



Things Fall Apart: America, Europe, and Asia in the New World Disorder
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We have entered a world in which, as William Butler Yeats put it in 1919:

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

In Europe, in America, and in parts of Asia there is a sense of foreboding – an elemental unease about what is to come. There is vexing drift amidst political paralysis. Demagoguery is ascendant and the stench of fascism is in the air.

Developments in American politics are particularly discomfiting. The American people are belatedly beginning a discussion about the role of the United States in the world. We Americans should have had this conversation twenty-five years ago, when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended. Now we are airing differences about foreign policy in circumstances of dispiriting international political and economic uncertainties. Few can even remember the optimism that prevailed when Germany reunited, Europe became whole and free, China joined the capitalist world, and Russia aspired to democratize and do the same.

Almost no one now sees much to admire in the results of U.S. foreign policy since these events. A few assert that our uses of force should have been more vigorous and sustained but most believe that recent U.S. military interventions have been counterproductive. A growing number of Americans express skepticism about interventions abroad.

In a world of ambiguities, the choice posed is binary. Are you for or against the exercise of U.S. military power? But the divisions between the sides have yet to be clearly drawn. The debate is ramping up as part of an election campaign driven by domestic malcontent, to which foreign policy is at most tangential. The discussion about America's international purposes and responsibilities is just beginning. It remains incoherent and as perplexing to Americans as it is alarming to allies, partners, and friends overseas.

Americans are having trouble formulating alternative approaches to foreign affairs, but they clearly reject more of the same. They may differ in their views of what "more of the same" means. But whatever it is, most don't want it. In this regard, Europeans do not seem much different.

Everyone is aware that major shifts in the distribution of global wealth and power are taking place. Ubiquitous malaise accounts for the welcome that many in both Europe and America have given to empty slogans masquerading as new ideas about how to manage borders, immigrants, foreign trade and investment, relations with allies and adversaries, and innovations in the existing international order. Further uncertainty arises from economic doldrums born of political gridlock, legislative defaults on fiscal policy, radical but unproductive monetary policies, the spread of authoritarianism, renewed antipathy between the West and Russia, and a lot of trash talk by the politically ambitious but intellectually challenged in both America and Europe.

The crumbling of the Pax Americana is an important contributor to the new world disorder. It is unnerving to Americans as well as to the allies and partners of the United States overseas. The best that might be said of it is that it also confuses America's adversaries. But, then, there is no agreement on who these adversaries are, still less what they may want.

With the disappearance of messianic totalitarianism, Americans succumbed to enemy deprivation syndrome. That is the queasy feeling of disorientation one has when one's military-industrial establishment no longer has an obvious, credible enemy on which to focus. European statecraft has traditionally accepted that allies on some matters can be adversaries on others, that military power is not in itself an answer to many problems, that long-term interests may require short-term sacrifice, and that it is often wiser to conciliate than to confront those seeking limited

changes in the existing order. But these are novel thoughts for Americans schooled in international relations by the Cold War, when diplomacy resembled trench rather than maneuver warfare..

In many respects, the long contest with the Soviet Union turned America into a strategic “one-trick pony.” Washington learned to resort to military deterrence and punishment through sanctions before considering diplomacy to eliminate the sources of discord that create the dangers it seeks to forefend. And deterrence is problematic, not only because it risks war by accident and doesn’t always work, but because it immobilizes and defers potential conflicts rather than addressing their causes. Deterrence prevents immediate strife, buying time for diplomacy. But if there is no diplomacy, deterrence just stores up trouble for later, when the odds may shift to the advantage of one or the other side. This is especially likely when balances of power are rapidly shifting, as they are in the Indo-Pacific.

Americans now seem to be groping our way toward the realization that resolving the underlying issues driving contending sides toward combat may be a better approach to sustaining peace than trying to manage risk by promising to respond in kind to the use of force. If so, this is a healthy evolution that all should welcome. It offers renewed opportunities for U.S. allies and partners to leverage America’s still enormous power to shape, steer, and maintain a better future than might otherwise evolve from the current global disorder.

But from an American perspective, Washington’s European allies seem more muddled than ever. Europeans speak in many tongues and in contradictory ways. Britain’s vote for Brexit has just exacerbated Europe’s confusion. Brexit promises to shatter the post-war order in Europe, to remove the British as intermediaries between the United States and “the Continent,” and to deal a potentially fatal blow to Britain’s special relationships with both. All this as ill-considered proposals to renegotiate U.S. trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific alliances, the global trade regime, and US-Russia and US-China relations ring out on the campaign trail in the United States.

A growing number of Americans understand that, if the United States does not heed the voices of its allies, it will in time cease to have any. But others ask how countries that spend relatively little on their own defense, preferring to leave it to Uncle Sam, can qualify as “allies” and equals rather than “protectorates.” “Allies” are countries with mutual obligations and responsibilities to

each other, not a one-sided dependency. Loose usage of the term “ally” conceals the fact that in Asia and the Middle East, the United States has wards and client states that it has taken under its unilateral protection, not “allies” committed to the common defense.

By contrast, the United States has always sought such allies in Europe, not satrapies or straphangers, still less servile sycophants. That is why Americans have been so supportive of the “European project.” As the effort to unify Europe falters, so does American hope that Europe can avoid a return to the imbalances of power and politico-economic breakdowns that, on three occasions in the last century, required the United States to rescue and, finally, to garrison it.

To be frank, in present circumstances, to continue to be seen as allies and to be listened to as such by Americans, Europeans must alter their expectations of both themselves and America. They must do more in their own defense and form and communicate coherent views of what they need and don’t need from the United States to supplement their own military power. They must equip themselves to persuade the American people that it’s in the interest of the United States for them to get what they want. (The same is true of non-European partners like Japan and south Korea.) For better or ill, the world has entered an era of transactional relationships, not coalitions based on confrontation with a common global enemy or mutual commitments to shared strategic interests and visions.

The call to rejustify and at the same time restructure America’s overseas defense guarantees is a reminder that, for 160 years, the United States carefully avoided “entangling alliances.” This stance ended only in 1949, when the U.S. joined Canada and ten European nations in forming NATO. Washington then sought to counter the perceived threat that Stalin’s USSR might seek to dominate – if not conquer – not just Europe, but the world beyond the Western Hemisphere, aggregating power in the Old World to the point that it could pose an existential challenge to the New. But the Soviet Union is no more. Notwithstanding today’s efforts to portray Russia as implacably predatory, Europe faces no external menace comparable to those of yesteryear.

With American help, Europe recovered from World War II and strengthened its democratic political culture. It has enjoyed a quarter-century of peace, prosperity, and expansion of the rule of law since the Cold War ended. Europe may be much less than the sum of its parts, but it is not weak. European NATO members alone have a population more than four times that of Russia

and a GDP that is nine times larger. They fall short of NATO's military budget targets but still spend at least three times more on defense as Russia. Some maintain formidably effective armed forces. There is no present requirement for Europeans to continue to rely mainly on U.S. forces for their defense. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that a growing number of Americans believe that the trans-Atlantic alliance is overdue for rebalancing.

Some ask "if NATO is still the answer, what were the questions?" But, far from seeking to separate themselves from Europe, most Americans want a more equal security relationship with it. This is because three wars in the twentieth century (two hot and one cold) have shown that:

\$ Europe and America belong to a single geopolitical zone in which the security and well-being of each is inextricably connected to the other;

\$ A Europe-wide security architecture is needed to sustain security cooperation and keep peace among Europeans;

\$ America needs a link to that architecture to safeguard its vital interests in stability in Europe and Eurasia; and

\$ Europe requires American participation in its security architecture to preclude domination by its greatest power, Germany, and to enable it to balance and coexist peacefully with Russia.

These realities create an inescapable framework for trans-Atlantic cooperation, but they are not self-executing. They are undermined by Brexit and similar fissiparous tendencies elsewhere in Europe. They do not lead automatically to cooperative security, cooperative relationships with Russia or Turkey, or cooperative stabilization of the borderlands between Eurasia and Europe. The crafting of such arrangements demands statecraft that has been conspicuous by its absence since the end of the Cold War.

Peace and stability in Europe and Eurasia require recognition by Europe and Russia that both have a vital interest in a broadly united, prosperous, independent Ukraine. Such a Ukraine cannot emerge without restraint and reassurance by both. A model for this is the Austrian State

Treaty of 1955, which established Austria as a sovereign, democratic state with safeguards for ethnic minorities. Austria cemented its freedom by declaring its permanent neutrality between East and West and developing a credible federal defense force. If this could be done for Austria at the height of the Cold War, it can be done for Ukraine in today's far less confrontational circumstances.

It would be in the interest of all, especially Ukrainians, to establish Ukraine as both a buffer and a bridge between Europe and Russia. Europeans and Russians have now proved beyond a reasonable doubt that each is prepared to frustrate and punish attempts by the other to absorb or dominate Ukraine. The United States has shown that it can be counted upon to back Europe militarily in resisting Russian intervention in Ukraine. The result is a dangerous impasse but also an opportunity. The two sides have exhausted coercive measures. Neither can hope to gain anything substantial from continuing competition for dominance in Ukraine. Escalating confrontation between NATO and Russia is costly and risky. It leads nowhere either side wishes to go. The negotiation of mutual guarantees of Ukraine's independence and neutrality on the model of Austria is the best remaining option.

But without a shared vision between Europe and Russia to frame such an outcome, the impasse will persist. This is an instance where a grand bargain is appropriate. The mutual pullbacks and reforms stipulated in the Minsk accords provide a potential starting point for a diplomatic process to consolidate the future place of an independent Ukraine between Europe and Russia. As at Minsk, Europe, not America, is best qualified to conceptualize and lead such a process, which needs to be part of a larger vision of cooperative security in Europe.

Wise American statecraft would welcome, not resist, Russian participation in the governance of affairs in both Europe and the Eurasian landmass as a whole. There are many existing institutional frameworks for this, including the OSCE, the NATO-Russia Council, the Council of Europe, the Shanghai Cooperation Council, and others. The reintegration of post-revolutionary France in the Concert of Europe after the Napoleonic wars showed how the inclusion of former adversaries in decision-making can promote long-term peace and stability in Europe. The exclusion of post-Wilhelmine Germany and post-Czarist Russia from the councils of Europe after World War I did not work out so well. That experience should drive home the peril of excluding great powers from an appropriate role in managing affairs in which they have a

legitimate interest.

The United States, Europe, and Russia must also all adjust to a world in which China and India join Japan as Asian nations with global reach. This is a particularly difficult adjustment for the United States. America has dominated the Western Pacific for seventy-one years. It has become accustomed to being the custodian of the global commons and the indispensable arbiter of disputes in the region. Now it must accommodate a rising China, a more assertive India, and a more independent Japan.

Existing institutions, like ASEAN, are divided and ineffective in managing these issues. The shifting balances of power in the Asia-Pacific are mostly driven by economics. By contrast, the so-called U.S. “rebalance to Asia” is almost entirely military. The United States, Japan, and China are shouting past each other. But a piecemeal process of accommodation is unfolding amidst much histrionics about maritime territorial issues to which the United States is not a party.

The huge asymmetries between what is at stake in these issues for China and the United States are dangerous. To paraphrase Bismarck’s prescient comments about the Balkans twenty-six years before World War I, *all the rocks, reefs, and sandbars there are not worth the life of a single U.S. Marine. But if there is ever another war in Asia, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the South or East China Sea.* Wars can happen even when they make no sense. In Asia, as in Europe, there is an urgent need for diplomacy as a substitute for military approaches that solve nothing but risk much.

With the United States pushing back against Russia in the West and China in the East, the two are being nudged together. To counter Sino-Russian partnership, Japan is courting Russia, though not very effectively. China is reaching out to Europe. And China, Europe, Japan, Russia, and the United States are all courting India, which is playing hard to get. We have entered a world of many competing power centers and regional balances in which long-term vision and short-term diplomatic agility are at a premium. With the exception of India, none of the great powers at present displays both qualities.

This is the global context in which China has proposed to integrate the entire Eurasian landmass

with a network of roads, railroads, pipelines, telecommunications links, ports, airports, and industrial development zones. If China's "One Belt, One Road" concept is realized, it will open a vast area to economic and intercultural exchange, reducing barriers to international cooperation in a sixty-five-country zone with seventy percent of the world's population, with over forty percent of its GDP, generating well over half of its current economic growth. The estimated cost of projects already on the drawing boards is at least eleven times what was spent on the Marshall Plan.

These massive infrastructure projects promise to deliver major increases in the speed of transport and telecommunications, to lower costs, and to create a great many new jobs. They will integrate Russia and Central Asia with both China and Europe, while connecting South Asia by land as well as by sea to the markets and natural resources of the countries to its north as well as to Africa. By making land transport vastly more efficient and linking it to new ports and airports, the "One Belt, One Road" program will alter the balance between land and sea power, including in the Arctic regions now becoming accessible as a result of climate change.

In concept, the Belt and Road program is the largest set of engineering projects ever undertaken by humankind. Its potential to transform global geoeconomics and politics is proportional to its scale. It will create a greater arena for peaceful cooperation and competition than any empire ever did, and it will do so without military conquest or the use of force. It thereby offers an antidote to the strategic myopia, militarism, and financial gamesmanship that drive the new world disorder. It is an alternative to "more of the same" that the world should welcome and embrace.