity and a factor highly relevant to its role and place in the world. Its image was hurt by Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo where moral and humanitarian principles were violated, and by preferring military solutions (the "Bush doctrine") on the international arena. The invasion on Iraq, and earlier on Afghanistan, were perceived by many as symbols of global American imperialism. In this situation talking about a historical mission to promote democracy and freedom looked hypocritical to many communities and nations. A hypocrite should not lead, as the ethical foundations of their leadership become suspicious.

The ability to build coalitions, win allies and partners who gather under one banner in the name of common values and for one purpose was an important factor of US leadership. The Bush administration lacked that ability. Furthermore, during the first term of Bush's presidency, the United States also lost its appeal as a coalition leader as it adhered to unilateralism and the declared principle: "You're either with us or you are with the terrorists". What is more, the arrogance showed at the time, overconfidence and rejection of other points of view led to attempts to isolate the United States on the international arena and to conspire against the arrogant superpower. America produced an unprecedented capability for the building of political coalitions against itself, not with itself. The Bush administration squandered the huge emotional potential of international solidarity and support on which America could rely before 11 September 2001. The US failed to create anything constructive and positive out of 11/9. It failed to shape a new model of relations in the world. In result, the United States failed as a reliable and responsible leader.

For those reasons, at the end of Bush's presidency, the country experienced an unprecedented hostility, opposition, distrust, and even hatred. Those negative attitudes were to be explained not only as the effects of Bush administration's policy. They were also a reaction to America's wealth and power which induced envy and jealousy of its enemies and fed inferiority feelings of others. Anti-Americanism became an almost universal phenomenon and the main stream attitude of various communities in many cases hindered building friendly and close relations with the US administration. At home, some European leaders, and not only them, learned a painful lesson that supporting America and having a close relationship with President Bush could weaken their position in their own country and bury their election prospects. In other words, a pro-American attitude did not pay while anti-Americanism became a fashionable trend and a political asset. Can a greatest power play the role of a global leader if it induces so many negative emotions, even if not entirely justifiable and caused by it? The question seemed rhetorical. The worst thing was that it also referred to the US leading role in transatlantic relations which was an important factor conditioning the global rank of the United States.

The Brookings Institution, May, p. 34ff.; J. Kiwerska (2005), *Neokonserwatywna polityka George'a W. Busha. Założenia, realizacja i skutki,* "Zeszyty Instytutu Zachodniego" No. 38/, pp. 38-54.

The failure in Iraq revealed the weakness of the strongest military power in the world. America had already suffered defeat, and a very spectacular one, in Vietnam. However, the situation was different then. It was the time of the Cold War and a continuous fear of Soviets. This automatically and permanently made the United States the patron saint and protector of the Western world. The status of America was not undermined by any Western country for their well-understood self-interest. Vietnam was but a failure which caused more havoc in the thinking and attitudes of Americans than among foreign allies and leaders of western European countries in particular. The world changed however, and many felt that the American colossus was actually not that strong, which gave them some satisfaction and also strengthened the desire to profit from the weakened role of the United States. Smaller powers and various countries that wished to co-decide on the order of things in the world or to demonstrate their new capabilities received an important message: America was no longer as powerful as we had thought.

The above prompted some observers to compare the Iraq war to the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) which affected the fortune of the British Empire despite being victorious for the United Kingdom and carried somewhere on the periphery of the British Empire.[16] Today it is difficult to determine whether this analogy, as regards the consequences, was right. However, one thing is certain: Iraq and Afghanistan operations challenged the primacy of the United States by exposing its military and political weaknesses. America lost its advantage in the post-Cold War world. Its role of the world's policeman changed as it ceased to be the one ready to resolve conflicts, act effectively in event of threat and decisively react to hostile actions. It was unable to enforce its authority by force or persuasion, not even in a country of twenty million residents located on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. America – in a fairly common opinion – failed as an effective, competent and trustworthy strategist.

The Russia-Georgia conflict of August 2008 also exposed the weakness of the United States which did not have instruments strong enough to impose anything on Russia. The mere persuasion and pressure of the weakened superpower were hardly effective. The use of force was not an option. The American diplomacy was weak without strong instruments to exert economic, military or political pressure. That largely applied to its effectiveness in other regions and various conflicts to mention the Middle East, nuclearisation of Iran and North Korea, Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism. Those threats and challenges exposed the US inefficiency, helplessness and lack of credibility and the needed support of other countries and their forces. The US no longer had a decisive say on solving problems and conflicts in the world. It found itself almost on the defensive, while the geopolitical offensive was taken "over" by other regional powers such as Russia and China, and the European Union.[17]

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[16] Cf. W. Mitchell, *Ameryka słabnie, Rosja w ofensywie,* „Gazeta Wyborcza" 30-31 August 2008; also F. Zakaria (2008), *The Future of...,* pp. 20-22.

[17] Cf. W. Mitchell (2008), *Ameryka słabnie...*

America was still a superpower but it functioned in a world of many new active players. Thus, the transformation of the unipolar system into a new geopolitical structure was in progress. It is a matter of discussion to what extent the United States itself contributed to the change of the order of things by its actions and losing its attributes of the leader and the world's policeman. Opinions were voiced that it was already Bill Clinton who did not manage to use the existing unipolar system effectively and that was why "the post-Cold War peace dividend could not be transformed into a global liberal order under the US leadership".[18] Unfortunately, commentators did not specify what had to be done in order to use the "extraordinary" opportunity which the United States had after the Cold War to build an international order permanently dominated by the US.[19] After all, the Bush administration demonstrated that it was impossible to enforce a universal liberal order under the leadership of America, and Clinton tried to promote democracy in various ways. Indeed, the admission of three countries from Central Europe, which were former satellites of the Soviet Union, to NATO also served that very purpose, i.e. the expansion and strengthening of the area of democracy and freedom.

Whatever the validity of blame put on the United States, it had to be admitted that already at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the United States - willingly or not - had to compete with other powers and various political groups on the geopolitical market. That happened despite America still being the only country that had all attributes of a superpower: economic, military, technological and political. Other superpowers had varied and particular strengths, however that was enough to make their voices stronger on particular matters. In the world of complex relations and dependencies, particularly economic ones, other powers were able to block, restrain and even torpedo US actions more efficiently than ever. They could also join forces against America. Some called this new geopolitical constellation a multipolar system or return to the situation of the rivalry of powers, others spoke of a world without poles, and some about chaos or transition.

In any case, the emergence of new powers, whose place on the international arena was largely defined by their increased economic potential, was among most important developments in the first decade of the 21st century. It was due to economic factors that at that time new countries and regions suddenly gained importance. The growth of economies of China, India and south-eastern Asia was unprecedented and economies of Russia, some African and Latin American countries grew fast as well, and last but not least, the European Union kept increasing its potential too. According to 2008 forecasts of the World Bank, China and India were to triple their respective national income by 2030. (As a matter of fact, transformation processes in those countries and regions are a big and complex issue.) Their economic growth was accompanied by great ambitions and growing political potential. Already in 2008, F. Zakaria claimed that those countries no longer perceived themselves as pawns

[18] P. Khanna (2008), *Waving goodbye…*

[19] Z. Brzezinski, *Tarcza tak, ale nie taka,* „Polityka" 7 June 2008.

used by someone else on a geopolitical chessboard but as full participants in global developments[20] and Z. Brzezinski observed that: "We are witnessing an unprecedented awakening of the world awareness. For the first time in history almost all of humanity is politically aware".[21]

Not all countries, however, wanted to make use of their growing strength in the same manner and to the same extent. It seemed that China indeed wanted more power, prestige and recognition in the world, but its objective was to achieve a higher status by joining the international system, not by overthrowing or transforming it. In 2007 R. Kagan wrote: "National ambition drives China's foreign policy today, […] although it is tempered by prudence and the desire to appear as unthreatening as possible to the rest of the world […]".[22] China counted also on full acceptance of its internal order of things including its autocratic, undemocratic, and even oppressive attitude to Tibet.

Already then, some involvement of Beijing turned out to be indispensable while dealing with various issues and challenges in the world and China's impact on the course of events grew stronger. It was not only about blocking the North Korean nuclear programme, but also about Darfur. It was the PRC which by providing arms to one of the conflict sides, effectively sabotaged international efforts to end the war in that part of Africa. The United States seemed to be helpless in the face of China's operations. It was difficult for the US to challenge China as their economic ties expanded substantially in result of both globalisation and China's impressive economic growth. The gesture of the American national team who honoured Lopez Lomong, a US citizen born in Darfur, by asking him to carry the national flag during the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics in August 2008, became a symbol of the helplessness of the Bush diplomacy.

However, it was Russia, which despite political turmoil and economic collapse accompanying the breakdown of the Soviet Union, has never lost the zeal to regain its superpower status if only to a limited extent. The first decade of the 21st century was conducive to its goals. Rising oil prices fuelled Russia's economy and the lack of a sensible energy policy in the West, which was in part America's fault (as no plan to reduce oil consumption and invest in alternative energy sources was prepared), made many countries dependent on the supplies from Russia. The rule of Vladimir Putin, a determined, effective and ruthless leader who suppressed the chaos of the 1990s and restored the sense of pride and optimism in Russians, made Russia of the year 2000 a very different country. In 1999, its gross domestic product amounted to USD 200 billion and in 2008 it reached 2 trillion dollars. Russian military budget grew equally rapidly. In 1999, Russia allocated about 3 billion dollars to military purposes, while in 2008 it was over USD 40 billion. The Russian expenditure was

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[20] Cf. F. Zakaria in interview titled *Pax Americana się skończył,* „Dziennik" 19-20 July 2008.

[21] Z. Brzezinski (2008), *Tarcza tak ...*

[22] R. Kagan (2007), *End of Dreams...*

significantly lower than the American one (over USD 500 billion) but the growth rate of defence spending in Russia was impressive.

Thus, Russia's image changed and Russia had a new and greater economic and political potential. It was going to use its potential by breaking rules and standards of conduct and resorting to its methods from the past, that is to pursue its imperial policy by *faits accomplis*, energy blackmail, forced imposition of its interests, and recovery its areas of influence. Russia wanted to be not a partner but a rival and competitor on the international scene, and thus it tried to point to a "another" new pole of the world order or contribute to the world's multipolarity. When several years ago Putin said that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, many commentators perceived it only as an expression of nostalgia for the non-existent state. Years later, it turned out that his rhetoric had clear objectives: to recover the lost role and rank on the international arena, and to restore a geopolitical order beneficial to Moscow. "Russia's complaint today is not with this or that weapons system. It is the entire post-Cold War settlement of the 1990s that Russia resents and wants to revise." wrote R. Kagan.[23]

The attack on Georgia on 8 August 2008 was the best example of those new/old trends in Russia's activity. Leaving the responsibility for the conflict and its consequences aside, the reaction of the Kremlin, i.e. Russia's military attack on a sovereign, democratic country, destruction of Georgia's military and civilian infrastructure, and the use of Russian armed forces force against civilians, definitely exposed the dangerous and ruthless face of Russia. "This is the rebirth of Russia as a 19th century superpower challenging the post-Cold War order," wrote Ivan Krastev in his excellent analysis. According to him, in this way Moscow returned to the centre of the European and world political scene, and certainly not as a policy object.[24]

Undoubtedly, Russian foreign policy "after Georgia" resembled that of the 19th century. It was based on a typically Russian combination of national frustration, ambition and power. Therefore, the war in Georgia enjoyed such a big support of the Russian public opinion. For Russians, defeating Tbilisi implied the end of Russia's post-Cold War humiliation and return to the best – from their point of view – imperial policy. For those reasons it was so difficult to reach a compromise with Russia ruled by Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. Disrespecting Western standards, Russia would not accept any limitations and restrictions which the West wanted to impose on Moscow's relations with its closest neighbours. Russia's conduct surely made it difficult for both the US and European countries to pursue actions and weakened the effectiveness of their initiatives concerning not only Georgia. At the same time, considerable powerlessness of American foreign diplomacy was exposed.

To some extent, the restoration of Russia's and other countries' power to be an active and strong player on the international arena was also a consequence of the weakening of the role and prestige of the United States. "By both what it has done

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] I. Krastew, *Polityka mocarstwowa spółka z o.o.,* „Gazeta Wyborcza" 23-24 August 2008.

and what it has failed to do, the United States has accelerated the emergence of alternative power centers in the world and has weakened its own position relative to them", wrote R. N. Haass.[25] According to F. Zakaria, the new situation was to be attributed not only to the decline of America but also to the increase of the importance of other countries.[26] The point was that next to leading powers, many regional powers emerged shaping the international situation in different ways.

Iran has become such a new power. Benefiting from the increase in oil prices, the country of ayatollahs gained attributes of a regional power which not only refused to respect decisions of the international community on Iran's nuclear programme, but also impacted the situation in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestinian territories in Israel. The very character of that state, the anti-Western and hostile to Israel rhetoric of its leaders and its policy, all constituted a threat to American interests in the region and were a limitation on the US policy.

In Latin America, Brazil and also Argentina, Chile and Venezuela became influential. The problem there was that the United States, focused on the fight against terrorism, neglected its southern neighbours and did not adequately respond to dangerous tendencies. Meanwhile, Latin America become both left-oriented and extremely anti-American. The tone was set by revolutionary and populist leaders who considered Fidel Castro their role model and Hugo Chávez their informal leader. Growing prices of crude oil gave the Venezuelan president an advantage. Revenue from petroleum exports was used to support other anti-American regimes in Latin America. Eventually, the president of Venezuela took the leading role in the region ousting the United States which long enjoyed it whether under the Monroe Doctrine or the neighbourhood policy.

Venezuela was yet another country which greatly capitalised on the raise of petroleum prices and made enormous political capital. In the beginning of the 21st century, the demand for oil increased and its price per barrel went up from 20 to over 1000 dollars in less than 10 years. It was due to the complicated situation in Iraq, a major oil exporter, but also, if not primarily, to the growth of oil consumption in the world, especially in China and India which were experiencing an economic boom, and in the United States, as well. The lack of an American energy policy – according to experts – led to imbalance in the world political order. Oil and gas producers, owing to enormous proceeds from sales, joined the geopolitical powers' club.[27]

Weak states complicated the situation. It is hard to agree with F. Fukuyama's thesis that the international world today is different because it is not dominated by strong states but the weak and failed ones.[28] However, in the face of weak governance and poorly functioning state administration, the actual power was, in fact, tak-

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[25] R. N. Haass (2008), *The Age of Nonpolarity*, "Foreign Affairs" May/June, No. 3; see also F. Zakaria (2008), *The Future of...,* pp. 21-22.

[26] F. Zakaria (2008), *The Post-American...,* p. 48.

[27] R. N. Haass (2008), *The Age of Nonpolarity ...*

[28] F. Fukuyama, *Epoka słabych państw,* „Europa" supplement to „Dziennik" 16 August 2008.

en over by various radical organisations beyond the state control, such as *Hezbollah* in Lebanon, *Hamas* in Palestine, or the Taliban restoring their influence in Afghanistan. Some countries were targets for various criminal cartels, terrorist forces and extreme religious groups. The use of military force, which is an important attribute of the United States, frequently proved to be ineffective in the world of weak states. Fukuyama claimed that one cannot use hard power to create legitimate state institutions and consolidate governance. He gave an example: the United States spent huge amounts on armed forces, not comparable to any other country, and yet it failed to stabilise the situation in Iraq, despite five years of strenuous and costly efforts.[29] Thus, the world of weak states limited the power of America in some way.

The role and place of Europe – the other party in cross-Atlantic relations, changed in the new though not fully crystallised world of diversified powers. The "Bush era" was followed by havoc in Euro-Atlantic relations, and Europe used the weakening position of the United States to its advantage. Some European countries felt that they could disobey America and it would no longer cause them trouble. European governments began to freely and strongly articulate their views, formulate critical opinions on the US policy, and even adopted confrontational attitudes to the US. Of course, that did not apply to all European countries and there were differences between EU Member States. The anti-American front nevertheless attracted various countries whose political interests were previously distant. Fukuyama warned that other countries started to mobilise against the United States, which became a less desirable, and even unwelcome partner if only for some time.[30]

America's heavily strained image among Europeans was also a problem. In Europe, president Bush became one of the least popular political leaders. It was not only about the assumptions of the "Bush doctrine," unacceptable to some politicians and European public opinion. It was a result of the attitude to the Republican president himself, his way of reasoning, conduct and personality. Conservatism, Manichean approach to problems, simplistic view of the world, and finally, the easily noticeable incompetence and mistakes of his administration, all intensified the dislike for Bush. It translated into a drop in favourability rankings for the United States and its policy, identified with hegemonic aspirations if not political belligerence. Public opinion polls in a number of European countries confirmed that. Results demonstrated that to the end of Bush's presidency, the approval for the United States was well below 50 per cent.

This reluctant attitude to the Bush administration was, to some extent, a result of long-lasting anti-Americanism especially of the intellectual elite of Western Europe. It was founded on a general dislike of Americans as *nouveaux riches* and their ignorant if not arrogant conduct, and of their leaders tending to pursue imperialistic policies. There was also much of a concealed inferiority complex toward the power which half a century ago took the international leadership away from Europe, and

[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Ibid.*

deprived highly sophisticated European culture of its primacy in the world. Indeed, eight years of the Bush administration, its peculiar style and controversial undertakings, strengthened anti-American attitudes in Europe. Bush certainly could not, unlike Clinton, leave his office in the White House with the honourable title of "a European" and the prestigious Charlemagne Prize awarded annually by the Chancellor of Germany in Aachen. Anti-Americanism was expressed by a large part of the public opinion and the intellectual elite of Western Europe. Reluctance toward the United States increased even in Central and Eastern European countries which were earlier regarded strongly pro-American e.g. Poland. Those were the undisputed facts that weakened the status image and rank of the US. They also affected the condition of relations between America and Europe.

However, it was the growing feeling of European independence that had the strongest impact on transatlantic relations and their new dimension. After the period of post-Cold War transformations and development of a new order in Europe, the Old World found itself in a situation where its close ties with the United States were the result of an informed choice rather than necessity. Consequently it was possible to impose conditions, adopt a strongly autonomous stance toward the American superpower, and put an end to Europe's image of an obedient partner, sometimes even a vassal. Europe benefited from the difficult situation of the until then undisputed superpower: its weakened role in the world, tarnished image and inability to cope with many challenges "on its own." As a result, the Bush administration was unable to make its case even within NATO. The issue of Afghanistan was the best example. There was a joint mission of NATO, and its European members increased their contingents, however not to Americans' full satisfaction as their expectations about European commitment were much higher.

The growing feeling of Europe's independence was also strengthened by the ongoing European integration. It was no secret that the European Union, whose GDP in the first decade of this century was higher than the American one, was a growing challenge for the United States. The economic aspect of the problem is a huge issue but it suffices to say that economic conflicts between the US and the European Union certainly did not improve mutual relations. There was much more competition and rivalry than willingness to cooperate. On the other hand, both the EU and the United States were part of the same Western system of rules and principles of free market economy, they both participated in globalisation processes, and without their cooperation it would be difficult to solve major economic problems of the world. Awareness of that fact was increasingly manifested on both sides of the Atlantic, especially in the context of the growing financial and economic crisis at the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

The political aspect of the relationship between the United States and the European Union which is a unique formation in the history of our continent, needs to be discussed. Simply put, the political influence of the EU kept increasing at the expense of America. Both Brussels' technocrats and leaders of major EU Member States tried to make the UE a balance factor or a global intermediary between the

United States and the rest of the world. That refers especially to countries in conflict with America. Three major EU countries – Germany, France and the United Kingdom - conducted negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme. The talks did not bring expected results, however the European trio or "troika" emerged to be an important player that could contribute to stopping the Iranian nuclear project.

While the United States unsuccessfully tried to resolve the situation in Iraq, Europe engaged its financial resources and political capital to attract peripheral countries. "Many poor regions of the world have realized that they want the European, not the American dream" wrote P. Khanna with some exaggeration.[31] His point was that in the world of the 21st century, tools of "soft power", especially of economic and cultural impact, were more important for enlarging influence zones. It was striking that the "Bush era" was primarily associated with the military dominance and as such resembled the times of the Cold War, not to mention the loss of the soft power attributes of the United States, which was against the American tradition.

The European Union benefited from this as well. As a structure integrated mainly in the economic dimension, it itself created an exemplary model of development, but also provided considerable assistance and support to other countries. Referring to the famous Kagan's thesis on Europe being from Venus and America from Mars, Khanna argued that Europe is like Mercury as it has deep pockets.[32] Indeed, the EU market grew to be the largest in the world and European technologies increasingly set standards. At the same time EU Member States were among the largest donors of development aid. Referring to the ability to peacefully co-exist developed by Europeans after their dramatic past experiences and in spite of various differences and old prejudices, Zygmunt Bauman observed that Europe could offer the world its experience and skills which our planet in the present distress needed most.[33]

The European approach paid off in the form of the EU's greater political power. The European Union became a more desirable partner as it was less controversial and arrogant than America. The EU had hardly any inclination to act as a hegemon. Kagan commented on that as follows: "Europeans seek honor and respect, too, but of a postmodern variety. The honor they seek is to occupy the moral high ground in the world, to exercise moral authority, to wield political and economic influence as an antidote to militarism […]".[34] Thus the European Union was on its way to establish another pole of the new international system. According to some experts, in the new world order leading roles would be played by the U.S., China, and the European Union. The new Big Three already imposed some rules and standards and other countries were but to choose partners in the emerging new order. The Big Three fought hard for greater influence, that is "who would attract whom". That made relations between the three difficult. It was particularly important to the

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[31] P. Khanna (2008), *Waving goodbye...*

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] Z. Bauman, *Korzenie amerykańskiego zła,* „Gazeta Wyborcza" 28-29 June 2008.

[34] R. Kagan (2007), *End of Dreams…*

relationship between America and the European Union. Both of them belonged to the same western world of values and principles, however, their respective interests, goals and competition for influence began to divide them even more noticeably than before.[35]

The effectiveness of EU political activities on the international arena was still an open question. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the question was whether the European Union was an institution sufficiently tight and strong to ensure the EU's security and implement its foreign policy, and whether it had mechanisms and measures necessary to effectively respond to emergencies. Henry Kissinger once asked "Who do I call if I want to call Europe?". In other words the question was if Europe had a defined response facility which one could call when seeking effective response to threat or in need of instant aid? Answers to that question were to reveal Europe's actual strength on the international arena and thus its ability to solve political problems effectively.

In this respect, one has to agree with the opinion that the European Union, despite the weakened United States, was not yet an alternative to American leadership. An obvious weakness of the EU was its lack of military structures. In Brzezinski's opinion, "A political Europe has yet to emerge". Referring to Europe's relations with the United States, he argued that the political dialogue between America and Europe was limited to bilateral relations especially with Great Britain, France and Germany, which themselves are unable to take a common stand on issues important to America."[36] To some extent, this bilateralism resulted from its ease. It was easier for the Bush administration to talk with individual European partners rather than the integrated whole. It was during Bush's first term when US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld distinguished between American policies toward "Old Europe" and "New Europe". During Bush's second term, differences lessened somewhat. Nevertheless the point was that the European Union was still not able to resolve world conflicts on its own. Having not formed a joint military force yet, the EU was not openly inclined to do so. In other words, the EU was not a global player yet.

The inertia and conservatism of the European Union were strong. Individual EU Member States had different interests, attitudes, experience, objectives and thus policies. Their different assessments of various situations as well as their different expectations, for many years precluded the EU from developing its common foreign policy and common position on a multitude of huge and small international problems. At the beginning of 2009, it was even difficult to prejudge whether the Lisbon Treaty would be an effective mechanism shaping EU common foreign and security policies. This assessment of the situation in the EU was not changed even by the EU's involvement and role during the Georgian crisis, where the president of France, which held the EU presidency, was an effective conflict mediator. Also decisions taken on 1 September 2008 at a special EU summit did not result in the

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[35] P. Khanna (2008), *Waving goodbye...;* see also: R. Kagan (2007), *End of Dreams…*

[36] Z. Brzezinski, *Tarcza tak ...*

adoption of a tough stance on Russia, i.e. radical enough to force Moscow to give up its *fait accompli* policy. EU Member States did not agree on all proposed sanctions to be applied. Eventually they agreed to suspend the EU's talks with Russia on a new partnership and cooperation agreement, but decided not to impose any economic sanctions or visa restrictions on Russia. A rhetorical question was whether the European Union – diversified, not having its common foreign policy and more strongly dependent on Russian energy supplies than other regions of the world – could afford to confront Russia.

From the American perspective and in a political sense, the European Union was still quite a "cloudy" formation with internal contradictions that impeded its potential role of an important and effective actor on the international stage. It did not mean that the condition and capabilities of the European Union would have no impact on transatlantic relations including their prospects and scope. In essence, America had questions about the European Union's international impact and its consequences for the condition and shape of the Euro-Atlantic community, and above all, its impact on the United States' place in the world.

At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, America faced an aggregate of extremely difficult and pending problems resulting from dynamic transformation processes in the world, which manifested themselves in the declining – according to many – international ranking of the United States and the emergence of new powers. What strategy did the United States adopt in view of those challenges? Was it effective? Did various forecasts and expectations formulated at the time when G. W. Bush was about to leave the White House, prove correct and become executed? What was the international standing of America after four years of the Barack Obama administration?

In January 2009, when president Obama took office, he had to rebuild a good image of America and restore the high place of America in the world, which was strained by his predecessor's policy, economic crisis and the emergence of new powers and competitors on the international arena. America had to re-win trust and admiration to effectively compete on the international arena. A politics of fear was not an option. Undoubtedly, when the first African-American president of the United States began his term, there were high hopes and support expressed by both Americans and most of international public opinion. This was an advantage which G. W. Bush certainly did not have when moving to the White House in 2001. Then, in Europe, the Republican president was judged on his conservatism, Manichean approach to problems and amateurism in international affairs. Later, in result of his policies, the dislike of Bush grew stronger negatively affecting attitudes of many leaders, politicians and communities toward America. In contrast, Obama evoked mostly positive emotions if only because he was not Bush, but also in anticipation of the announced changes in American foreign policy.

The context helped Obama to relatively quickly improve the image of the United States in the world. Obama's first declarations to return to the Wilsonian or original understanding of "the historical mission" of the United States served that purpose

too. Obama spoke about promotion of democratic principles and values by America which could not be done by force. The best way to promote them was to live by them at home. This was repeated in the *National Security Strategy* published in May 2010. The document was based on the presumption that "America's commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law are essential sources of our strength and influence in the world." Therefore, the "mission" was to begin in the United States and spread to the world from there. Foundations of American leadership were reinterpreted as it was emphasised that "global security depends upon strong and responsible American leadership." As written in the *National Security Strategy*, the foundations of this leadership should be strengthened, especially domestically.[37]

The new strategic concept equally strongly emphasised the need for broad co-operation in the world. The document reads: "Diplomacy is as fundamental to our national security as our defence capability". Recognising limitations on American dominance in the world, it was clearly stressed that cooperation must have included both international institutions and allies in Europe, Asia, Americas and the Middle East.The emergence of new poles in the global order required "deeper and more effective partnerships with other key centres of influence - including China, India and Russia […]".[38] If one wanted to indentify a distinctive trait of the new *National Security Strategy*, it would definitely be a wide offer of international cooperation, including diplomatic cooperation and dialogue. That was how Obama's America intended to find its place in the world of diversified powers.

The first declarations and strategic arrangements were accompanied by actions. The tone and style of American diplomacy changed. It was dominated by the will to work through dialogue, negotiation and cooperation. Even American enemies and opponents were offered to enter talks and negotiations. The offer included "rogue states", like Iran. The declaration of talks without preconditions was certainly encouraging and appealed to many Americans and world public opinion. The question was whether it would be an effective strategy to address the main problem which was the threat of Iran's nuclear programme. After all, the European "trio" - Britain, France and Germany - had already carried talks with Tehran for several years without visible results. President Obama, however, remained hopeful that his offer for Iran and the Muslim world to start a dialogue and discussions would be taken seriously and possible to advance. In fact, this was the main message of his memorable Cairo speech in June 2009.[39] Other uses of soft power included the announced closing the controversial Guantanamo Bay detention camp where basic rights were violated, and active participation in the fight against climate change. Much was said

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[37] National Security Strategy, May 2010, www.whitehouse.-gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by the President on a New Beginning*, Cairo University, 4 June 2009, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09.

about the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in near future (it happened in December 2011) and stronger commitment to assist Afghanistan. It seemed that a more pragmatic and consultative approach replaced the former ideologisation of American policy and authoritarianism in decision taking.

What seemed to particularly distinguish actions of the new administration from the previous one was its new approach to terrorism. The Bush administration made the war on terror its absolute priority and the very substance of its policy to which the style of operations and strategies were subordinated. Obama, who recognised the threat of violent extremism, especially of al Qaeda, drew attention to other threats and challenges. The threats posed by mass destruction weapons, their proliferation, and hazards associated with nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea were emphasised equally strongly if not more. The new president clearly saw a need to reduce armaments, including advancement of nuclear disarmament.[40]

Terrorism was not high on the Obama administration's agenda. They seemed to understand that the "war on terror" referred to something abstract without directly pointing to where the problem was and who the enemy was. Talking about the "war on terror" without a clear definition of who the enemy was excessively narrowed and simplified the complexity of both causes and conditionalities. A negative perception of America in the Muslim world was certainly a cause. Hence Obama addressed the Muslim community in Cairo with a positive message, i.e. a declaration of intent to support peace and provide aid and assistance. What is more, the American leader – in contrast to many previous US presidents, criticised Israel's settlement policy and clearly articulated the point of view of Palestinians/Muslims, which annoyed the Jewish community.[41]

From this perspective, the operation to kill Osama bin Laden on 2 May 2011 at the direction of the White House was controversial from moral and legal points of view (execution without an attempt to catch and bring the leader of al Qaeda to trial). It was a breach of the rules which Obama sought to promote. Not surprisingly, it met with a strong reaction in the world. In some commentaries, Obama was compared to Bush Jr. and accused of violating human rights. This was one aspect of the case. On the other hand, by killing the leader of al Qaeda and accomplishing the most important objective of his predecessor's foreign policy in a manner not entirely acceptable to the democratic world, Obama eliminated the greatest terrorist of the world and a leading apologist of the most radical political movement of our times. Osama bin Laden was a symbol and his death meant closing a chapter in the fight against terrorism. All in the world accepted that it was "an act of national self-defence" which was justified and understandable.[42] The world reacted similarly to further acts eliminating

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[40] *Ibid*.; see also Z. Brzezinski (2010), *Front Hope to Audacity,* "Foreign Affairs" January/February, No. 1, p.16ff.

[41] CF. M. S. Indyk, K. G. Lieberthal, M. E. O'Hanlon (2012), *Bending History. Barack Obama's Foreign Policy,* Washington, pp. 118-119.

[42] W. Osiatyński in interview titled *Bin Laden musiał zginąć,* „Gazeta Wyborcza" 7-8 May 2011.

radical leaders, such as Anwar al-Awlaki who after the death of bin Laden was said to be the most dangerous terrorist. His death in Yemen on 30 September 2011 inflicted by a drone was an example of a new type of activities carried out by the US in its fight against terrorism. Some claimed that those acts helped the American president to presented himself to the world as a strong and decisive leader who strengthened the international role of the United States.[43]

Russia was the country which started to play a special role in the new American thinking about the role of the US in the world and its international relations. Already in February 2009, at an international security conference in Munich, a new opening in relations with Moscow was announced. "[…] it's time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together," said American Vice President Joseph R. Biden.[44] It very quickly became clear that the Obama administration treats "resetting" relations with Russia not only as a neat slogan, but an actual direction of American policy to the implementation of which the US was to devote much time and effort. Opinions on whether that approach was effective and reasonable were strongly divided.

It is hard to deny that without the Russian partner it would be much more difficult if not impossible to eliminate threats to European security and deal effectively with challenges on global and regional levels, especially in face of diffusing new powers. Therefore, relations with Russia could perfectly fit into the new style of the Obama administration's activity on the international arena, i.e. favouring dialogues and seeking cooperation and agreement. Resetting relations with Moscow led to the signing of a new START document on 8 April 2010 which significantly reduced the limits on American and Russian nuclear warheads. It was an act of great importance, as the START I treaty, which was signed by George H. W. Bush Sr. and Mikhail Gorbachev, was due to expire at the time. Interests of the United States associated with Russia also included the possibility of further use of Russian (formerly Soviet) air and land space to transport supplies for western allied forces in Afghanistan. That logistic assistance was almost a *sine qua non* for the success of the American mission in the Afghanistan. Other issues, the solution of which would be much more difficult without Russia's involvement, included blocking Iran's nuclear programme and the Near East conflict. The situation in Syria was an additional issue. If only for those reasons, it was worth to seek arrangements with Moscow.

On the other hand, the policy of "reset" relations with Russia had a price which the Obama administration paid. For Poland, it was painful. In September 2009, Obama decided to scrap the missile defence agreement the Bush administration negotiated with Poland and the Czech Republic. Originally, some elements of the missile defence system were to be installed in those two countries. Obama's decision to scuttle that part of the European defence system was a side effect of the appre-

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[43] M. S. Indyk, K. G. Lieberthal, M. E. O'Hanlon (2012), *op. cit.,* pp. 70-72.

[44] J. R. Biden, *Speech at the 45th Munich Conference*, 7 II 2009, www.securityconference. de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2009 = &menu_konfer

ciation of Russia's role and importance by the US in the context of its security and foreign policy. Aware that the deployment of units of the US anti-missile system in countries geographically close to Russia annoyed Moscow and was strongly opposed by it, the Obama administration decided to abandon the commitment of Bush. It was not a complete abandonment of the plan to build a US missile defence system in Europe. The plan was modified. Clearly, there were technical reasons which made Americans change their decision. The new architecture of the system appeared to be cheaper and technologically more efficient and it was to warrant greater security of the United States and its allies. Opinions of commentators made it quite clear however, that the redesign was definitely a friendly gesture toward Moscow. After all, what could please Russia more than assurance that in Poland there would be no American missile base and that in the Czech Republic there would be no American radar to monitor Russian airspace.

There was one more aspect of the Obama administration's decision to implement a new defence system. For Russia, that decision meant not only rejection of what its leaders did not accept, but also a prospect of joining the new project. In other words, it meant a full recognition of Russia's aspirations to play a significant role in the world of diversified powers. It is worth noting that in fact, the Obama administration revived Clinton's idea, who in the early 1990s tried to make Russia his "strategic partner".[45] It did not work at the time, if only because Yeltsin's Russia was weak, in chaos and unpredictable, and America dominated in the world anyway. Now that strategic objective seemed more plausible given the stronger standing of Putin's Russia and the limited American power which forced it to cooperate and to compete.

At this point, it is worth asking what the place of Europe in the strategy of Obama's administration was. So far, Europe was the most important ally and partner of America but also its growing economic competitor. At least it seemed so while reviewing US-EU relations to the end of Bush's presidency. There is no exaggeration in saying that an improvement of relations with Europe, attention paid to the importance of transatlantic cooperation, and restoration of its cohesiveness and effectiveness could be an important factor contributing to strengthening the role and importance of America in the world leaning toward multipolarity. It was a task both important and difficult, given the quality of transatlantic relations which President Obama inherited from the "Bush era." The strained mutual trust, a growing feeling of autonomy in Europe, but also Bush's attempts to polarise Europe were but some of the reasons which weakened the alliance between America and Europe.

There is no doubt that to reconstruct strong ties between the allies, it was essential to restore a good climate in their relations. This was the purpose of the change of the US style of politics where again importance was paid to diplomatic activities and demonstration of willingness to cooperate with and listen to US partners. America tried to rebuild its *soft power* which unquestionably contributed to its prestige and

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[45] For further details see: J. Kiwerska (2000), *Gra o Europę. Bezpieczeństwo europejskie w polityce Stanów Zjednoczonych pod koniec XX wieku,* Poznań, pp. 255-277.

importance and was highly regarded in Europe. But such efforts did not solve the problem. Transatlantic relations needed to have more substance and be given a new impulse. Europe expected that President Obama would appreciate the significance and importance of the US alliance with the Old World and recognise the importance of European countries in American politics. It was not only about friendly gestures, not about more consultations, but, above all, about more commitment and time devoted to European issues. In turn, the Obama administration hoped for a more effective involvement of Europeans in solving problems and overcoming challenges.

A review delivered to the end of Obama's first term was not positive. The US and Europe failed to strengthen their transatlantic relations. They did not offer a convincing reason for up keeping their relations and did not deliver a strong impulse. The Obama administration made proposals and suggestions which did not meet with an adequate, or expected, response from the European side. In turn, many European countries were disappointed with some gestures and actions of the US administration. President Obama's visits to the European continent were limited to the necessary minimum and some important meetings, such as the planned EU-US summit in May 2010, were removed from the American short list. On the one hand, there was a feeling of Europe's marginalisation in the US global policy and, on the other hand, Europe remained both assertive and passive in respect to many challenges and problems. Thus the impression that Europe (European Union) and the United States drifted apart persisted.

During Obama's first term, the European continent was no longer a region of prime importance to the US.[46] To some extent, this was due to the weakening of emotional ties between American politicians and European leaders. The background of Obama himself – his father from Africa, childhood spent away from the American continent in Asia and Hawaii – automatically pointed to his weaker emotional bond with Europe. Thus, a close relationship with the Old World depended now more on pragmatics than – as it used to be for over 50 years – on historical, emotional or cultural bonds.

America's lesser interest in Europe resulted also from the simple fact unlike during the Cold War and shortly after, Europe was secure, stable and democratic and thus it was no longer an area of US worries. To Obama, Europe was relevant in the context of and in relation to his objectives constituting a real challenge to American interests and priorities. That approach was explained by R. Kagan who said that Obama was the first truly post-Cold War American president and his attitude to Europe was not emotional. As a man steering a troubled superpower, Obama focused

[46] In this context, it is very meaningful that in a new American publication evaluating foreign policy of the Obama administration (M. S. Indyk, K. G. Lieberthal, M. E. O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*), its authors decided not to devote even one chapter to US relations with Europe while their first chapter is titled: *Emerging Power: China,* pp. 24-69. This indirectly shows the level of the Obama administration's interest in Europe.

on what Europe could do for him while Europe's strategic importance kept decreasing at its own request because of what Europe did and did not do.[47]

The Obama administration expected transatlantic relations to be more than sharing values and principles that is NATO and security issues. It was expected that the relations would have a more practical dimension. America wanted Europe on which it could count while solving various problems and which would get involved, as much as it possibly could, in various parts of the world often very distant from the European stage. "We want strong allies. […] We're not looking to be the patron of Europe. We're looking to be partners with Europe.", said Obama during his first European visit as President in April 2009.[48] Given various challenges including global economy issues, terrorism, threat of nuclear proliferation and the Middle East conflict, the objective of the Obama administration was to cooperate with everyone able to effectively contribute to solving those problems. That was the special role the US assigned to its European allies.

At the time, European countries, although integrated in the European Union and having a foreign affairs minister of the EU, failed to present themselves as an effective and active player on the international arena. They did not assume the role of a power, which the European Union potentially was. They consistently criticised long detention of terrorist suspects in the Guantanamo prison without any sentence having been passed, but refused to let the released prisoners enter their territory. Furthermore, in the case of the Middle East conflict. Europe lacked real determination to engage diplomatically as much as it potentially could, in the implementation of the peace process. Europe awaiting actions of the US, limited its role to financial aid for the Palestinian side (about 1 billion euro per year). The role the European Union played in resolving the dangerous and still insurmountable problem of Iran's nuclear ambitions was hardly perceptible then, while earlier, the "troika" countries carried important talks with the regime of the ayatollahs.

Apart from the economic crisis, Europe failed as a strategic actor on which the United States counted, due to the lack of readiness of European countries to make greater commitment and take greater responsibility for the course of events in the world. That would require overcoming national egoism, displaying more dedication, and demonstrating the willingness to cooperate with America in partnership. It is worth noting that in the area of foreign policy and defence policy, EU Member States cultivated their national sovereignty. Therefore, it was difficult to make them think in terms of a joint EU position. Even while joining NATO operations in Afghanistan, European countries acted as individual allies strongly dependent on their national conditionalities and limitations.

Moreover, according to Americans, Afghanistan proved the lack of Europe's decisive involvement in supporting the United States. It also exposed the weaknesses

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[47] R. Kagan in interview entitled *Obama - cudu nie było,* „Gazeta Wyborcza" 16-17 January 2010.

[48] After M. E. O'Hanlon, *Obama's Solid First Year on Foreign Policy*, www.brookingsed/opinions/2010/010 l_obama_foreign-_policy_ohanlon.aspx...

of the North Atlantic Treaty, i.e. the lack of determination and sense of shared responsibility among some of its members though, officially, it was a NATO mission in Afghanistan. In result of the above, it was the United States which had to make up for various material, human and operational deficiencies of operations in Afghanistan. (President Obama had to increase the US contingent from 38 thousand early in 2009 to 90 thousand in mid-2012). That surely did not improve Americans' perception of European allies. On several occasions, European leaders declared that the success of the Afghan mission was relevant to national security of their countries, but in practice the mission was treated as an almost exclusive responsibility of the United States. The more so as the NATO operation in Afghanistan met with little support of the European public opinion.

In this context, one could hope that the Arab Spring of 2011, with its most bloody part being the NATO military operation in Libya, would give a new impetus to transatlantic political relations, or at least confirm their value and importance for the involved NATO members as well as their close and distant neighbours. For various reasons, that NATO military operation had no precedent. In contrast to most previous NATO military interventions, it was undertaken not on the initiative of the United States but several European countries, mainly France. In a way, the US was forced to join that operation. It was also Paris, supported by London, which forced the Security Council to adopt a resolution which *de facto* sanctioned the military intervention. In the beginning, the operation in Libya was led by the United States. At the end of March 2011, NATO took the command over and the US became but a member of the coalition. Thus, it was the first military operation of NATO in which America was "leading from behind".[49] But the precedence ends there. The Libyan operation extended in time (it lasted until September 2011) and military resources of participating European countries shrank as did their will to continue military operations. In consequence, America had to take initiative, increase its military forces and again play the leading role directly contributing to the removal and death of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The lessening involvement of European countries was undoubtedly related to a long process of reducing defence spending by European allies, which in practice meant that their military capabilities decreased.

American criticism of the European involvement in the Libyan operation included other developments as well. Firstly, it was not a truly joint operation as a number of important countries, including Germany and Poland, refused to participate in it. Secondly, one could have reservations about the EU common foreign and security policy. It seemed that the Lisbon Treaty equipped the EU diplomacy with tools which could be used to integrate EU Member States to deal with cases like Libya and – earlier - the revolt in the Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East. In reality, the European Union failed. It was not Catherine Ashton, the head of the EU diplomacy, who coordinated actions taken but two European capitals – Paris and London. Hence, in Europe, national policies and interests dominated, not the EU di-

[49] CF. M. S. Indyk, K. G. Lieberthal, M. E. O'Hanlon (2012), *op. cit.,* p. 158.

plomacy. So to speak, that particular European telephone number which Americans could call in case of emergency was not there.

All those factors were important, however, there is no doubt that the lowering of Europe's place in American politics was primarily a consequence of the new international environment of emerging powers in which the United States had to function. They competed against America and strongly threatened its interests. While the European Union busy with the spreading economic and financial crisis and threats of EU disintegration, no longer "inspired the world," other powers have become actual competitors of the United States.

Undoubtedly, China is such a challenge for the US economy and politics, as it has been consistently and rapidly developing in recent years. It suffices to give some figures. The US debt to China is over USD 1.5 trillion, and it is projected that in 2020 China, with its economic growth of nearly 10% annually, will be ahead of the US in terms of GDP (India ahead of Germany, and Russia ahead of the UK and France). In 2030, China's GDP will be greater than the American and Japanese GDP together (and India's GDP greater than the total product of Germany, UK and France).[50] The growing economic potential has increasingly financed military resources and capabilities of the new powers and raised their political importance. While four years ago it was said that China's ambitions were limited to the economic sphere, at the end of Obama's first term some argued that the growing economic strength of the People's Republic of China resulted in an increase in its political aspirations in Asia. Beijing has become more aggressive toward its neighbours, e.g. the Philippines and Vietnam, not to mention Taiwan, which worries neighbouring countries, including Japan, and even Australia. If we add China's potential to influence North Korean politicians, who threaten the world with their national nuclear programme, it is not surprising that the Obama administration has focused on the Asia-Pacific region and hence the American "pivot to the Pacific Rim"[51] and opinions that "Obama is not the first African American president of the United States but the first Asian one".[52]

The new strategy of America was announced in November 2011, during Obama's visit to the Pacific region. Speaking to the Australian parliament, Obama declared that "the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region". He stressed that the United States as a Pacific power should contribute to shaping the future of the region. Therefore, the American presence in the Asia-Pacific region was to be a highest priority in the new US foreign policy.[53]

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[50] After Z. Brzezinski (2012), *Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power,* New York, p. 65.

[51] This expression was first used by the Press Office of the White House, see: M. S. Indyk, K. G. Lieberthal, M. E. O'Hanlon (2012), *op. cit.,* pp. 56-59.

[52] Emilio Lamo de Espinosa (president of the *Real Instituto Elcano* in Madrid) in interview with M. Stasiński, *Nie pozwólmy umrzeć Europie,* "Gazeta Wyborcza" 4-5 August 2012.

[53] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament*, 17 November 2011, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/ll/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament.

It was confirmed with a new US-Australia agreement on strengthening US military presence in Australia. Deployment of a contingent of American soldiers (initially 2.5 thousand) in northern Australia was announced at the time when the Obama administration developed their plan to drastically cut defence spending (USD 500 billion in next 10 years) and reduce US military presence in Europe. The US did not intend to reduce American bases in Japan (40 thousand soldiers) and South Korea (28.5 thousand). The plan was to provide military support for Singapore and the Philippines. The American "pivot to the Pacific Rim" – although expected, given long-observed changes in the international order due to the emergence of new powers – provoked a strong response in the world. There was criticism of such a revaluation of priorities in US foreign policy. Disappointment and dissatisfaction were common especially among European allies. However, in America, it was argued that Europe nonetheless remained the most important obligation of the United States in terms of security, and that transatlantic relations were highly important to both the US and Europe. At the same time, it was questioned whether China had real capabilities to translate its economic potential to international political power and whether it was likely to play a dominant role in the region.[54] Opinions were also voiced that the Arab Spring was a great opportunity for the US strategy as it created a new space for America to carry its "mission" and build American relations with the Muslim world on entirely new principles. It was argued that otherwise, i.e. with no American interest and involvement there, the region would be dominated by Islamic fundamentalists.

On the other hand, there was a strong belief that the biggest challenge for American politics would be the Asia region, with two states growing in power: China and India. Furthermore, the world's economic centre of gravity kept moving from the West to the East and, as Brzezinski put it, the "political awakening" intensified worldwide.[55] It was expected that the dynamics of the modern world would be shaped by Sino-American relations characterised by tensions but also mutual dependence, hence called "Chimerica" by British historian Niall Ferguson. Some foresaw effective expansion of China thanks to its *soft power* which earlier seemed to be "reserved" for the US. Manifestations of Chinese "soft power" have been China's foreign investments with which it strengthened its recognition and role in the world. Those investments-in-aid were particularly attractive to poor and weak countries. The Chinese aid did not require democratisation, clearance of accounts nor even a sensible economic policy contrary to the aid provided by international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund dominated by the US.

To be ready to face the above, America has had to prepare itself by changing its policy priorities and turning to "the Pacific Rim." The US should strengthen its political and military commitments in the region, revitalise the existing regional alliances (APEC, ASEAN), and finalise new agreements (in addition to the already

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[54] R. Kagan, *Not Fade Away: Against the Myth of Americana Decline*, "The New Republic" 17 January 2012.

[55] Z. Brzezinski (2012), *Strategic Vision*..., pp. 26-36.

ratified *US-Korea Free Trade Agreement* and *Trans-Pacific Partnership, TPP*). As aspirations of Beijing have been worrying, the US had better act immediately. Furthermore, China is the main and most important trade partner in the region but not necessarily a desirable strategic ally.[56] It follows that America, with its experience and still considerable potential, is perceived as a counterweight to the People's Republic of China and a guarantor of security for many countries in the Pacific region.[57]

If a conclusion is to be drawn from the long discussion on the US strategy in view of the world heading towards multipolarity, it is the need to maintain American leadership against all odds.[58] "If America was immersed in deep crisis which would paralyse it for a long time, its consequences on the international arena would be extremely negative ", argued Z. Brzezinski, convinced that no country is able to substitute for the United States.[59] His view has been shared by R. Kagan, who in his another bestseller *The World America Made*, asked a highly valid question: "If American power were to decline, what would that mean for the international order?".[60]

Concerns about geopolitical consequences of America giving up its role of the global leader or of actions effectively weakening the role of the US in the world seem to be widely spread. "The United States, regardless of its policy mistakes, is the ultimate source of global stability", claims Brzezinski.[61] He has repeated and strongly emphasised that thesis in his most recent work *Strategic Vision*. Brzezinski, who is an expert on modern world politics, admits that today's world of many new powers will not easily give in to the domination of one superpower, even as powerful as the United States. However, the important role of America in the world as "the promoter and guarantor of a revitalised West and as the balancer and conciliator of a rising New East"[62] has not changed.

The US is still number one in global economy and the only superpower able to carry war in every region of the world, however distant from its territory. Hence, its withdrawal would mean chaos, return to the rivalry between minor and major powers, revival of old conflicts, and possibly even the end of the domination of market economy. According to many analysts and experts, such prospects await the world without American leadership. Even if there were a power able to take over the role of

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[56] Cf. D. W. Drezner, G. Rachman, R. Kagan, *The Rise or Fall of the American Empire,* www.foreignpolicy.com./articles/2012/02/ 14/the_rise_or_fall_of_the_american...

[57] R. Kagan (2012), *The World America Made,* New York; Z. Brzezinski (2012), *Strategic Vision...,* p. 184ff.

[58] B. Jones, Th. Wright, J. Esberg, *Reviving American Leadership: The Next President Should Continue on the Path Obama Has Set,* www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/05/25-americas-role-jones-wright

[59] Z Brzezinski in interview with A. Lubowski, *Szach królowej,* „Gazeta Wyborcza" 5-6 November 2011.

[60] R. Kagan (2012), *The World...,* p. 68; see the work by the same author *Why the World Needs America,* "Wall Street Journal" 11 February 2012.

[61] Z. Brzezinski (2011), *Szach królowej...*

[62] Z. Brzeziński (2012), *Strategic Vision...,* p. 192.

the United States, the future would be unknown and thus uncertain. The same applies to a multipolar scenario. As history has taught us, that type of international systems is neither stable nor free from wars, conflicts, rivalry and disputes. Therefore, to paraphrase Churchill's words, the leadership of the United States certainly has not been perfect, but there is no better one.

Questions about the future of American power and the nature of US leadership remain to be answered. One thing is certain. If America continues to be the leader, it will lead in a much more difficult environment than a decade earlier. It will definitely have more freedom of action than others, but its actions will compete against or be compared with actions of other powers and forces stronger than before. In the new situation, the United States needs allies and more support. Thus, we "go back" to the issue underlying this essay, i.e. whether Europe and European allies of America are no longer a priority in American political calculations and no longer count as the most important strategic partner of the US. Is the American *pivot* to the Pacific Rim determined by the emergence of new powers and the shifting of the economic centre of gravity to Asia? Are we really witnessing a substantial revaluation of American politics and policies? Many factors indicate this is the case. There are new pressing conditionalities in the world of diversified powers awaiting response. However, only the nearest future can give full answers to questions asked.

ABSTRACT

The article attempts to show the role of the United States in today's world of diversified powers. Although the US still has an enormous potential at its disposal and can exert stronger influence on the international situation than other powers, it experiences growing competition in various areas. This new environment markedly affects the direction and character of American strategy which seems to be reversing its Pacific orientation. Consequences of this tendency are particularly visible in transatlantic relations.