

Multi-Polarity and Trans-Atlantic Relations: Normative Aspirations and Practical Limits of EU Foreign Policy*

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ABSTRACT

Sections of both the scholarly and practitioner EU foreign policy community operate with a series of untested assumptions that (i) there is an inevitable shift towards a multi-polar world order; (ii) that the EU will automatically be one of the major poles in this new order; (iii) that multilateralism will be the principal *modus operandi* of that order; and (iv) that the trans-Atlantic relationship will be the key driver of this order. While all four assumptions might be more or less plausible, they are not the only scenarios available to us and they are certainly not axiomatic. This paper shows them to be stronger as an exercise in international normative thought about the future role of the EU than as an empirical analysis of the EU as an actor in contemporary global politics. These assumptions need to be analysed in the context of a set of alternative and in many ways equally plausible judgments about the future direction of world order. The paper demonstrates that a distinction needs to be drawn between the normative aspirations underpinning much EU foreign policy thinking on the one hand and the EU's ability to successfully conduct foreign policy on the other.

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Introduction

Two themes have grabbed the attention of the Brussels foreign policy community and those in the academic community close to them at the turn of the first decade of the 21st century.¹ The first is what is commonly called the rise of multi-polarity. The second is the need to reinvigorate the trans-Atlantic alliance.² It would appear that for many in these European foreign policy making circles that the world is on a journey from one political equilibrium to another. The story goes something like this: Over the last 20 years we have exited from a bi-polar world into a brief uni-polar moment and now stand on the doorstep of a new equilibrium—a multi-polar world. This world is not yet tightly defined and, according to this view, Europe should, can and must play a role in the definition of a multi-polar world or risk being marginalised in it (see *inter alia*, Nicolaides and Lacroix, 2002; Grevi, 2009; Peral, 2009; Renard, 2009; Vasconcelos, 2009 and the essays in Biscop, 2009). In order to do this, the EU must advance the cause of multilateralism, which it sees as the principle normative driver of its foreign policy making (see Macaj, 2008) and ‘act as a change agent in the multilateral system’ (Vanlangenhove, 2010: 22)

At this stage in this unfolding story we can be certain about only a few things. If not how this journey will turn out, at least who the travellers on this journey will be. These include the major actors from the 20th century (the USA, Japan, the EU, and a renewed Russia), the 21st century rising powers (especially, but not only, China and India) or what, following Jim O’Neill of Goldman Sachs, policy communities around the world have taken to calling BRICs. At its most sophisticated, this reading recognises that these statist travellers will not be alone. They will also be accompanied by those increasingly influential non-state actors (from both civil and non-civil society) through to the new and emerging transnational regulatory networks of both public and private policy makers and regional agencies and actors. These travellers will, without overstating the case, surely determine the direction of travel towards a new equilibrium in contrast to their absence in fashioning earlier equilibriums. The emergence of these new actots is now thought to be one of the key and now abiding influences of globalisation.

Similarly, we could say that we know the key hurdles that these travellers will confront on their way to a new equilibrium—in effect, the issues on the policy agenda are known: they range across the politico-security and socio-economic spectrum and include *inter alia* security (both

traditional and non-traditional); human rights and justice; trade and financial regulation; sustainability, environmental degradation and climate change. We can also say that whatever the eventual structure of a new world order, it will have profound implications for the EU and its member states and they, for their part, will have some impact (though maybe not as great as many members of the EU foreign policy community might think) on the shape of this new order.

What we cannot say at this stage is how these actors will address these issues and what the instruments of 21st century collective action problem solving will look like if we are to tackle these issues. They may still evolve from the institutions and structures that developed in the second half of the 20th century but to be effective under contemporary economic and political conditions they will require transformation across the spectrum of both their structure and purpose. Whether this transformation is underway or not is problematic. But these assumptions pose a series of questions of a theoretical nature that cast long policy shadows about Europe's, and the EU's, role in any evolving world order:

1. The first set of questions concern the parameters of an evolving world order.
2. The second set of questions concern the role of the EU and other key global players (especially the USA and Asia) in that emerging order.

These two sets of questions are posed in this paper in a deliberately provocative manner. The paper challenges several core assumptions that underpin European perspectives on what we might call 'evolving world order thinking'. By way of illustration of the problematic nature of these assumptions, the paper examines and questions some further oft-expressed assumptions about the centrality of trans-Atlantic relations for that order.

Place Your New World Orders Here

The fall of the Berlin Wall represented the coming together of the economic and political dimensions of globalization in an era of unprecedented economic openness. Yet just two decades after that fall global leaders continue to ponder how to deal with the most serious economic crisis since the 1930s and the first to have a truly global reach. In addition, the contemporary era lacks a global political equilibrium that, for all its weaknesses, the bi-polar world prior to the fall of the Wall provided and that, for all its strengths, the USA hegemonic uni-polar moment following the fall, did not. The fall of the Wall and the end of

the bi-polar world caught both the scholar and the practitioner by surprise. So too have the economic crises since 2007 and the dramatic rise of the 'new actors' caught us similarly ill-prepared.

Major global public policy problems exist on all fronts: from nuclear proliferation (Gartzke and Kroenig, 2009) and ongoing terrorist challenges to the international system; through planetary deterioration occasioned by global warming and energy security (Youngs, 2009), crises in the global economy across the policy spectrum from instability and chaos in global financial markets to the growth of nationalist/ protectionist sentiments in the global trade regime (Baldwin, 2009; AU REF 2009). These challenges are both issue specific and policy specific; but they are also much more than that. Collectively, they are a challenge of global governance.

The difficulty in addressing these challenges arises from the now widely accepted judgment that power has been diffused, both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, state power is increasingly constrained by the presence of numerous actors—MNCs, banks, markets, civil (and uncivil) society, the media, international organizations, networks and regions. Horizontally, power is progressively diffused from the west and the north to the south and the east. New (and new-old) great powers compete with the USA and Europe. The re-emergence of Russia and the rise of China and India especially are dramatically changing our understandings of global power. But while the enhanced power of the new actors is real, this power shift has changed perceptions much faster than it has changed in statistical and political reality.

Given that even today's 'realities' are interpreted in different ways by different people, it should be no surprise that identifying tomorrow's realities is a far from easy task. There might be consensus that new powers are 'rising', but how they will rise and what this means is yet to become apparent. Impressed by the rapid economic growth of the new state actors from the developing world, it is too easily assumed that multi-polarity has arrived. But such pronouncements misconceive current trajectories as final outcomes. While the perception of a decline in American intellectual hegemony (and of its economic model in particular) from the

heyday of globalization in the mid-1990s and especially since the 2007 global financial crises seems to be increasingly evident, obituaries for US power may be nevertheless premature. A distinction needs to be made between short term and longer term analyses.

In the short term, the USA still secured 22 percent of global income in 2008 (IMF, 2008) and the Pentagon's budget of \$660 billion in 2009 still accounted for nearly half of the global total (Grevi, 2009). The US also remains the most 'innovative' country in the world with more patents than all other countries combined. The standing of the Anglo-Saxon approach to market capitalism has been damaged by the global financial crisis (GFC) but the dominant policy response focuses on rectifying mistakes, making the system work better and restoring trust and confidence in it (rather than replacing it). The dollar and Treasury bills as symbols of US financial power have shown no sign of melting away since the global financial crisis (GFC). The adverse effect on what Joseph Nye would call the US's *soft* power arising from the GFC is not mirrored by a decline in what Susan Strange over two decades ago determined to be US *structural* power (Nye, 2004; Strange, 1988). So a continuation of US hegemony, certainly in terms of brute military power over the short to medium term remains a probable scenario for the future; however, this may be a diminished hegemony with less ability for the US to attain its objectives on its own terms through the use of this power.

In the longer run, comparative analysis overtime shows a strong trend in the changing economic standing of the USA, especially when compared with its assumed major rival, China. Their respective shares of world product, whether using current US dollar prices or purchasing power parity (PPP), are moving in the opposite directions. This shows a US decline from 26 to 21 percent (-32%) of world product at current US dollar measures or a decline from 23 to 19 percent (-19%) at PPP between 1990 and 2013. For China over the same period we see respective growths of world share from 2 to 9 percent (+144%) in current dollar measures and 4 to 15 percent (+104%) in PPP (IMF, 2008). As noted by Robert Pape, it is this comparative analysis of its trajectory vis-a-vis the other major actors that is the most powerful indicator of the underpinnings of US power in international politics. Moreover, the data precedes the GFC and the trajectory they identify will almost certainly be reinforced by the GFC (Pape, 2009:23-7).

The implications of the declining asymmetry in US-China economic power relations in combination with the effects of the GFC are significant but should not be overdrawn. Both states recognise that the initially stabilising effect of China buying American debt in return for the US buying Chinese goods and the concomitant co-dependence of this imbalance, is now giving way to a more destabilising struggle as the interaction becomes a more politically sensitive contest (Beeson, 2009). We should not assume, however that the flattening out of the relationship axiomatically leads to a new era of bi-polarity in global politics, captured in discussions of the emergence of a G2. However, G2 activities are only ever likely to be *de facto* arrangements within a wider contexts in which both the US and China opt for them to be embedded in a wider grouping, such as the G20, as the G20 moves from being concerned with crisis exit strategies to more substantive questions of structural and institutional reform in, and of, the global economy (Garrett, 2010).

A further alternative might be the fragmentation of authority at the global level. The concept of polarity implies states being attracted to one pole (and repulsed from another) and then remaining allied to it (and its values) in different and competing blocs. But coming together and staying together in different camps may be a thing of the past. Informal alliances (and attractions) may well become increasingly defined in issue-specific contexts. Analysts need to consider if it is possible that the attractive pull for many developing countries of China's growing economic might and its critique of the existing balance of power in global economic institutions could co-exist alongside a residual attraction to the political values of the erstwhile hegemon and its allies. Rather than moving to multi-polarity, we might instead arrive at a "depolarized" world of fluid, unfixed and overlapping sets of relationships, alliances and attractions among states or even what Acharya (2009) calls 'region-polarity' focussing around regional hegemons. Both these interpretations are, of course, heavily statist and take no account of other changes, such as the emergence of trans-national networked relations of non-state actors that traverse borders beyond state control.

The prospect of competing potential futures, as opposed to an assured multi-polarity, raises a series of further questions. First, at a theoretical level, European thinking ignores a historical record that suggests that multi-polarity is an inherently unstable configuration of international

power. It is invariably viewed too uncritically in current European thinking (see for example Telo, 2009b). Secondly, and on a practical policy level, this raises the question of how Europe might best shape its own future under conditions of uncertainty? Rather than simply assume that Europe's role in a given, preferably multi-polar, order is assured, it is necessary to consider what needs to be done to solidify any such order, prevent European marginalization in it and ensure its interests and preferences influence the nature of that order. This also necessitates an understanding of the concomitant objectives and interests of other key players – existing powers, rising powers (global and/or regional powers), and those that through their choice of partners, allies and preferences will also affect how power and authority functions at local, regional and global levels in the future.

Second, rather than assume a multi-polar future, much more data and conceptual rigor are needed to document how and if multi-polarity is emerging. This includes thinking through multi-polarity as a contested term that has different meanings used in different (political) contexts. So in addition to evaluating multi-polarising trends, scholars must also consider the methodological question of how to study these trends. Poles may not necessarily be the same ontological entities. Poles do not have to be units, such as states, with the same formal status. As Fareed Zakaria argues '...the current alleged shift to multi-polarity can be seen as largely due to 'the rise of the rest' (2008: 2). While we are clearly witnessing a global rebalancing across a range of issue areas—and specifically in the domain of global decision-making on economic issues—yet, the long term consequences of current changes are unclear. Dramatic changes, both real and perceived, are not reflected in contemporary global institutional arrangements.

In many respects, the balance of power today in major global institutions still largely represents the (modified) balance of power from 1944-1945. The permanent (veto holding) members of the UN Security Council are still the five 'victors' of the Second World War (even if the China that holds the seat today is not the same pro-Western China that the West assumed would rule after 1945, and Russia has slipped into the seat created for the Soviet Union). The IMF and the World Bank, despite some changes in their mission, still carry the imprint of Harry Dexter White and the power secured by the USA in return for funding economic recovery and underpinning the financial security of post war international order (Ikenberry, 2001).

Despite the continuing presence of these institutional arrangements, the domain of global economic decision making is changing. Even if 'the West' in general (to use our old categories) and the USA in particular remain the dominant loci of power in the global order, they will need to find new ways of accommodating to the interests and values of others. A (relative) loss of both moral authority and material power now constrains the USA's abilities to set and implement the global economic policy agenda for the rest of the world. Neither the west collectively, nor the USA individually, can exclusively hold the moral high ground occupied, for example, during the first Gulf War on the one hand and during the Asian financial crises of 1998 on the other. Its practices in the security domain, and perhaps even more so its practices in the recent global financial context, have eroded key elements of the West's moral authority; particularly, but not only, in Asia where memories of the way the region was treated when it had its own financial crisis in 1997/8 still remain very much alive.

The moral authority of 'the West' of the late 20th century has been further constrained by the manner in which it has played fast and loose with the concepts of accountability and sovereignty. For example, humanitarian intervention is seen in many developing countries as but a smokescreen for the pursuit of other interests by military means. The West is seen to intervene when there are hard material gains to be made, but ignores supposed standards of humanity, civilization and rights when there are not. Perceived double standards in the enforcement of UN resolutions (for example, relating to Israel on one hand and Iran on the other) and the bypassing of the Security Council when it 'gets in the way' (for example, over intervention in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq) cast further doubt on the moral and ethical basis of the foreign policy of Western states. Even the supposed democratic bottom line of Western societies (and values) appears to be conditional. Indeed, there is some amusement in China, once barred from the G8 of leading nations in large part because of its lack of democracy, that it is now the apparent saviour of the capitalist economy (Yang, 2009).

A growing dispersal of global economic power may still make the emergence of multi-polarity the more likely option. But it needs to be tested, analysed and indeed nurtured if that is the dominant normative preference it seems to be for many analysts and practitioners close to the making of European foreign policy. It is not necessary to accept the more hyperbolic argument

of the coming of an *Asian* century to be found in some literatures (see Mahbubani, 2008) to recognise that we have just lived through the decade in which, taking Niall Ferguson's evocative phrase, the 'world tilted East' (Ferguson, 2009: 9). China's re-awakening and size—what Ramo (2004) called its 'gravitational pull'—do matter. This century will be, at the very least, a *Trans-Pacific*, as opposed to a *Trans-Atlantic* century. For some scholars this is the inevitable outcome of three centuries of American history in which the US nurtured its sense of exceptionalism by 'turning west' (Cumings, 2010). In the contemporary era it is unlikely to be otherwise given three of the world's five largest economies (the US, China and Japan) are Pacific powers. This is *the* trend to which EU member states need to accommodate.

This time it is different from the first phase of Asian assertiveness that preceded the Asian financial crisis of the last decade of the 20th century. Back then, scholars and pundits from the region, such as Shintaro Ishihara (1991) in Japan, Mohamed Mahathir (1995) in Malaysia, and Song *et al* (1996) in China, argued that Asia did not need to accede to a western way of doing things. Asia could just say 'no' to the imposition of alien political, economic and social structures. In the current era, for Asian public intellectuals such as Mahbubani, the region is no longer a mere recipient of global order seeking to find Asian alternatives for Asia; rather, it is a driver of the emerging world order. It is the USA and Europe that will need to adapt if new cooperative global structures are to emerge. The Asian crisis might have punctuated the Asian miracle, but the West's own recent economic crisis has done even greater damage to assumptions about the superiority of an 'occidental' world order.

This trend does not, of course, assume a smooth, linear transition from a US ordered equilibrium to a multi-polar one underwritten by a set of alternative actors. There is durability to the 'Western Order' as John Ikenberry argues (2008: 34). And the contours of what we might call a 'BRIC ascendancy scenario' remain indeterminate. To the extent that they have influence, the BRICs are global players; but not Russia, Brazil nor India will be in a position to challenge the USA individually in the foreseeable future. Moreover, an assumption that they will do so collectively any time soon is not borne out by recent history.

While inter-BRIC trade has increased—especially Russian oil and Brazilian commodities to China—substantive collective diplomatic and political action has yet to follow the commencement since 2008 of pre-meetings of senior officials prior to international economic gatherings such as the IMF and G20 and the first BRIC Heads of Government meeting in Russia in 2009. They occupy few common positions on key issues of global public policy. For example, on exchange rates, Brazil supports US complaints against China. Nor despite some commonalities is there a single model of economic management; contrast the authoritarian politics of Russia and China with the democracy of India and the move towards social democratic politics in Brazil. On trade, especially in the Doha round, Indian and Brazilian leadership and rhetorical solidarity at the head of the other G20 needs to be contrasted with India's desire to protect its farmers but Brazil's efficient agricultural industry. On climate change, China was a lone agent at the 2009 Copenhagen summit.

It is too easy to concentrate on the BRICs and neglect the interests and aspirations of other less central and/or powerful actors. Hence this paper eschews the idea of using the notion of the BRICs as an analytical category in international politics. Brazil, Russia, India and China (and South Africa) might be large but there are as many factors that differentiate them as collectively badge them. Moreover, there are other emerging states that, according to circumstance—Turkey during the 2003 invasion of Iraq or resource rich states practising the politics of denial (Klare, 2008)—have the potential for as much if not more influence than the named BRICs.

While any new world order will be shaped by what the most powerful actors want and do, so too will it be shaped by how others respond to these powers and who they decide to interact with in order to attain their own goals and objectives in specific policy domains. One should not equate power with influence in a one-to-one fashion and the power of the BRICs is principally that of a politically rhetorical device to signal a shift in economic power from the old developed countries, particularly Western Europe, to the emerging countries. This will not transfer into influence in all cases. Indeed China is the only emerging power with any real potential to influence the USA in a structural, as opposed to single issue, sense. China is already the world's second largest producer of goods and services, has the largest holding of foreign currency reserves and the world's three largest banks. Goldman Sachs suggest it has the capacity to

become the world's largest economy by 2030 (*Financial Times*, 18 January, 2010: 8). It alone is expected to generate 60% of BRIC growth between now and 2020. Yet it is not without questions marks as to future stability. Its 1.34 billion people are uncomfortably governed by a potentially unstable mix of authoritarian governance structures and actors and capitalist economic policy. As one observer notes, China's own leaders are more aware of the frailty and overstretch of the party's ruling capacity and structures created by its rapid growth than are many external observers (Breslin, 2010: 24. See also Breslin, 2008).

Newly powerful state actors other than China, such as Brazil, India, South Africa and Turkey—the four most important regional *democracies*—have all demonstrated a growing difference from US foreign policies, notwithstanding occasional talk of 'special relationships'. Rather than side with the US, they are just as likely to side with China (or even Iran) on some global policy issues (though not necessarily on all issues in multilateral fora). Residual US hegemony does not translate into a passive acceptance of US ideational or policy positions. The sub-optimal outcome of the 2009 Copenhagen conference is not an isolated example of evidence to support this argument. The difference of opinions expressed by these new powers was more than symbolic. Their unwillingness to privilege a 'community of democracies' over support for authoritarian regimes should have come as no surprise; their identities as democracies is tempered, and at times trumped, by their self perception as developing countries that are not part of the white, rich, western world (*Financial Times*, 4 January, 11).

This evolving state of affairs leads increasingly to deadlock in certain policy domains such as trade reform and climate change for example. The US has been slow to recognise that it is not inevitable that the majority of the world's developing countries will always share its values or adopt its policy positions on international issues and in international institutions. The US has been slow to recognise the significance of China's appeal as an international actor defined as 'different from' or 'in opposition to' the USA or, more positively, as a developmental model that can be used by or inspire others. Nor can it be simply assumed that because China has opened itself to the global economy it will necessarily respond to American overtures in all policy domains. Indeed, China has shown that full economic liberalisation is not necessary to secure economic growth, nor that opening the domestic economy to external competition must be

automatically be accompanied by political liberalisation. Along with the recognition of its growing material power and the fact relations with China can reduce dependence on the West, China's ideational 'soft power' makes it an increasingly attractive model for emulation by other developing countries (see Breslin, 2010: 15-18). China thinks it can regain its historical status and thinks it has time on its side in these changing global contexts as other key players distance themselves from US global leadership.

Some Implications for the EU as a Global Actor

From a European Perspective:

Of course, the EU is a global foreign policy player, although there is a debate as to what kind of player it might be—an international organisation or a *sui generis* polity? This paper adopts Jorgensen's understanding of the EU as a distinct polity within a multilateral global system (see the essays in Jorgensen, 2009) and a distinctive system of European international relations is emerging, although evidence for the existence of a consistent common foreign policy is mixed in both a multilateral context and in the EU's bilateral relations with major players such as Russia and China (see Whitman, 2010: 9-13 and the essays in Hill and Smith, 2006).³ Hence the EU's prospects for playing a major role in the evolution of the global order over the next decade also require the development of a more integrated strategy. For sure, the Lisbon Treaty aspires to enhance the EU's ability to address global challenges via the creation of its own diplomatic corps (the External Action Service) under the responsibility of a High Representative for external relations, but it is too early to make a positive judgment on the effectiveness of these innovations.

Indeed, these innovations will count for little in the absence of a joined up collective strategy (see for example Biscop, 2009). This situation is unlikely to pertain while EU leaders require the High Representative to be their servant not their rival for control of their foreign policies. The Treaty makes provision for the High Representative, as Vice President of the Commission to sit in both the (inter-governmental) Council and the (supranational) Commission which in theory should minimise the traditional competition over foreign policy making between these two bodies. But the Treaty does not remove the tension between national foreign policies and a collective EU policy and the High Representative will only be effective if she has the collective

consent of the member states on major issues (see Gardner and Eisenstat, 2010: 109). At the risk of repetition, the essence of any such strategy emerging in influential European foreign policy circles seems to assume that a new world order is emerging in the 21st century, that it will in all likelihood be defined by multi-polarity and that European strategy should be to become one of the poles in that new multi-polar order. In the words of one analyst: ‘Either the EU participates in the shaping of the coming order and becomes one of its major poles, or it will be relegated to the position of a mere spectator in global affairs’ (Renard, 2009: 7). This argument rests on questionable assumptions.

Firstly, even in its most sophisticated variant, which sees the world as moving in the direction of ‘interpolarity’ (Grevi, 2009)—that is multi-polarity under conditions of interdependence—the theory is far too statist for the 21st century. The second questionable judgment is to assume that only poles have influence. Thirdly, this mode of thinking holds an optimistic view of summit diplomacy and that Europe’s expertise at it is a key to successful 21st century multilateralism (Ibid: 31-6). Indeed, the need for the EU to develop its own multilateral diplomacy has been an explicit element of thinking since the articulation of the first *European Security Strategy* in the Solana Report in 2003 (Solana, 2003). As one forceful advocate of this strategy puts it, however, ‘[the] EU needs a world governed by an encompassing and effective multilateral system if it is to exert its influence’ (Grevi and Vasconcelos, 2008: 24).

Yet counter arguments are evident. Multi-polarity is not inevitable. Individual actors can wield influence in 21st century global politics, as a reading of contemporary international history reveals, without necessarily being a pole. Further, it is possible, and often fruitful, to start from an assumption of non-polarity; that is ‘...a world dominated not by one or two or even several states but rather by dozens of *actors* [my emphasis] possessing and exercising various kinds of power’ (Hass, 2008: 44). Working from such an assumption, the emergence of other actors and activities that can contribute to collective action problem solving in global politics beyond the confines of statist multi-polar theory becomes important in a way that is little recognised in much policy focussed writing on the EU as an international actor. Similarly, in the eventuality of multi-polarity, that Europe will become a pole is a hypothesis to be tested rather than a reality to be asserted.

To pose such counter claims is not to propose throwing the statist baby out with the bath water; rather it is to acknowledge an increasing complexity in the distribution of power in contemporary world politics that is subject to pressures from a wide variety of sub- and supra-national actors, many of which are organized transnationally rather than along national or statist lines (Cerny, 2010). It is also to recognise that even when working well, multilateralism is for most foreign policy practitioners still a second best strategy and, moreover, that effective multilateralism does not reside in the hands of the EU alone. Yet, the predominant approach adopted by the European Union appears to be to treat multilateralism as ‘a guiding philosophy’ of its foreign policy (Macaj, 2008: 4) and in its institutionalised behaviour towards international organisations in general (see Jorgensen, 2006) and the UN in particular (see Wouters, 2007) Indeed, as Laatikainen and Smith (2006: 8) suggest ‘The assumption of EU policy makers appears to be that its own successful experiment in multilateralism is sufficient to revitalise the UN even with (or despite) US ambivalence.

It is not necessary to accept the line of argument that the EU’s commitment to multilateralism stems from a position of weakness (Kagan, 2003: 37-42) in order to see that in adopting this approach EU policy makers all too readily minimises the challenges faced by multilateralism as a form of behaviour in the 21st century (generally see the essays in Newman *et al*, 2006). That there is a growing systemic mismatch between the historical origins of multilateralism as institutionalised intergovernmental cooperation geared to preserving the sovereign integrity of states while at the same time allowing them to engage in collective action problem solving on the one hand and the trans-sovereign nature of much contemporary global public policy on the other, is not in doubt. That the (trans-sovereign) sources of global public policy and the (sovereign) authority to address them are likely to be aligned in the immediate future remains in considerable doubt.

In the most influential, yet basic, analysis of multilateralism, John Ruggie describes it as a process that ‘coordinates behaviour among three or more *states* (my emphasis) on the basis of generalised principles of conduct’ (Ruggie, 1993: 14). This definition could hold good even if we substitute ‘group of states’ for states and think of the EU as a single actor. But to-date, EU member states still operate more often than not as defensive individualists in the major

international organisations such as the IMF, World Bank and UN system rather than as a proactive collective leader with a distinct and common (EU) position. This is not to suggest that EU member state views of multilateralism are merely the sum of individual state preferences. For would-be architects of EU foreign policy, in both the scholarly and the Brussels institutional world, a commitment to multilateralism as a normative good is invariably a deeply held conviction—indeed, internalised as a ‘way of life’, in John Groom’s evocative if somewhat over the top phrase (2006).

In EU thinking, the idea of multilateralism, seen in Ruggie’s words as an ‘organising principle’, is as important a characteristic of multilateralism as it is an instrumental process by which states conduct policy. As Macaj points out, the study of European policy making, especially with the growing recognition of the inter-constitutive nature of the relationship between the membership and the EU institutions, has taken us beyond this inter-governmentalist reading of the making of EU foreign policy. It is clearly a combination of member state preferences and the behaviour of the EU institutions that ‘co-constitutes’ EU foreign policy (2008: 6-10). The EU does at times both think and act multilaterally. Its normative disposition for multilateralism attests to that, as indeed does policy practice in a range of issue areas—notably trade policy.

However, this is not the case in all areas. It is difficult to maintain the normative commitment to multilateralism in policy practice over time; to do so ‘[...] requires its participants to renounce temporary advantages and the temptation to define their interests narrowly in terms of national interests.’ (Caporaso, 1992: 604) Moreover, the EU can be as instrumentally selective as any other major state actors (see Pollack, 2006). Classically, for example, the major EU members have shown little self-awareness as to their continued over-representation in those established international institutions that have come through from the 20th century on the one hand or those new issue-specific processes of the 21st century, such as the leaders level G20 emerging from the global financial crises, on the other. Indeed, Europe’s over representation in global fora on a seats-population ratio, continues to become increasingly disproportionate as its share of global population declines vis-a-vis that of Asia and Africa. Notwithstanding stated desires to reinforce multilateralism the EU has yet to show that it is willing to assist the institutional enhancement of an initiative like the G20 by, for example, pooling its multiple voices to allow

greater representation of the emerging powers in what many of them still perceive as essentially western state-led activities. Indeed, for some, the G20 is less the resurrection of a genuine multilateral urge to cooperate in the face of economic crisis and more an extended consultation group for the old G7 with the emerging actors—perhaps ‘the last gasp of an old fashioned concert of great powers’ (Woods, 2010: 51).

Moreover, even in those organisational contexts and policy domains where a European policy consensus appears to be emerging, such as climate change, member states still pursue individual rather than collective strategies and the evidence that multilateral summitry plays to Europe’s strengths is not encouraging. The (non) decisions reached in Copenhagen in December 2009 (presented to the meeting after agreement by the US, China, India, Brazil and South Africa with little or no European input) represent perfectly the parlous nature of global governmental decision-making capability and, tellingly, Europe’s under-performing, or indeed less than central role in it. Protecting the global commons is assumed by Brussels to be one of the areas where Europeans see themselves as pioneers of values and policies that the rest of the world should learn from and emulate. But what we saw in Copenhagen was what the *Guardian* called ‘... a game changer, a moment when the global balance of power tilted and relegated the EU to the second division’. Others saw it in equally portentous terms ‘Europe does not count’, ‘Europe is not at the table’, ‘a seminal and symbolic moment’ (*The Guardian*, 2009: 1 and 24).

Copenhagen, along with the failure to secure an outcome to the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations, illustrates what we might call the growing governance gap in global public policy and the manner in which multilateralism has weakened. It is hardly surprising therefore, that in recent years, the role of other transnational bodies (NGOs, global firms, transnational regulatory networks) acting as agents of policy change in world politics has steadily grown. These non-state processes are not replacing nation-states, but they are forging new transnational webs of power not captured in simplistic understandings of any variant of polarity theory or old style multilateralism. These processes have rapidly evolved within the European context, with the proliferation of networks in both public and private life and also cutting across public and private life.

These trends need to be understood and factored into the analysis of Europe's potential place in a multi-polar order, and how it might best achieve its own aims within this order. Given the highly networked European polity and economy, to do so should enhance Europe's global influence. Indeed, addressing the challenge inherent in the search for a new global political equilibrium, that accommodates the interests of both the existing and new actors at the same time as it makes institutional provision for collective action in the domain of seemingly intractable trans-sovereign problem solving, is a key research question for our time. The seemingly perennial problem in all issue areas of global policy making is one of diverging national interests leading to competing diagnoses and prescriptions. Since the historical record demonstrates how difficult, albeit not impossible in all circumstances, this has been under conditions of either bi-polarity or hegemony, we must assume that such problems of divergence will prove of equal, if not greater, difficulty under conditions of multi-polarity.

To facilitate understanding we should make a prior separation between the idea of multi-polarity as reality (that is, as a structural fact in global politics) and multi-polarity as a normative goal. Securing a role for Europe as one of the multiple nodes as the preferred or best outcome is quite distinct from how we analyse that role. The assumption that we are moving inexorably towards multi-polarity must be continually tested. In sum what I am suggesting is that current European thinking on the inevitability of multi-polarity has more substance as a normative goal than as empirical reality. This is not to suggest that normative thinking does not have an important role to play. Rather it is to suggest that this kind of theorising is a different activity to empirical analysis. If the question is 'would a multi-polar world characterised by multilateral collective action problem solving in, for example, the key issues areas of finance, trade, security and the environment be a good thing?' Then my answer would be unequivocally 'yes'.

If the question is, 'is that the way the world is heading', then I am circumspect; especially if the essential driver of this process is thought to be state-driven multilateralism. This distinction is no mere scholarly problem. As indicated earlier, it casts policy shadows both globally and regionally. European thinking is driven by a normative commitment to multi-polarity as a preferable way of managing global order. Europe seeks to adjust to being a demographically and materially smaller player in global politics and economics at the same time as it aspires to extend

its influence over global policy processes by a better articulation of a common 'European' normative voice in global affairs.

A European normative voice may no longer be articulated in the absurd fashion of the earlier years of the century when analysts talked of Europe's 'soft power' ruling it (Leonard, 2004). But still implicit in much European thinking on its role in the world is a confidence in the normatively beneficial qualities of the European, cooperative, project and the projection of these 'internal' qualities beyond Europe into a specific view of world order (Manners, 2002). There is, says Laidi (2008) '...an idealisation of the European political identity that places Europe in the avant-garde of a forthcoming, pacified world'.

For Europe to be a central player in the evolving global order—it is too soon to simply label that order 'multi-polar'—will require experimentation, policy adaptation and learning in the use of instruments of political and economic diplomacy on the part of Europe, beyond those instruments and policies that were relied on in the 20th century. Clearly, one central policy objective is to determine the ways in which any shift to a multi-polar world matters for Europe. To do so, however, also requires us to understand this question from a global perspective in which geographical Europe is both an object of global change and the EU, as an institutional actor, is an agent of that change. Clarifying Europe's role requires us to recognise both the structurally powerful nature of exogenous forces bearing on Europe under conditions of multi-polarity but also that the relationship of influence between structures and agency is not always a unidirectional process. Such relationships can also be constituted as a two-way process with links between their normative underpinnings and practical applications on the one hand and the constraints on the ability of the global community to engage in collective action decision-making on the other. To do this, theoretical and applied scholarship on multilateralism and international organisation needs to extend beyond 20th century understandings (see AU REF, 2010; Newman et al, 2006).

The President of the World Bank calls for a 'new multilateralism' to address emerging multi-polarity by building in the flexibility to engage not only sovereign states, but also transnational networks comprised of non-state and market actors (Zoellick, 2008). Such multilateralism should

be able to enhance the capacity to anticipate rather than react to international crises, as well as foster better governance practices through the inclusion of non-state actors. This view reflects a widely held belief, across both the policy and scholarly world, that traditional international organisations (IOs) find themselves unsuitable to many areas of public policy which transcend national boundaries. But part of the problem in reforming IOs is the rigidity of the existing structures of power within them; those that have power are often reluctant to give it up and/or share it with others (see Strange, 1998; Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; AU REF, 2006).

Inter-state multilateralism, the principal organisational form of collective action problem solving in the second half of the 20th century (Ruggie, 1993), is now confronted by new challenges, practices and processes. IOs (such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO and the UN) no longer dominate international policy development and certainly do not reflect the current global distribution of economic power. Their role is now much more 'contingent' (Keohane, 2006: 56-76). The policy environment has changed. Newer organisations, networks, committees and fora have emerged to expose the limits of international organisation and transform its operation. These limits and a preference for more networked forms of governance have been clearly demonstrated within Europe (Börzel and Heard-Lauréote, 2009). We know that European networks for regulatory cooperation, business, and security are robust actors within the context of the European polity, but we know a lot less about their ability to enhance Europe's power beyond its borders and the implications of these new practices and processes for governance and regulation at the global level.

Whilst not the subject of this paper, it is necessary to keep in mind the increasing role of networks in global public policy if we are to fully understand Europe's role in an evolving multi-polar world. We require an appreciation of the importance of how to reform international organisations and harness the purposive activity of important emerging transnational policy networks. There are, however, currently limits to what state of the art theorising about the role of international organisation and networks in global public policy tells us (but see Slaughter, 2004; Stone, 2004 and 2008 and Sikkink 2009. In a European context there are some exceptions. Sabel and Zeitlin (2008), in their pioneering work on experimentalist governance demonstrate the degree to which the EU is indeed extending, and in some instances exporting its own internal

governance models to extra European partners. Similarly, an emerging body of literature demonstrates how European sector specific regulatory norms, rules and concepts of external governance expand the influence of the EU beyond its borders (see Lavenex, 2008 and Lavanex and Schimmelfennig, 2009). However, innovation in both the theory and practice of international organisation and networks more generally has not, as yet, been extensively or well integrated into the study of Europe as an actor in the global policy process. It is in this domain that fuller understandings of extent and limits of Europe as a normative power will be determined in coming years. But even within a more traditional, statist understanding it is not the intention of this paper to say that Europe does not matter.

Indeed, Europe does matter. As a partial corrective to the critique of contemporary analysis of the EU offered in this section let us not forget that Europe is a region with immense intellectual and material capacity, and notwithstanding the current crisis the EU still has substantial economic power. As a region it is collectively and (as with the larger member states) individually able to exert influence through traditional levers of ‘great power politics’ (including through existing global institutions), and also through ‘newer’ mechanisms of persuasion and soft power promotion. European values of politics, society and governance do indeed offer something from which others can learn; and the success of the European experience in creating peace and prosperity on a regional level is something that Europe should not be afraid to laud. Through the activities of state, non-state and EU level actors and new networks of interaction, Europe has developed a range of ideas and interests that might serve as examples—in some instances a model even—for other parts of the world. Indeed, there is an academic industry in comparative regional studies that considers the utility or otherwise of the development of the EU as a model for other parts of the world (see Webber, 2005; Telò, 2007; AU REF, 2008; Telò, 2009a). As Pascal Lamy (2009) notes, notwithstanding its current trials and tribulations, ‘the European Union remains the laboratory of international governance—the place where the new technological frontier of international governance is being tested’.

A View through Non-European Lenses:

A question not addressed in much of the European literature on the evolving world order is what other key actors might think about this evolving order and especially, given the importance the

EU sets by the trans-Atlantic alliance, just how closely the US does, or does not, think along similar lines to the EU on global policy issues. Just how close, or how far apart, is the meeting of minds across the Atlantic? Notwithstanding the stylistic change we have witnessed in the transition from the Bush to the Obama administration, it behoves not to take rhetoric for granted. If we dig deeper into the two foreign policy cultures that prevail on the two sides of the Atlantic then it is clear that the differences are more substantial than the trans-Atlantic rhetoric would have us believe. We do not have to accept Robert Kagan's view (2004) that Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus to recognise that the USA's approaches towards world politics in general and global institutional cooperation and global order (global governance) are different to those of Europe as well as to other parts of the world, such as East Asia.

Even in a post-Bush era, the US and the EU still differ on questions of 'partnership', 'burden sharing' and 'exceptionalism' as approaches to global economic management. Though the rhetorical language may be different from administration to administration, US policy is still underpinned by assumptions of 'primacy' (albeit tempered in recent years), 'real-politik' and freedom to manoeuvre. The US policy community sees the global order primarily through realist, geo-political set of lenses. For Europeans it is 'interdependence', cooperation and, according to a recent study, 'risk aversion' that counts. Indeed, at the extreme, Europe across the politico-economic spectrum in the contemporary era is, according to Zaki Laidi, a 'risk-averse power' (Laidi, 2010).

Europe, in theory and in practice, exhibits a stronger normative attitude towards multilateral governance structures than is to be found across the spectrum of the US policy community. By way of illustration it is inconceivable, for example, that any US administration would prepare a document similar to *The EU and the UN: the Choice of Multilateralism* (Commission of the European Communities, 2004) that argues for a 'systematic *integration of multilateral and bilateral policy objectives*' (their emphasis). This European disposition for multi-level-governance and 'sovereignty pooling' remains incomprehensible to most US foreign policy makers. Similarly, the '*acquis communautaire*' (the body of common standards and regulations that have developed over the life of the European project), notwithstanding perpetual complaints

about excessive bureaucracy, are widely accepted in Europe. Such an approach is also unthinkable anywhere across the spectrum of the US policy community.

These distinctions also play out in the differing attitudes of the US and the EU towards the development of regionalism in the 21st century. Built on an understanding of US political and economic power, the US exhibits a preference for regionalism built on bilateralism and preferential trade agreements. Europe by contrast, again reflecting its understanding of its more limited power, seeks to develop a web of multi-dimensional inter-regional links and institutional relations—what Bjorn Hettne calls inter-regionalism (Hettne, 2007: 107). US attitudes towards regionalism, still viewed through geo-political hegemonic lenses, are principally instrumentally driven. For the EU, drawing on its own historical experiences of the second half of the 20th century, regionalism, indeed multi-regionalism, is the preferred form of political organisation (Wallace, 1994).

These differences are to be found not only in attitudes towards the institutional development of the EU and regional orders, but also in normative economic and security policy contexts. For example, in the security domain, especially since the failure of ‘old Europe’ to support the war in Iraq, foreign policy makers in the US have expressed reservations about the ‘European project’. The arrival of the Obama administration has seen hostility of the ‘Rumsfeldian’ variety decline as the USA’s trans-oceanic priorities shifted from the Atlantic to the Pacific. But US remains more instrumental than sentimental in its attitude towards Europe. It is less interested in Europe’s normative view of itself (what Europe thinks it is) than its ability to function as a single actor with functional assets to bring the trans-Atlantic relationship (what Europe does).

It is more difficult in the early 21st century than it was for much of the second half of the 20th century to think in terms of the North Atlantic as a ‘political community’—to use Karl Deutsch’s phrase (1957). Clearly, substantial and abiding strengths in the trans-Atlantic relationship remain. But we cannot assume a contemporary mutuality of interest comparable to the high watermark of trans-Atlantic cooperation that existed in the military and the security domain in the era of bi-polarity. The foundations on which that relationship rested have been eaten into by at least three changes: (i) in the priorities of the respective domestic politics of the USA and

Europe since the end of the Cold War, (ii) diverging perceptions of how to handle the ‘new’ foreign and security policy issues, (iii) the changing international context emanating from the end of stable macroeconomic conditions of the Bretton Woods era, the emergence of globalisation and re-occurring economic crises (Beeson and Higgott, 2005). These changes, more than issue-specific policy disagreements such as Iraq or Iran’s nuclear programme, have set the tone of the modern relationship. As Helge Hveem notes:

‘...community formation affects the global political economy, but is also affected by it. The North Atlantic community is no exception in that respect. ... The North Atlantic community can no longer be taken for granted. If the highly integrated character that has been typical of it is to be preserved, it will not only have to be reinvigorated politically, but more importantly re-embedded socially and partly reconstructed institutionally. This has to happen in an environment that is very different from the past and will be very challenging in the future.’(Hveem, 2005: 17)

For Hveem, the emergence of *complex globalization* is clearly the strongest factor. The era of the embedded liberal compromise has ended (Ruggie, 1982). Since the turn of the millennia the USA has been less willing, and indeed less able, to underwrite the post World War 2 liberal bargain by playing the role of a ‘self-binding hegemon’ (Ikenberry, 2001; Martin, 2004). The turn from the institutionalised multilateralism of the Cold War era to the more unilateral attitudes and practices that began under Clinton and accelerated under Bush might have slowed under Obama but we are not seeing, and will not see, a return to the *status quo anti* that prevailed for much of the second half of the 20th century. Any such return is problematic for a number of other reasons of both a real and perception variety. US authority over others, secured by restraint and self-binding during the Cold War, and lost quickly in a brief era of uni-polarity, is not simply regained by a warmer rhetorical style, no matter how genuinely meant.

Not only is there is a mismatch between the challenges thrown up by globalisation and the institutional mechanisms of global governance available to address them. More specifically, there is a misunderstanding in Europe about both the political and economic priorities of the US on the one hand and, on the other hand, how other parts of the world, that have also recognised

the redistribution of economic power since the turn of the century, and will use that power in a politico-diplomatic sense in the future. It is not axiomatic that the US administrations will think along the same lines as the emerging and increasingly institutionalised (but still confusing to the Americans) post-Lisbon EU foreign policy community; especially one with a specific, multilateral agenda and approach. Moreover, while NATO, for decades the institutional expression of the trans-Atlantic alliance might be very active in the contemporary era it is, in the words of an astute recent report on the US-EU relationship by a group of US and European think tanks led by the Atlantic Council, in a state of ‘...drift, lacking identity and driven more by outside events than by collective interests’ (Atlantic Council *et al*, 2009: 7).

The US now sees itself as much, if not more, as a trans-Pacific power than as a trans-Atlantic power and for none of the countries of the Asia Pacific, without exception, is the relationship with Europe anywhere near as important as relationships across the Pacific. And notwithstanding the various evolving architectures for regional and trans-Pacific dialogues in the Asia Pacific, notably APEC (Beeson, 2008), the larger powers such as China, Japan and South Korea, and indeed the smaller powers such as Singapore, still give primacy in the conduct of their relationship with the US to bilateral as opposed to multilateral instruments. As China takes over from Japan as the world’s largest economy, it is not difficult to imagine that even a close ally like Japan, following its historic traditional policy of trimming to changes in global power balances, may edge closer to China in the coming decades (Rachman, 2010).

In East Asia the twin phenomena of a residual discontent with US policy in, and towards, the region since the Asian financial crises of the second half of the 1990s and the accompanying augmentation in the power of China has been one of the most significant factors to-date in the global politics of the 21st century. Both are processes in which Europe has been but an observer. The advent of an Obama administration has done much to soften the rhetoric of regional antagonism engendered under the previous US administration, but it has not altered the fundamental direction of travel in the changing structure of economic power.

It is in the context of the wider global structural changes identified in this essay that an appreciation of the contemporary trans-Atlantic relationship needs to be embedded. The paper is

not suggesting a moribund relationship. Trans-Atlantic political relationships are cordial, if not always as warm as many Europeans would like to think. NATO remains the world's major functioning alliance. The US and Europe, with trans-Atlantic trade at + €2 billion per day, remain major economic partners; in addition, at + €2 trillion per annum they are each others major investment partners. Bilateral ties and networks, especially at the elite level (in the private sector and the upper echelons of civil society) remain strong. The US and Europe with 14 million 'on-shored' jobs, that is jobs arising from inwards investments, are each others principal destination for such jobs. But it is not necessary to resort to the more fanciful suggestion of the Atlantic Council that an *acquis Atlantique* exists to recognise the continued existence of solid material interests and shared norms and principles that make it still an important relationship for both parties. As the Atlantic Council Report goes on to say, the US-EU relationship, as currently constituted is '... important but not strategic' and the re-invigoration of the partnership requires both a new politics as well as new processes (Atlantic Council *et al* 2009: ii).

Conclusions

With origins in a wider normative European view of itself as torch carrier of 'systemic inter-regionalism' (Hettne, 2007: 210) there is a view amongst European foreign policy thinkers that envisages movement in the direction of a multi-polar global order with Europe as a pole. But this paper argues that this is too determinist a picture and that a more restrained and nuanced understanding of the direction of the both the nature of the emerging global polity and the EU's role in it is required. Notwithstanding, or indeed because of, the dramatic changes that are in train we should expect a much more variegated and complex picture in which a statist understanding of multi-polarity is complicated by the rise and activity of actors, of both a state and non-state variety, other than that of the traditional great powers.

A second theme has questioned the assumption implicit, and frequently explicit, in some EU foreign policy literatures that the trans-Atlantic relationship is the principal, as opposed to but one, explanation of and driver of contemporary world politics. The structural changes in the emerging global order outlined in the paper, especially the emergence of China as a global actor, the heightened importance of trans-Pacific economic and political relationships more generally and a widening perception gap across the Atlantic are making the trans-Atlantic relationship,

while still relevant, much less salient than in the last century. The more cooperative US discourse that accompanied the advent of the Obama administration does not diminish the structural changes in train. Metaphors privileging the Pacific Community in the 21st century that have replaced the Deutsch style metaphors of Atlantic Community that prevailed in the second half of the 20th century reflect these structural changes in both the global economy and polity.

Boosters of the trans-Atlantic relationship would argue, and rightly so, that structural change is not deterministic and that agency matters. As the Atlantic Council puts it:

‘... merely asserting difference, or reciting lists of tough issues, does not make the case for estrangement. It makes the case for more effective partnership’ (2009: 2).

The issue is whether the EU, and more importantly the US, has the will, purpose and ability to recreate an effective partnership where interdependence dictates the need for collective action problem solving; for example in the reform of the global economy, especially the financial sector, coping with climate change and containing nuclear proliferation. In some policy areas, the trans-Atlantic community, rather than an Asian or Asia-Pacific one, is still the most likely source of ideational leadership and the most necessary source of political leadership, notably in the development of global economic and environmental governance structures. Of course it is important for China and India and others to play their part in these domains; but for obvious historical reasons it is left to the US and Europe, as the richest and most developed countries, to lead by example in reforming the nexus between the production of wealth and the consumption of resources.

It is possible to envisage a situation in which the world becomes more multi-polar. Not in the realist sense of powers combining to balance against a hegemon, although this could happen, but multi-polar more in the sense that the US becomes a less significant actor in the world’s evolving regions as other actors become more economically powerful and politically salient. We are currently in a nether-world in which we no longer have a uni-polar order underwritten by US hegemonic power on the one hand or a fully formed multi-polar order with functioning multilateral and regional institutions on the other. Having won the Cold War through a combination of hard and soft power the US has, with the passing of the Bush administration, recognised that raw material power is not sufficient to intimidate other rising great powers. US

residual primacy in the military sphere is not preventing the development of a range of initiatives in geo-political and economic domains, as the nature of regional institution building without US participation in various parts of the world, such as recent East Asia experimentation, attests.

In the absence of structures of effective global economic governance—initiatives of the G20 variety are a start, but only a start—we must expect policy makers to explore more manageable alternatives at other than global levels. State-centric power politics approaches to the management of the world order under conditions of globalisation, even for the USA in some circumstances, would appear to be less salient. Interestingly, and echoing two arguments advanced in this paper, concerning the contemporary limits of institutional multilateralism on the one hand and the growth of issue-specific transnational policy networks and non-state actors on the other, the key to a more effective US-EU relationship, according to the Atlantic Council Report, is to be found in

‘... encouraging and orchestrating networks rather than seeking new formalistic structures to direct and control ... [and that] ... on a case by case basis create plurilateral initiatives of countries and institutions with the most relevant capacities, resources and interests to address foreign and security policy crises’ (Atlantic Council: vii).

More diffuse networked understandings of power, with loosely multilateral and regional institutionalised regulatory actions providing a *modus operandi* for cooperation are becoming increasingly attractive across a range of specific policy areas (Stone, 2008) and different meso-level geo-spatial domains, *especially regions* (see Acharya, 2010 and Jayasuriya, 2010). It is through these processes and in these domains that the emergence of networked based policy activity and the growth of multi-level governance, as it has emerged in European international thought and practice, might offer the bones of an alternative model without the excessive privilege assigned to the concept of state driven multi-polarity.

¹ Though not an unproblematic conflation, Europe and the EU are used interchangeably in this paper. Similarly, the scholarly and policy literatures on EU foreign policy are not always discrete. This is, in part a reflection on the

porosity of the EU foreign policy community. Official and unofficial voices exist side by side in the scholarly literature, the policy commentary and the official discourse.

² In addition to regular pronouncements by senior figures in the Brussels foreign policy community this interest is also illustrated by the Commission Directorate General for Research invitation to bid for framework funding for up to €10 million for a major research project entitled 'Europe Facing a Multi-Polar World' (2009) and two recent high level conferences entitled "The EU and the US in a changing multi-polar system: Transatlantic convergences and divergences" (2009) jointly convened in Washington by the Directorate-General for Research and Directorate-General for External Relations and "Mapping the Future of the EU-US Strategic Partnership: Policy and Research Perspectives" convened by The Directorate General for Research in cooperation with the Spanish EU Presidency (2010). See synoptic overview at: http://ec.europa/research/social-sciences/events-89_en.html

³ Of course, all European states have their own diplomatic infrastructures and foreign policies, hence must distinguish EU policy from that of its member states and especially those member states with *comprehensive* national foreign policy establishments and practices (notably the UK and France).

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