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**The greater Middle East strategy of the United States and the
transatlantic relationship in the decade following
September 11 2001**

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of the Ph.D. dissertation by

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1. Introduction and the research question

In 1999 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization celebrated its 50th anniversary in Washington. As crisis management was incorporated into the new strategic concept of NATO, Western leaders could hardly have anticipated what shape the next major mission would take. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 gave a new orientation not only for the U.S. foreign policy, but also for NATO and the transatlantic relations as a whole. The greater Middle East region became the number one priority of U.S. foreign policy over the next decade. The war on terrorism, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have become a dominant factor concerning international relations of the United States. The transatlantic relationship, the most deeply embedded and comprehensive relationship the United States has based on common strategic interests, values and institutions, was not an exception.

The uniform transatlantic solidarity following the terrorist attacks did not last long. Increasing levels of political debates emerged about the way terrorism and additional new threats should be dealt with. These disputes, which have caused serious fractures not only in the transatlantic context, but also within Europe, were intensified by the war against Iraq, however, they were present in other dominant conflicts of the Middle East region, and made a significant impact on transatlantic relations as a whole. These determining conflicts of the region examined in the respective era Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the "peace process", the disputes about Iran's nuclear program and the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though before the emergence of the Arab awakening the broader Middle East had numerous interstate and intrastate conflicts, in terms of regional balance of power and U.S. foreign policy the above mentioned four conflicts held most significance.

Despite of the debates of the past decade, NATO, the central pillar of the transatlantic relations, survived these disagreements. The war against Iraq was the lowest point of the political conflict between the United States and its allies. During the second Bush administration the tensions about the issues of the broader Middle East already decreased within the alliance.

The election of Barack Obama as president brought a significant change to the format and the appearance of American foreign policy. It also changed the Europeans' perceptions of the American government. However the alterations in the basic foreign policy and strategic questions were not that obvious. Unlike his predecessor the first African-American president's personality and rhetoric had a positive influence on the transatlantic relations.

As a result of the previous highly publicized disagreements, which were partly based on ideological prejudice, almost totally disappeared. In addition, a more intensive transatlantic dialogue began across the entire spectrum of the relations, including the challenges of the broader Middle East. A growing convergence between the US and European Middle East policies, which actually began in the last years of the Bush administration, took place. However the previous strategic differences still remained. The central element of these differences continued to be the global ambitions of the USA and the increasing strategic weakness of Europe which were reflected in the different interests and ambitions regarding the broader Middle East region. The transatlantic debates around the Obama administration's Afghanistan strategy at the beginning of his presidency reflected this tension.

Nevertheless it seems that the United States and Europe is confronting ever greater obstacles in vindicating their interests in the region. The developments of the Arab awakening showed that basic political processes of the region are formed independently from the policies of the Western countries. On the one hand because of their growing economic problems the US and Europe had less resources and political will to apply positive incentives or force in the region to influence external actors. Furthermore the legacy of the Western presence – especially the recent past - in the Middle East is another great challenge for Europe and the United States. The most important components of this heritage include the frequent military interventions in the region, the different treatment of the pro-Western and hostile autocratic regimes, and the biased support of Israel. These features were all present in the policies of the United States during the previous decades, and especially after the Bush administration declared war on terrorism.

The basic research question of the dissertation is whether US greater Middle East strategy enhanced or weakened the cohesion of the transatlantic relationship, especially concerning NATO's political unity, effectiveness and future outlook. As the antecedent of the era of my research I begin by examining the basic objectives and features of US greater Middle East strategy from the beginning of the post-cold war, and close the research at the outbreak of the Arab awakening in early 2011. The relevant parts of the dissertation will focus on examining the continuity and changes in the American Greater Middle East policy, but it will also examine whether the US strategy was successful or not from an American point of view.

The caesura outlined above is useful not just because of the space limitations. The turbulent regional changes which started at the beginning of 2001 known as the Arab Awakening or Arab Spring has transformed the region significantly, and encompass numerous open

questions regarding the future of the region and also US foreign policy. Nevertheless in the relevant conflicts of our research question US foreign policy hasn't changed much after 2011. Therefore it will not cause any inconsistency in the dissertation to lay out the end of Obama's first term as the time frame boundary for our research concerning US policies towards the respected conflicts.

The objective of the second part of the dissertation is to reveal the transatlantic projection of American greater Middle East strategy. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have made a lasting impact on the political elites and the societies on both sides of the Atlantic. Behind the related disputes and different perceptions I will seek to examine the impact of US foreign policy after September 11 2001 and the subsequent European reactions on transatlantic relations. Along with the war in Iraq I will pay special attention to NATO's mission in Afghanistan, which became the most comprehensive and longest operation in the alliances history. In addition, the dissertation will refer to the transatlantic aspects of the other defining conflicts in the Middle East, the Iranian nuclear issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The dissertation will not aim to give a holistic historical, political, strategic overview of neither the transatlantic relations nor the Middle East region, since it would obviously exceed the scope of the research. Accordingly in the first part of the dissertation, which discusses American greater Middle East strategy from the beginning of the early post-Cold War period, I will focus on the introduction of the subsequent administration's strategic objectives and priorities, and the most relevant political initiatives and decisions. Concerning the examination of US strategy I will only focus on the greater Middle East and its transatlantic aspects. In the second part, the main focus will be on the introduction and theoretical analyses of the relevant European security policies, and the cooperation among the allies.

The policies in connection to the greater Middle East is obviously just a fraction of the transatlantic relationship, however, it had a defining impact on its security dimension in the decade following the September 11th attacks in 2001. It is important to note that implicitly the quality of the relationship depends on the actions of all the relevant actors. However, as by far the most powerful member of the alliance, the United States has a defining influence on the Alliance, creating a point of reference for the policies of other members, and having the means to directly or indirectly exercise significant pressure on them.

The author hopes that the dissertation can help in the better understanding of American Middle East policy of the recent past, and in addition to this the sources of tensions in the

transatlantic relationship can be better identified. The greater Middle East, which is going through turbulent changes, grave crisis, and taking note of the uncertainties and risks the region encompasses, how the Europeans and North Americans can cooperate with each other to tackle the challenges posed by the region is crucial.

2. Hypothesis

The basic hypothesis of the thesis and the resulting further hypotheses according to the research questions are as follows.

The main elements of the U.S. Greater Middle East strategy in the decade after September 11 2001 - the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, policies towards Iran and U.S. engagement concerning the Israeli - Palestinian peace process -overall weakened the transatlantic relationship.

Some key concepts need to be clarified about the hypothesis. There are different definitions of the Middle East as a political and historical concept in the literature of international relations. With regard to our research theme we refer to the Middle East regional security complex concept used by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, (Buzan – Waever [2003]) which considers the region extending from Morocco to the Eastern borders of Iran as a unified regional security complex. According to the authors' definition, this region includes three sub-complexes, the Maghreb, the Levant and the Persian Gulf. Though Afghanistan falls outside the scope of this Middle Eastern concept, it is defined as a buffer state, which is simultaneously part of Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Moreover, as it will be discussed later in the dissertation, U.S. foreign policy in the aftermath of September 11, the war on terrorism has drawn Afghanistan closer to the determining political dynamics of the Middle East. In addition, the influential neo-conservative groups which supported the Bush administration often use the term "greater Middle East", of which Afghanistan was meant to be a part of. By their definition the Islamic religion, including the role of extremist Islamic organizations, the authoritarian political systems, socio-economic backwardness and the hostility towards the West and Israel were important distinguishing marks by which they considered the Middle East as a unified and independent political region.

The transatlantic relations in the hypothesis basically refers to the relationship between the United States and its European partners. Although the term "Europe" is frequently used in the International Relations (IR) literature as the partner of the United States over the Atlantic Ocean, it is still a simplification since this does not reflect properly the actual European political circumstances - likewise with the ignorance of Canada's situation on the other side of the transatlantic relationship. Although, as we shall discuss throughout this essay, NATO remains the pillar of the transatlantic relationship, it must be added that the Atlantic Alliance as a whole and its Member States do not cover all the transatlantic actors, as the European

Union as an independent identity and non-NATO EU Member States are increasingly actively shaping those relations. So when the dissertation talks about transatlantic relations, it is aware of the problems of this concept, with the nation-state fragmentation of Europe, and with the institutional differentiation of the relationship.

The basic hypothesis outlined above can be divided into the following hypotheses. In the first stage, the task is to define the determining goals and features of U.S. Middle East policy. The related hypothesis is as follows:

1 Continuity rather than change was present between the Bush-administration's and the Obama administration's greater Middle East policy.

On this issue we are examining the two consecutive administration's main strategic objectives and the policies implementing them concerning the respected region, with a brief outlook to the post-Cold War historical antecedents.

2. The American strategy implemented in the study period, the strategy aiming to forcefully maintain hegemony has contributed to the weakening of American influence in the greater Middle East region.

Our hypothesis states that U.S. strategy concerning the determining conflicts of the greater Middle East region had a negative impact on the long-term US interests. This strategy thus contributed to the strengthening of hostile political forces and powers in the region, whose interests are contrary to the strategic objectives of the US.

3. The "Western" alliance strategy realized in the greater Middle East region was largely an American, and not a "transatlantic" strategy.

As the dissertation will discuss it in the relevant chapter the dominant elements and decisions of the strategy for the region were made alone by Washington. Although both administrations were seeking to gain support for these decisions from the European allies, but even the lack of such support did not significantly affect U.S. foreign policy. The root cause of this, the

different perceptions on the security environment of the post-September 11 era is explored through our next hypothesis.

4. The different threat perceptions played a crucial role in the transatlantic debates, however, they were closely related to the different strategic preferences resulting from the different power capacities.

We depart from the shock of the September 11th attacks and the interpretation of the war on terrorism, highlighting the differences between the American war approach and the European law enforcement and comprehensive approach, which focus more on the root causes of terrorism. According to our hypothesis the strategic advantages in certain power domains possessed by the two powers obviously played a major role behind both the American and the European approach.

The strategic power advantages and "assets" of the United States and of Europe were historically partly a result of the different political and social environments. The political preferences and the preferred power assets developed interacting with each.

5. US strategy contributed to the weakening of the cohesion of NATO.

Concerning this hypothesis we focus on the effects of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars due to the direct involvement of NATO, but we will also not ignore the Middle East peace process and the issue of Iran's nuclear program. NATO experienced one of its deepest crises in its history regarding the disagreements over the Iraq war. In the case of the war in Afghanistan there weren't any similar breaking points in the alliance, but the ISAF mission was not free from internal conflict. On the one hand we assume that American unilateralism, the strong reliance on hard power, the military involvement of European nations in the conflict by indirect American pressure and the European costs related to the engagement resulted in weakening the cohesion of the alliance.

On the other hand, the engagement in Afghanistan gave NATO as an organization a task, a mission, which had a positive influence especially on the military cooperation within the alliance. The military cooperation among the allies in particular, has had a positive impact. In testing the hypothesis we seek to balance the political, strategic and military implications of

the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the alliance, with the help of later discussed methodology and indicators.

6. NATO by itself is not properly equipped to deal with the challenges of the greater Middle East, the cooperation of the United States with the European Union, and the cooperation between NATO and the European Union potentially provides a more suitable framework.

With regard to the hypothesis we review the forms of cooperation among the United States and the major European powers and NATO. It is necessary in this context to refer to the changing geopolitical environment, the transatlantic challenges posed by the economic crisis and the emerging powers.

3. Methodology

The testing of the basic hypothesis will be conducted through a multi-step process. Firstly it is necessary to examine the content, the continuity and the change within the US strategy. Through this examination the major objectives and decisions regarding the greater Middle East can be identified, to which the European allies had to relate to. (Oren [2008]; Woodward [2004]; *The War Within*; Woodward [2008], Bob Woodward [2010]; Carlisle; Collins [2011]; Suhrke [2011]; Caldwell [2011]; Parsi [2011]; Indyk et al [2012]; Gerges [2012]) The identification of the relevant European security interests and perceptions is also required in this context. In this respect we aim to examine the relevant security policy features of the three leading European powers, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, just as well the basic security policy interests of the Eastern European allies, identified as the New Europe in the transatlantic debates of the early 21st century. (Gordon – Shapiro [2004]; Serfaty [2008]; Behr [2009]; Ashraf [2011]) The review of the three leading European nations is not only necessary because of their size and influence, but also due to the different features of their security policy perceptions and interests, in which framework the transatlantic policy of other European nations can usually be fitted. Furthermore it is important to give special attention to Central European nations because of their unique geopolitical and historical backgrounds. After the exploration of the relevant security policies in light of our research question, the effects of US strategy will be examined.

The analysis of the US strategy towards the greater Middle East will be based upon a theoretical framework with multiple elements. Primarily we rely upon a typology from the field of strategic studies used in *Americas Strategic Choices*, which appeared in 2000 and was edited by Michael L. Brown (Brown et al [2000]). The isolationist, selective engagement, cooperative security and primacy strategies developed in the work cited above is a widespread classification system in the literature, and it draws upon the unique global status and opportunities of the United States. (Posen - Ross [2000], pp. 3) To understand these grand strategies it is necessary to touch upon the historical context of US strategic thought, in this regard it is extremely useful to rely on the typology set up by Walter Russel Mead on American foreign policy traditions (Mead [2002]). Mead made a distinction between the Jeffersonian, the Hamiltonian, and the Jacksonian and Wilsonian traditions. These different approaches to American foreign policy have had an influence on each and American administration, hence the heritage and impact of these traditions can be found in the grand strategies.

In addition to properly examine American foreign policy and compare it to the relevant European foreign policy practices and world view, it is necessary to rely on the thesis of IR theories, the realist school, the liberal school, and constructivism. On the basis of these schools of thought not only could the continuity and change be better traced, but the strategic consequences of certain decisions. The IR theories help explain the conflicts and contradictions, which caused huge tensions between the motivations behind the American decisions and the perceptions of the relevant outside actors.

Concerning the survey of American strategy it is necessary to analyze the changes in US strategic positions in the Middle East. The basic question in this regard is whether the strategy adopted strengthened or weakened American positions in the Middle East, and also in Europe with regard to the transatlantic ties. In this respect the adaptation of the Buzan - Waever typology on the Middle East and Europe can be helpful. In order to place American foreign policy in the context of the basic features of the international system, we rely on the pre-modern, modern, postmodern typology of the international system constructed by Robert Cooper (Cooper: [2000]). The latter will help to introduce the main characteristics of the greater Middle Eastern and the European security complexes, and the way the United States relate to them. Furthermore it is indispensable to refer to the problem of hard power and soft power, since according to our relevant hypothesis these played a significant role in the differences between American and European security perceptions. We draw upon greatly on the works of Joseph Nye in this aspect (Nye). Additionally the dissertation also refers to the role of force according to the different IR theories, in connection with the nature of American power, the debates the decline of the US, with the help of the works of such scholars as Robert Kagan [2004], Colin S. Gray [2011], Charles Kuching[2002], John Ikenberry [2011], Fareed Zakaria [2008].

In examining the transatlantic relationship we refer to the theories on alliances of the IR schools. Within the realist school we rely on the classical theories of balance of power (Waltz [1987]) and balance of threat theories (Walt [1987]), concerning the liberal school we depart from the thesis on alliances of the neoliberal institutionalism theory. Furthermore, the application of unilateralism or multilateralism, and hard power or soft power by the United States will also be examined. Concerning the impact of US Middle East strategy on the transatlantic relations and the behavior of the allies, we refer to the problem of burden sharing within alliances (Liska [1962]; Forster - Cimballa [2005]). We apply certain indicators which measure the strength of the cooperation between the two sides. These indicators include:

- Military contributions to the wars led by the United States
- Development aid provided by the allies
- Defence expenditures of European allies
- Threat perceptions and ambitions in strategic documents
- Social perceptions on transatlantic security
- Joint resolutions, measures (UN, EU or unilateral)

Military contributions and development aid: the presence or the increase of military and economic assistance shows cohesion.

Defence expenditure and strategic documents: increasing defence expenditure coupled with a counterbalancing strategy against the United States would indicate the weakening of the cohesion, however, if the increase of military spending is followed by a growing support of the United States, it would result in the strengthening of the relationship. The interpretation of the decrease in defence expenditure is determined by its causes and the relevant policies: it is result of other political priorities of European countries, and allied burden sharing weakens as a result, it signals a lack of common interests and perceptions. However it is also a sign of growing security dependence on the United States.

Social perceptions: the differences in the public opinion concerning US foreign policy towards the greater Middle East have a negative effect on the political cohesion.

Joint resolutions, measures: common political declarations, measures, actions by the allies indicate growing cohesion between the parties, the lack of support for such actions taken by each side signals lack of cohesion.

4. Results of the thesis

4.1. Continuity in US greater Middle East strategy

Continuity rather than change was present between the Bush-administration's and the Obama administration's greater Middle East policy.

Regarding the examination of US greater Middle East strategy the dissertation builds on the American foreign policy traditions, the IR theories and US global y strategies. In light of these theories and according to the historical overview of the dissertation a significant amount of continuity could be observed in US foreign policy from the Clinton administration and throughout the Bush and the first Obama administrations. This continuity was based primarily on the significant presence of the strategy of primacy, which seeks to ensure the regional hegemony of the United States in the greater Middle East. In this effort the intent of the United States was to maximize American interests through relying heavily on its military superiority in the defining conflicts of the region.

Although within each presidency the features of other strategies could also be found, such as cooperative security during the Clinton administration or the shift towards the selective engagement strategy under the second term of the Bush administration and the Obama administration, the above cited features of primacy remained constant and dominant.

- The wars and „nation-building” experiments in Iraq and Afghanistan could be defined as examples of strategic overstretch. Though the Bush administration's reliance on military superiority was more powerful and scenic, the Obama administration also built upon it especially in the expansion of covert counterterrorism operations and the surge in Afghanistan.
- The strategy of primacy was also present through the policy of coercion and threats concerning Iran, and through the biased support and enforcement of the interests of Israel regarding the Middle East peace process. The strategy pursued by the Bush and Obama administrations built largely on the primacy strategy of the Clinton administration, with its dual containment of Iran and Iraq, and securing Israel's strategic advantage in the region.

4.2. The failure of US strategy in the greater Middle East

The American strategy implemented in the study period, the strategy aiming to forcefully maintain hegemony has contributed to the weakening of American influence in the greater Middle East region.

By reviewing the Bush administrations and the Obama administration's foreign policy it can be stated that the hegemonic policies led to significant failures for the United States. Furthermore the weakening of American influence was demonstrated by the reduction of the declared strategic objectives.

- The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan failed in terms of democratizing the countries and the region, it strengthened terrorism, and strengthened the positions of Iran, the main regional adversary of the US, and the influence of other hostile political forces.
- The strong pressure and threats applied against Tehran not only gave incentives for the Iranian leadership to maintain its nuclear weapons program, but it also made isolating Iran more difficult. The United States was forced to make concessions to international partners, especially to Russia and China, in other strategic areas in order to gain support for the containment policy. Concerning the multiple modifications of the so called "red lines" on the nuclear program drawn by the American administrations represented the failure of US policy first the capacity for nuclear energy production, then the capability to enrich uranium, after words the quality of the enriched uranium, and subsequently a nuclear weapons program was defined as a boundary, which if crossed is unacceptable to the United States.
- American policies regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict also strengthened the hostile political forces in the region, the strong support for Israel narrowed the US room for maneuver, since it made cooperation with regional allies such as Saud Arabia and Turkey more difficult, while US standing in the region suffered greatly because of the perceived strong bias towards Israel.

4.3. An American rather than a transatlantic strategy

The "Western" alliance strategy realized in the greater Middle East region was largely an American, and not a "transatlantic" strategy.

The US and European strategic objectives partially overlapped regarding the essential goals in the major conflicts of the greater Middle East. However, according to the results of our research, unilateralism was strongly present in U.S. greater Middle East policy during the examined period. The American strategic decisions aimed at the region, which also influenced transatlantic relations, usually came about by the unilateral decision of the US administration. The above outlined US foreign policy, which was based on the strategy of primacy, in many ways did not overlap with the approach preferred by Europe. European nations represented a policy closer to realism and balance of power, seeking to maintain stability in the region, and wished to only partially support the offensive hegemonic strategy of the United States.

- European nations would not have opposed the overthrow of the Saddam-regime by its self, however the likely political and military costs and consequences of the war together formed the opposition to US policy. Unilateralism prevailed especially concerning the decision on the war against Iraq, with the absence of meaningful consultations on the most defining questions of the issue, but it was also present in the other greater Middle East conflicts. The primary motivation behind the support of the US in the Iraq war by certain European nations was the significance of the transatlantic relations, and less the goal of ousting Saddam Hussein and implementing democracy in Iraq at whatever cost. In general Europeans did not share the view that the greater Middle East can be transformed from the outside.
- With respect to the war in Afghanistan the elimination of al-Qaida and the rolling back of the Taliban influence was also a European interest, though in general they preferred to have more modest goals, and would have chosen a strategy accordingly. The Europeans preferred a strategy less dependent on force and more open to a political settlement of the conflict with the necessary compromises. The main reason behind the support for the US in Afghanistan was the strategic interest to maintain the transatlantic alliance. Concerning the basic goals and means of Operation Enduring Freedom and the whole military engagement underpinned this notion. Later on the

AFPAK strategy and the surge of the Obama administration in Afghanistan was a similar unilateral decision, to which the US tried to obtain the support of the allies.

- European nations also confronted Iran on its nuclear program, since it was in their interest as well to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, however, they would of chosen a different approach by engaging Iran especially during first years of the Bush-administration. The Europeans were more open to pursue dialogue with Iran than the United States, and relied less on military threats. In the Iranian nuclear stand-off unilateralism was primarily present during the Bush-administration, while under the Obama administration consultations became much more frequent and meaningful, which was based on the narrowing of the precious gaps between the different approaches. However on the question of the possibility of the use of force the Obama administration kept all options on the table and maintained the right to act unilaterally. The United States still hasn't ruled out the military option, while the Europeans seemed to be keener to avoid a new war in the Persian Gulf. In this regard Israel had a greater influence on US foreign policy than Europe.
- Regarding the Israeli Palestinian conflict the main objectives of the United States and the Europeans were identical, a two state solution and the basic framework of a comprehensive settlement, though different approaches existed as to how to achieve these objective. Washington maintained its especially close relations with Israel, including the coordination on US positions regarding the conflict, while consultation and cooperation with the European allies remained a secondary issue. The protection of Israel's interests remained a priority for Washington even during the Obama administration, when disputes between the US and Israel became more frequent and stronger. The Europeans had a more balanced approach concerning applying pressure on the parties, and they were more critical towards Israel on the issue of complying with international norms.

4.4. Perceptual and power differences

The different threat perceptions played a crucial role in the transatlantic debates, however, they were closely related to the different strategic preferences resulting from the different power capacities.

- September 11, 2001 had a significant impact on the threat perceptions of the American public. The terrorist attacks provided domestic legitimacy for the robust use of force in the greater Middle East. The demise in the confidence of invulnerability, the conscience of American exceptionalism, and the overwhelming military superiority paved the way for military interventions. The global war on terror was quickly locked in to the American power interests in the greater Middle East. The Bush administration saw the terrorist threat also as an opportunity to improve the strategic positions of the United States in the region. Initially it seemed that with its military might it had the proper means to achieve its aims.
- The European shared the basic perceptions considering the security challenges of the greater Middle East. They considered terrorism, Islam fundamentalism, failed states, ethnic and religious conflicts the access to energy resources of the region as strategic factors – though to a different degree depending on the actual European nation. However, Europeans differed in their approach concerning the scale of these threats and the required strategy to deal with these issues. Within the context of the postmodern European system, the American security guarantee and the priorities of the welfare state the potential for power politics was much narrower. There was a lack of political legitimacy and military capabilities in Europe: in the absence of direct threats and great power ambitions they did not consider the improvement of their military capabilities a priority. The tools of soft power and hard power was used more evenly in their external relations than in the case of the United States due partly to the security perceptions of European societies. The preference for soft power corresponds to the features of the postmodern European system, the significant role of international institutions and norms. The unilateral actions and the breach of norms of US policies regarding the war and terrorism and the Middle East had a negative impact on the terms of transatlantic cooperation.

4.5. The negative impact on the cohesion of NATO

US strategy contributed to the weakening of the cohesion of NATO.

The answer to the problems raised by the hypothesis is complex. From a neorealist perspective our findings are as follows:

- The toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime by the „coalition of the willing” led by the United States produced great divides within the Alliance. However, the allies concluded that such breakdowns in the relationship have huge costs and negative consequences on both sides of the Atlantic therefore it is worth to avoid similar stances. The increasing practical cooperation among the allies even during the start of the second term of George W. Bush reflected this notion. The Iraqi war and the way it was set off did not strengthen the cohesion of the alliance, to the contrary, but it made the allies more prudent for the future. The modest contribution to the stabilization efforts showed that the allies were seeking to repair the transatlantic relationship, which was weakened by the disagreements about the war.
- On the other hand the military involvement in Afghanistan and to a lesser degree in Iraq strengthened the military cohesion within the alliance. The operations had a positive effect on the cooperation of the allies' armed forces, from the strategic to the tactical level. The ISAF mission was the largest, most complex and longest military mission of NATO, which gave a mission to the alliance seeking to find its role and legitimacy in the new security environment. Despite the disputes among the allies concerning the mission all in all the Europeans stood by the United States all along the way, and even increased their military contribution to the mission. The military aspects had a positive effect on the political dimension. Even a competition emerged among certain allies concerning the amount of contribution provided for the mission, which was motivated by the prospective political gains in Washington and in Brussels.
- Within a realist context the US strategy in Afghanistan contributed to the strengthening of the alliance, since notwithstanding the political disputes and reservations the allies contributed to the primarily US strategic objective of stabilizing Afghanistan. The allies did not balance in any meaningful way against the United States concerning their defence budgets and the core elements of their security policy.

However, neo-liberal institutionalism gives a more nuanced picture on the US strategy.

- The war in Afghanistan carried great risks for the Alliance. NATO, with the leadership of the US, set targets in front of its self which to a large extent could not be accomplished, and it is highly questionable whether the core aim, the stabilization of Afghanistan with a Western oriented government will be successful in the long run. It is doubtful whether the failure of the strategy and the mission will overall strengthen the cohesion of the Alliance as the mission comes to an end. In a certain way the failure will weaken the confidence in US leadership and power. If direct national interests are not at stake, the allies, driven by the Afghan experience, may be more reluctant to contribute to future operations led by the United States. The constant disputes in the Alliance about the expedience and burden sharing of out of area operations during the decade following 2001, has had a negative impact on the future conditions of allied cooperation, as the events of the Arab awakening has showed.
- Furthermore, the sidelining of institutions especially during the Bush administration, the unilateralist approach pursued by the United States, the frequent violation of international norms in all of the conflicts under investigation weakened the normative framework on which the transatlantic Alliance is largely built upon. The rejection of the policies of the United States in the greater Middle East by the European societies weakened the trust in American leadership.

4.6. The Institutional dimension: the significance of NATO-EU cooperation

NATO by itself is not properly equipped to deal with the challenges of the greater Middle East, the cooperation of the United States with the European Union, and the cooperation between NATO and the European Union potentially provides a more suitable framework.

As it was discussed during the relevant parts of the dissertation, effectively dealing with the security challenges of the region requires a comprehensive approach. In this regard NATO as a military alliance has an essential role, but cannot fulfill the needs required by the challenges. The security policy dimension of the European Union, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), despite its resource shortcomings and political challenges, does have a meaningful role to play. With its wide range of tools, including financial, governance capacities, law enforcement, military at its disposal, CSDP often provides a better framework

for crisis-management. However, in order to fully exploit its opportunities, a closer cooperation with the United States and NATO is essential.

4.7. Summary of the results

The validity of the basic hypothesis and its conclusions

The main elements of the U.S. Greater Middle East strategy in the decade after September 11 2001 - the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, policies towards Iranian and U.S. engagement concerning the Israeli-Palestinian peace process - overall weakened, debited the transatlantic relationship.

The American strategy towards the greater Middle East contained a significant amount of continuity in the post-Cold War era, including the decade after the September 11th attacks in 2001. The essence of this continuity was to preserve and strengthen American hegemony in the Middle East. Although there were significant similarities concerning the key Middle East conflicts, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Iranian nuclear issue and the Arab-Israeli peace process, the strategy of primacy made transatlantic cooperation more difficult. American Middle East strategy, especially the wars in Iraq, and Afghanistan became a constant source of tension between Europe and the United States. Although the European nations did not start to balance against the United States with policies striving to counter American power, neither alone nor collectively, but they kept the extent of their support for US objectives limited.

- The negative effects of the Iraqi conflict were quite visible in the disputes during the run up to the war and by the narrow European and NATO military engagement in the conflict. Regarding the conflicts in the greater Middle East played the most active military role in Afghanistan. The joint ownership of the stabilization of Afghanistan and European solidarity towards the United States has strengthened NATO's military cohesion. However, the failures and huge costs of the mission will have a negative impact on the future of the Alliance. The foundation of these debates to a large degree rested upon American unilateralism and hegemonic intentions, as well as on the differences on the perceptions regarding security in the greater Middle East. At the same time the negative consequences of the war forced the allies to strengthen their cooperation in the region.

- There was a similar convergence of policies regarding the Iranian nuclear issue which manifest itself in the growing international and transatlantic pressure against Iran. However, one crucial question concerning the conflict, the possibility of American military intervention, remained a cause for tension. The European would like to avoid war by any means, but this is not so obvious from examining the American policies. The convergence of the European approach towards the previously much tougher US policies partly meant to avert a military confrontation between Iran and the US or Israel. The constant American military threats against Iran caused tensions in the transatlantic relations and as a subsequence weakened the cohesion of the relationship. A future eventual war might cause similar tensions among the allies as did the Iraqi war. The strongly biased US support of Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict also weakens the transatlantic cohesion.

In essence the basic hypothesis is valid only with constrains. While the convergence of US and European policies strengthened in the examined time frame, this convergence was partly aimed to avert the negative consequences of US strategy of primacy, which previously weakened the cohesion of the transatlantic relationship. According to the findings of the dissertation a greater presence of the selective engagement in US strategy would not only have been more favorable for the United States, but for the transatlantic relationship as well. This thesis is likely still valid in light of the domestic and global challenges Europe and the United States face, with the restriction that the key to maintain transatlantic coherence is the constant strive for the harmonization of the different grand strategies. This follows from the nature of the transatlantic ties, from the significance of norms and institutions along with the pure national interests. The United States cannot get around the responsibility consequent from its global power, the responsibility of leadership. However, the guidance of George Kennan, the father of containment strategy, is still valid in looking at the recent past of American foreign policy: “*war seldom leads to good results.*”

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