The differences between American and European approaches to security policy after the Cold War

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine whether in the post-Cold War period the European approach to security policy is in fact different than the one of the United States of America, and why it is so. The author tries also to analyse what might be the impact of these differences on the transatlantic relationship and what consequences it might bring in the nearest future. After the description and definition of the term "security", the author analyses the differences between the two approaches and refers to the arguments and viewpoints of different scholars. In conclusion an attempt to foresee the future of the EU – US security relations is undertaken.

Key words: *European Union, United States of America, security policy, transatlantic relations*

Różnice pomiędzy amerykańskim a europejskim podejściem do polityki bezpieczeństwa w okresie po zimnej wojnie

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie czy podejścia Unii Europejskiej i Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki do polityki bezpieczeństwa są rzeczywiście różne, jakie są tego powody i co z tego wynika. Oprócz samej charakterystyki obu aktorów stosunków międzynarodowych, jakimi są UE i USA, i analizy ich podejść, autor próbuje ustosunkować się do przytoczonych zdań i poglądów różnych znanych naukowców z dziedziny stosunków międzynarodowych. Zbadanie różnicy w podejściach do polityki bezpieczeństwa jest punktem wyjścia do próby oceny ich wpływu na relacje transatlantyckie i refleksji nad najbliższą przyszłością.

Słowa kluczowe: *Unia Europejska, Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki, polityka bezpieczeństwa, stosunki transatlantyckie*

Marek Garlicki
Uniwersytet Warszawski, WDiNP, Instytut Europeistyki

The Differences between American and European Approaches to Security Policy after the Cold War

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the world has changed significantly, especially in the field of international relations (IR). We had the chance to observe a shift from the bipolar system to the unipolar one. Instead of two centres of power, there is only one dominant superpower – the United States of America (US). However, some claim that this is going to change soon because we are heading to multipolarity. Emerging powers such as China, India or Brazil are pursuing the US, especially in the field of economy. In terms of gross domestic product, the European Union is already even more powerful than the US. On the other hand many say that we should not expect radical changes soon and the US will remain the world hegemon for quite a long time. An important argument might be the fact that the US military spending accounts for almost half of the global arms spending. Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War and a new world order forced not only the US, but also European countries to rethink, redirect and transmute their security policies.

The purpose of this paper is to scrutinize whether American and European approaches to security policy after the Cold War are in fact different, what the reasons for such situation are and in what direction these approaches are heading. The author will also endeavour to answer the question what possible impact the differences between American and European approaches to security policy can have on the transatlantic relationship. In the course of this paper the following hypothesis will be verified: the transatlantic security relationship will persist because the US and the EU are complementary and need each other. This is because the first one concentrates more on hard power, whereas the latter on soft power.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five major sections. Firstly, the term 'security' is defined. In the second section, the approaches of the US and the EU are analysed within the context of different characters of these two IR actors. In this part, the arguments of various scholars are described and examined. Then the paper focuses on the most recent changes in American and in European approach to security policy. Before concluding with an attempt to predict future consequences of these changes, the differences between American and European approaches to security policy are explained from various theoretical perspectives.

What is security?

Security is a very complex and multi-dimensional concept. A whole sub-discipline of international relations, called security studies, has been dedicated to the issue of security. Therefore, the task to define this term is not an easy one. There is a wide variety of different definitions made up by various authors. However, the good news is that some basic elements of these definitions are common.

To begin with, *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* says that security "denotes the absence of threats to scarce values". Nevertheless, in reality, absolute security does not exist. It is a relative concept that can be analysed in terms of more or less rather than all or none. This is the starting point for all definitions of security. However, there is lack of consensus when it comes to the referent object (an object to be secured), sources of threats, and ways of countering those threats. For some IR scholars, security is related mainly to its military dimension and the states are only referent objects. A good example of such an approach can be the definition offered by Ian Bellany (1981: p. 102), who contends that "security itself is a relative freedom from war, coupled with a relatively high expectation that defeat will not be a consequence of any war that should occur". Similar, but at the same time simpler definition was proposed by Giacomo Luciani (1989: p. 151), who claims that "national security may be defined as the ability to withstand aggression from abroad". Definitions of this kind are typical for proponents of the realist perspective in IR. Realists are convinced that the international system is anarchic because states are unitary and self-interested actors, who are inherently insecure and compete against each other in order to gain more power. Moreover, the structure of the international system depends on the distribution of power among states. And by power they mean mainly hard (military) power.

On the other hand, there are scholars who understand security in a broader sense. For instance, Mohammed Ayoob (1995: p. 9) writes that "security-insecurity is defined in relation to vulnerabilities – *both internal and external* – that threaten or have the potential to bring down or weaken state structures, both territorial and institutional, and governing regimes". Lately, even individuals have started to be perceived as referent objects. According to Peter Hough (2004: p. 9) "if people, be they government ministers or private individuals, perceive an issue to threaten their lives in some way and respond politically to this, then that issue should be deemed to be a *security* issue". These definitions are closer to the liberalist perspective in IR. It assumes that states and societies can achieve significant cooperation and work together for common security. For liberalists, states are not unitary actors because different groups of people, who have different interests, can influence state behaviour. Liberalists also recognize the presence of other significant actors such as international organizations, non-governmental organizations, transnational corporations, terrorist groups or others. Furthermore, the conception of soft power is closer to this perspective. The author of this paper inclines towards more liberal, or even post-positivist approaches to security. Although, military dimension of security is still vital, one should not disregard other dimensions such as societal security (focusing on threats related to migration, cultural and religious identity, cultural discrimination etc.), environmental security (taking into account climate change as a security risk), economic security or human security (focusing attention on insecurity of human beings rather than states).

American and European approaches to security

It is evident that the US and the EU are different types of IR actors. The first one is a single federal state, whereas the EU is, from a legal point of view, an international organization, which comprises a group of dissimilar European states. European integration is an ongoing process and there is no single vision about what the EU will finally become. The EU can be treated as a superpower, at least in economic terms, but it is not a superstate. On the other hand, the US is still the most powerful state in the world. According to Zbigniew Brzeziński (1997) the supremacy of the US concerns not only military and economic spheres, but also technological development and cultural influence. Moreover, it has interests all over the globe, so the US is currently the only real global superpower.

Dissimilar characters of these two actors and their different histories have undoubtedly influenced their approaches to security issues. Robert Kagan (2003: p. 3) starts his famous book with the following words: "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world […]. On the all-important question of power – the efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power – American and European perspectives are diverging". Then he argues that the European world is Kantian, while the American is Hobbesian. The former one is dominated by the rule of law, negotiations and cooperation, whereas in the latter one international law is unreliable and true security depends on the possession and use of military power. Moreover, he underlines that it is disparities in power which have shaped the approach to the use of force: "now that the United States is powerful, it behaves as powerful nations do. When the European great powers were strong, they believed in strength and martial glory. Now they see the world through the eyes of weaker powers" (Kagan 2003: p. 11). The accuracy of this statement might be questionable. Some would probably argue that is not by default but by deliberate choice that the EU is weak in terms of military power.

However, the fact is that the US is more willing to use its military capabilities in order to provide their own security and influence other actors, whereas the EU is choosing its 'soft power' resources as often as possible. The concept of 'soft power' was invented by Joseph Nye and it can be described as a power of attraction which is produced by the values represented by a certain political entity (Nye 2002: p. 5-8). Nye claims that there are three resources on which the 'soft power' of a country rests: "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)" (Nye 2002: p. 11). Activities such as promoting democracy, human rights, rule of law or protection of rights of minorities and focusing on such missions as humanitarian intervention or state building show that the EU is working hard on developing its 'soft power' resources. These differences between American and European approaches were particularly evident during the US-led 'War on Terror' and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The US provided the vast majority of military resources, while the EU focused more on post-conflict rebuilding.

Nevertheless, the Iraq crisis has also highlighted another important difference between European and American approaches to security. It has shown that the US is an IR actor who prefers unilateral actions, whereas the EU is more willing to cooperate with other actors, especially within international organizations such as the UN or NATO. American unilateralism reached its peak during the administration of George W. Bush. Apart from the mentioned invasion of Iraq, which did not have the approval of the

UN Security Council, there are many other examples providing evidence of American unilateralism during Bush's administration, especially regarding the applicability of international treaties. For instance, in 2002 the US unilaterally withdrew from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty because it was an obstacle that blocked Americans from possibility of deploying a ballistic missile defence system. Another example is refraining from ratifying 1997 Kyoto Protocol, justified by the supposed negative impact of its provisions on economic growth. Bush's administration also refused to join the International Criminal Court, so it cannot indict American personnel.

Although it is believed that the administration of George W. Bush had the most unilateral approach to foreign policy and security issues, Rees claims that "[c]ore strategic interests have remained consistent in American foreign policy, regardless of who has occupied the White House. The unipolar hegemony of the US […] ha[s] remained consistent. President Barack Obama has continued with much of the strategic agenda of his predecessor, including the War on Terror, the conflict in Afghanistan and the focus on Iran" (Rees 2011: p. 174-5). Obama's administration has in fact done nothing to change the above-mentioned decisions of the previous administration. The latest issue of deployment of ballistic missile defence systems in Central Europe can also be proving American restraining from multilateralism. It seems that deployment of these systems is a bargaining chip in relations with Russia. Obama's position on deployment has been very changeable. First he was showing willingness to do it, then in order to engage Russia in imposing sanctions against Iran, Obama said that he would withdraw from this decision, recently in the course of Crimean crisis and Russian military intervention in Ukraine, he is again promising that missile defence systems will be build.

To sum this part up, we can say that it is evident that European and American approaches to security differ. The former is more multilateral, draws on liberal perspective in IR and focuses rather on its soft power means, while the latter is more unilateral, draws on realistic perspective and prefers the use of its military capabilities. In the next part the accuracy of this statement together with the hypothesis that the US and the EU are complementary actors and need each other will be analysed.

Most recent changes

According to Andrew Moravcsik (2003) these differences between European and American approaches to security might be positive and lead to role specialization wi-

thin transatlantic security relationship. He argues that "Europe needs American military might; America needs European civilian power. Each side has reason to value a predictable relationship that will induce moderation, self-restraint, and greater accommodation in advance of military action. […] For their part, Europeans should acknowledge the effectiveness of U.S. military power and support ongoing efforts to establish a flexible EU foreign policy that better coordinates civilian, peacekeeping, and military decision-making" (Moravcsik 2003: p. 89). His arguments seem to confirm the thesis that the US and the EU are complementary and need each other. He also perceives this division of labour as a factor which should have a positive impact on the transatlantic relationship. However, recently, there have been some changes in European and in American approach to security which may indicate that this model of Kantian Europe complementing Hobbesian America is not entirely true or might become untrue in the nearest future.

At the end of the 20th century the EU (led by the UK and France) started to enhance their military capabilities within the concept of the ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy[1]). The member states signed the Helsinki Headline Goal. The goal was to have 60 000 troops ready to be deployable within sixty days and capable of being sustained for one year (Rees 2011: p. 70). However, by the year 2003 the Goal had not been yet achieved, so the EU abandoned it in favour of the new goal of creating thirteen 'battle groups' of 1 500 soldiers each (Rees 2011: p. 71). What is more, the Berlin Plus arrangements allowed the EU to use some of the NATO military assets in the EU-led missions (EU-NATO declaration on ESDP 2002). The Lisbon Treaty and its provisions, especially the creation of the post of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and enhanced cooperation mechanism in the field of defence, have made another great step in the development of the EU military capabilities. Of course, there is still a lot to be done. Nevertheless, the EU has already been working on developing its military power for a while, and hence it has moved from its unique civilian power status. Lately, scholars have even coined the concept of 'ethical power Europe' (EPE). According to Lisbeth Aggestam (2008: p. 2) "[i]n contrast to civilian and normative power, concepts of EPE encompass both civilian and military power, as well as social and material power". This concept focuses on what the EU 'does' rather than what it 'is'. It emphasizes that the EU has its own special mission and, therefore, that it should undertake new tasks in such areas as crisis management or peacekeeping (Aggestam 2008: p. 1).

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[1]   After the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty the ESDP has changed its name to the CSDP – the Common Security and Defense Policy.

The case of the United States is also more complex. Although it seems that the US has played the role of the world's policeman, it uses also its soft power. American soft power has many sources. As Joseph Nye (2004: p. 68) put it in words, "[i]t depends in part on culture, in part on domestic policies and values, and in part on the substance, tactics, and style of our foreign policies". These are the means by which America attracted rather than coerced others. It is true that in the last decade, especially during the Bush junior administration, the US has been more successful in the areas of hard power, but its popular culture and technological advancement has also influenced the world. On the other hand, some scholars, such as Richard Haass (2008) argue that the US dominance is in decline. According to him its primacy has been challenged not only in economic terms, but also in the areas of military effectiveness and diplomacy. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are the clear evidence. Haass (2008) claims that we are heading towards non-polarity, and multilateralism is the only way to deal with a nonpolar world. Therefore, the US is being forced to change its approach to security from unipolar to more multilateral. Haass calls this American approach 'multilateralism a la carte' because it is still a very selective kind of international cooperation. Positions of Nye and Haass are different, but both lead to a conclusion that American approach to security is not purely unilateral and based not only on military capabilities.

Explaining the differences in approaches

The differences between American and European approaches to security policy may have different reasons. The explanation depends on the theoretical paradigm or approach that is taken into account. In this part of the paper, we will look on the differences in security policy from three perspectives: realism, liberalism and constructivism.

Realist scholars would refer to power issues. Since the US is the most powerful nation in the world and has at its disposal the most modern and the best equipped army, it follows that it believes in its military dominance and is willing to use its military might. The US is the superstate, therefore it can act unilaterally and use its advantage to protect its own interests. Consistently, the EU, which is not a state, does not have its own army and its military capabilities are limited. Thus, the EU is not as powerful as the US. In terms of military power, one can even say that it is weak. Therefore, Europeans cannot exercise their coercive power, but instead, in order to protect their interests, they are forced to search for powerful allies, such as the US.

From the liberal perspective, one can say that both Americans and Europeans strive to keep peace in the world and search for ways of cooperation. Of course, the US is focused more on the military capabilities, but as the leader of NATO it should be. However, it is willing to cooperate with other NATO members, especially European countries, which can play a bigger role in exercising soft power, i.e. humanitarian aid, cultural influence, developing political institutions. Sometimes Americans act unilaterally, but it results from the fact that they are looking from a broader, global perspective and try to prevent global threats, which could be dangerous not only for them, but for the whole international community. They see such threats earlier, thus have to act immediately, even without the consent of other actors.

Constructivism is one of the latest approaches in international relations. The first major difference between constructivism and the previous two theoretical approaches is that realism and liberalism are materialist theories which try to explain international relations and foreign policy in a behaviourist way, while constructivism emphasizes the importance of shared meanings and understandings of international phenomena (Jackson, Sørensen 2013: p. 211). The main assumption of constructivism is that reality is constructed and reproduced through ideas, in other words by interaction between agents. The interests of actors are constructed by shared ideas rather than material forces. Consequently, the foreign policy is shaped by identity rooted in ideas and discourse (Wendt 1999: p. 1).

Therefore, from the constructivist perspective, differences between American and European approaches to security will have its roots in ideas prevailing in these societies. The US approach to security policy can be understood only when we take into account the idea of American exceptionalism. The US has always had a strong belief in its uniqueness. This idea is based on three principles. First of all, Americans are proud of its democratic political system which should be perceived as model for others. The second principle, is its capitalist economic system which gives equal opportunities to all kind of immigrants, no matter the ethnicity, nationality or religion. The third component of American exceptionalism is its sense of moral superiority. This has arisen from the belief that the US is "the 'New Jerusalem' from which the word of the Lord should go forth" (Wees 2011: p. 17–20).

All these three notions explain well why Americans have 'the mission' and why they are convinced that they should intervene abroad and act as the world's leader. On the other hand, we have the European Union which believes in the processes of integration and reducing economic, social and political barriers between member states. The idea of European integration determines European approach to security. The EU is

more focused on its regional, rather than global security. The internal issues with which the EU struggles are the most important. Then it focuses on the closest neighbourhood, and in the last place on global security issues, but primarily on those which might have an impact on the EU.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been two different approaches to security in transatlantic relations: the American one and the European one. The first one has been focusing more on military issues, while the latter one on civil aspects of security. Nevertheless, it would be too simplistic to argue that Europe is from Venus, while America is from Mars. On the one hand, America has been influencing the world not only with its military capabilities, but also with its soft power resources. According to Nye (2004) the soft power of the US might be one of the most effective instruments of its foreign policy. On the other hand, the EU has been working on the development of its military means since the early 90s. As military conflict in the Balkans has shown, the European military capabilities were really limited, but since the end of the 90s a lot has changed. And the military power gap between the US and the EU is narrowing.

Therefore, looking from the positivist perspective, it can be concluded that the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this paper needs to be revised. The EU and the US are complementary, but only to some extent. It seems that Moravcsik was not entirely right. Instead of the division of labour, the reason for closer cooperation might be the fact that the power of the US is in decline, and if it wants to survive as the world leader it should strengthen its relations with the EU. From the European point of view, it is also incredibly important and beneficial to cooperate within the transatlantic community, especially because of the American military might. Thus, if the US and the EU are rational actors, the transatlantic relationship will persist and most likely the cooperation will be enhanced.

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