

## **Turbulence and Transitions in Transatlantic Relations**

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Thank you, Chairman Gapes, for the invitation to meet with the committee today.

This is very much a welcome homecoming for me. I worked with the Assembly from the 1970s through the 1990s in my years at the Congressional Research Service.

In the late 1980s, I was asked by Peter Corterier, the Assembly's Secretary General, if I would be willing to serve as rapporteur for a special presidential study of "NATO in the 1990s." The project was to be led by the late Senator William V. Roth, who made the formal request to CRS, which then agreed to assign me to the project.

As you well know, the world changed dramatically after that report was issued in 1988. Some ten years later, Senator Roth asked CRS to permit me to serve as rapporteur for another special presidential report, this one on "NATO in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

That report, which was on the Assembly's web site until recently, declared in its opening paragraphs, "NATO in the 21st century should be an enduring political/military alliance among sovereign states whose purpose is to apply power and diplomacy to the collective defense and promotion of Allied security, democratic values, the rule of law, and peace.... NATO's purpose is to defend values and interests, not just territory."

I still believe in those words. But now, after 50 years of working these issues, I come before your committee more concerned about the future of transatlantic relations than ever before.

Today, I'm going to talk about threats to the values on which this alliance was founded.

Those values are being challenged by external enemies of democracy and by internal proponents of radical right illiberalism.

The combination of these perverse forces is undermining NATO, the European Union, and the coherence of the transatlantic community.

How we respond to those threats will determine the future not only of this alliance but of western values more generally.

I will conclude with a few suggestions about how transatlantic relations might be revitalized. I'll give you a hint: defense spending may be involved, but it is not the most important part of the approach.

One thing remains clear to me: NATO is both a political and military alliance. It is not “just a military alliance,” as some would say.

It is also not a “bad deal” for either the United States or its transatlantic allies.

The North Atlantic Treaty's Article 5 collective defense commitment is the heart of the alliance. Until President Trump, all American presidents, for almost seven decades, have defended this commitment.

The credibility of Article 5 depends not just on military strength, but just as importantly on national political will to use it. Governments must effectively communicate that will to adversaries and allied citizens alike.

Article 5 therefore does not exist in a vacuum.

Collective defense may be the heart of the alliance. But it remains critically dependent on the political soul of transatlantic relations.

The recent Brussels summit communique emphasized the importance of “cohesion, unity, and shared goals”.

But many of us on both sides of the Atlantic today believe that the most powerful and influential of the allies – the United States – is damaging mutual political trust, seriously weakening the credibility of NATO's deterrence against adversaries and reassurance to citizens.

As I suggested earlier, the North Atlantic Treaty's preamble enumerates those values as “*the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.*” In recent years, the United

States and its allies have added “human rights” to the list. The defense of these values by NATO nations puts political backbone into the liberal international order.

The alliance has not always succeeded on the value side. Undemocratic governments have, from time to time, come to office in NATO countries. They were tolerated for geostrategic reasons. But they were the exceptions.

In 1989, we celebrated the great events that seemed to create new opportunities for Western values, international cooperation and world peace. It turns out that, in some ways, we were prematurely optimistic.

In subsequent years, our assumptions about the success of Western values came under attack. Those attacks have come from two external sources, both aimed at undermining faith in and political support for our democracies.

The more familiar threat has come from Russia, and not just from Russian tanks and troops. Military threats reinforce the political offensive from the East, but the actual Russian assaults come from covert and overt political weapons.

Russia mounted serious attacks against the 2016 American elections, and on-going intelligence operations seem designed to create disarray in American and European political systems.

Russia’s President Putin has mandated influence campaigns on social media and cyber attacks on Western infrastructure. His campaign has supported politicians on both sides of the Atlantic whose approach to transatlantic relations undermines the Western values on which the transatlantic alliance is based.

At the same time, radical Islamist terrorists have sought to achieve virtually the same objectives pursued by Moscow. Their goal has been to weaken Western societies and the faith of our citizens in Western values, systems, and leadership.

The Islamic State used its aggressions in the Middle East and North Africa to produce a flow of refugees seeking safety and a better future in Europe. This, along with terrorist attacks on Western targets, destabilized the West and disrupted European unity, thus advancing some of the Islamic State’s objectives.

There is little disagreement in the West about the need for effective counter-terrorist capabilities, across the range of threats.

But the refugee challenge has produced no such consensus. Profound divisions have plagued European unity.

Southern European states have had to bear the initial burdens of dealing with the refugees, while many northern European states have tried to avoid having to do so.

But there is another division. That division is between those in Europe and in the United States who believe that humanitarian instincts should govern responses to the refugee problem, and those who believe that security and economic factors should be the key considerations.

In any case, the disruptive Russian and terrorist-produced challenges have provided fertile ground on which radical right populist politicians and parties have thrived.

These politicians have used the natural fear stirred by the external intrusions as a political tool to convince populations that they should be willing to accept “strong” leadership and limits on their individual and collective freedoms – the very freedoms that all NATO member states are committed to defend.

Today, both European and North American democracies are threatened by spreading illiberalism embraced by radical right populists.

These radical right populists share some common traits. In general, they:

- whip up fears of immigrants;
- promise “strong” leadership, undermining institutions and free press, and the rule of law;
- oppose or question both NATO and the EU;
- make cynical appeals to religion;
- admire Russian President Putin’s leadership style.

These radical right “populist” politicians are using our democratic systems and practices to try to turn them in illiberal directions.

Today, many countries on both sides of the Atlantic are facing decisions about what kind of democracy they want.

Is it liberal democracy, based on the North Atlantic Treaty's value statement, and the values articulated by the European Union?

Or is it what has been called "electoral democracy," and which one European leader proudly calls "illiberal democracy"? This seem to mean that elections are held, but the rule of law and individual liberties, like freedom of speech and the press, are limited.

Decisions by NATO member states, including the United States, about which path to choose will have at least as much impact on the viability of the alliance as will decisions regarding levels of defense spending.

In developing a response, it is first important to have a common understanding of what we mean when we refer to "the West."

In my view, the "West" that has produced NATO and the European Union is an idea, or rather a basket of ideas.

That basket includes the values of liberal democracy, individual freedom, human rights, tolerance and equality under the rule of law.

In this definition of the West, democracy is influenced, but not defined by, distinctions of race, class, culture, religion, language, nationalism, wealth or other traits that can divide rather than unite human beings.

My preferred definition of the West is different from the one that President Trump endorsed in Warsaw last year when he described the West as constituting "the bonds of culture, faith and tradition that make us who we are."

Trump's formulation threatens to close the door of the West to those of different cultures, faiths and traditions who, while differing in many ways, nonetheless accept and practice Western values.

The liberal democratic, or “free world”, concept of the West has been shaped largely since the end of World War II. But the history is much deeper and fraught with the challenges of change.

This “West” traces its roots to the birthplace of democracy in Greece some 8,000 years ago.

The period of Enlightenment – a movement among European intellectuals some 200 years ago – advanced the concept dramatically, with its advocacy of relying on reason and rationalism rather than tradition, tribalism and religion to govern human relations.

It celebrated science, facts and the promotion of religious tolerance, and governments based on constitutionalism with separation of church and state.

However, illiberal political forces on both sides of the Atlantic are contesting this definition of the West.

This illiberal challenge did not appear completely out of the blue, and there is no single explanation for rising skepticism about liberal democracy.

The Great Recession left millions of Americans and Europeans without jobs and in debt.

While the job market has recovered, real wages have not, and a significant number of European and American voters believe that the system and its leaders have let them down.

Another factor is the concern that refugees, driven from their homes by conflicts in the Middle East, will not only bring violent terrorist attacks to Western states but will also threaten economic well-being.

Some people – encouraged by radical right populists – have come to believe that the processes of European integration, expanding international trade, and globalism are undermining the way of life of average citizens.

This perception is aggravated by the fact that the share of wealth in Western democracies held by the wealthiest among us continues to grow.

Some are concerned that governance appears to be moving further and further away from local and individual control, whether due to EU regulations in Europe or Washington bureaucracy in the United States.

On both sides of the Atlantic, there is growing concern that governmental decisions affecting the daily life of the average person are being made far from home. Rules and regulations seem increasingly disconnected from the needs of the common man and woman.

Finally, the pace of life and development of technology have moved faster than the ability of many citizens to adjust to or even comprehend.

This has made more people feel detached, disenfranchised and disadvantaged.

In these respects, our liberal democracies and its leaders have failed the people.

These failures provide fertile ground for both foreign meddling and domestic demagoguery.

As a result, extremist political movements throughout Europe, and in the United States, are finding greater public resonance for their attacks on Western unity, and even on the validity of a Western identity.

In my judgment, the West needs a political strategy to respond to this challenge.

How can Europeans and North Americans who believe in democracy, individual liberty and equality under the rule of law, how can you and I, fight and win against the illiberal tide and its foreign sources of support?

Clearly, we need to be in this together. This requires that European nations strengthen their contributions to defense and that the United States remains committed to security cooperation with its allies.

But, as I see it, most of the steps necessary to respond to the threats to Western values are not to be found in the realm of security policy.

Rather, our answers must emerge from political, economic, and financial system reforms.

If such reforms succeed, popular support for defense spending and measures to strengthen counterterrorism would come as a derivative product because people will see that “the West” and its values are worth defending.

Now, I know that all this is “easier said than done.”

But the potential cost of failure could be regression into some sort of contemporary “dark ages” dominated by authoritarian regimes supported by wealthy cronies and oligarchs, a circumstance in which Putinism could become the norm rather than the exception.

Today, our challenge is to improve the West’s democratic systems and institutions while providing sufficiently strong defenses against external threats.

These two tasks have in many ways become thoroughly interwoven.

Defense of the West will require revitalization of the political center in Western democracies.

In Western democracies, most outcomes that benefit the people and are consistent with liberal democratic values are best shaped and implemented around the center of the political spectrum.

The process almost always requires compromise among contending ideas and political interests, but it does not need to be a “status quo” outcome.

In fact, the threats and challenges I have discussed today suggest that we need an open mind concerning changes that may be required in policies to reinvigorate the West and the application of its values.

American and European political centers must become forces for constructive change and then demonstrate the will to make it happen.

If Winston Churchill were with us today, I’m sure he would confirm that this “imperfect” Western system is nonetheless better than any of the alternatives.

Those of us who believe in liberal democracy need to work hard to preserve and energize the West for the benefit of future generations on both sides of the Atlantic.

We must support those who choose freedom over tyranny, true democracy over illiberalism, and the rule of law over would-be dictators.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I look forward to your questions and comments.