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TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS DURING THE PRESIDENCY OF BARACK OBAMA: END OF "SPECIAL RELATIONS"?

TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION AT THE BEGINNING OF BARACK OBAMA'S FIRST TERM

During Barack Obama's presidential campaign, in the summer of 2007, his paper titled *Renewing American Leadership* was published in "Foreign Affairs". In that paper, Obama presented his foreign policy objectives. The main thesis of the article was the need to restore the world's trust in the United States which was greatly undermined by actions of the Bush administration. The US' policy toward its European allies was not of primary concern at the time. Obama emphasised that next to strengthening NATO, it was essential for the US security to build long lasting alliances in other regions of the world, especially in Asia.[1]

Throughout his campaign, Obama was very popular in Europe. His charisma and criticism of the unilateral, violent policy of his predecessor awoke high hopes for a new beginning in transatlantic relations.[2] Europe believed that a promised new US foreign policy could benefit European countries which might increase their share in shaping global policies.[3] Obama demonstrated his strong interest in climate change challenges and proliferation of mass destruction weapons, which was in line with European priorities. There was also a noticeable shift from the neo-conservative vision of American hegemony. Obama's rhetoric implied his awareness of global connections in all areas. He sought to create a broad coalition that would be able to deal with problems troubling the world of today. To achieve his goals he preferred to deploy "soft power": diplomacy and economic incentives. Such an approach seemed very promising to Europe, especially since Obama also expressed his readiness to upkeep American leadership.[4]

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[1] B. Obama (2007), *Renewing American Leadership*, "Foreign Affairs" July/August, pp. 8-9.

[2] S. Serfaty (2009), *No Time for a Time-out in Europe,* "Current History" March, p. 101.

[3] After J. Kiwerska (2008), *Barack Obama - szansa czy zagrożenie dla stosunków transatlantyckich?, „*Biuletyn Instytutu Zachodniego" No. 7, p. 3. http://www.iz.poznan.pl/news/65_Biuletyn%20IZ%20nr%207.%20B.%20Obama.pdf (accessed 25.04.2011).

[4] Á. de Vasconcelos, *Introduction - Responding to the Obama Moment: the EU and the US in a Multipolar World*, in: Á. de Vasconcelos, M. Zaborowski (eds) (2009), *The Obama Moment. European and American Perspectives,* Paris, pp. 12-14.

The main aims of American foreign policy, presented at the beginning of Obama's presidency, were: stabilisation of the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, stopping the Iranian nuclear programme, fighting the consequences of the financial crisis and counteracting global climate changes. Europe argued that a closer transatlantic co-operation would be needed to implement those plans. According to the *Transatlantic Trends Survey* of 2009 done by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Obama was more popular in EU Member States (77% of the respondents declared their trust in Obama) than in the US (only 57%).[5] The decision to award Obama the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 was a symbol of those hopes.[6]

From the very beginning of his presidency, however, Obama's attitude to cooperation with Europe was highly pragmatic. He knew that the EU could provide assistance in many areas and was aware of its limitations. According to Obama, most important EU limitations were the difficult process of making joint decisions and differences in European and American approaches to some issues e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict[7]. Americans chose to focus on winning Russia's and China's support, taking the support of European countries for granted.

The US decision of 17 September 2009 to cancel its plans to install missile defence elements on the territories of Poland and the Czech Republic was widely considered to be a proof of the decreased importance of European allies to the US. The original project, put forward in 2007 by the Bush administration, had worsened US-Russia relations, and, according to many commentators, it was the main reason why the project was later abandoned. Thus it could have been expected that Obama would not follow his predecessor's plan. Already in July 2009, prominent politicians from Central Europe wrote a letter to Obama, warning him against caving in to Russia's pressure and neglecting America's faithful allies from Central and Eastern Europe. Two former presidents of Poland Lech Wałęsa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski signed the letter.[8]

Officially, Obama announced his intention to build a different defence system which was to be better and less costly for the US and its allies in Europe. He thought that efforts should be focused on eliminating the threat posed by Iran, which was most likely capable of producing short- and mid-range missiles but not intercontinental ones[9]. After difficult negotiations which started in April 2007, Obama's de-

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[5] D. Hamilton, N. Foster, *The Obama Administration and Europe,* in: *The Obama Moment...,* p. 41.

[6] The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded by a committee composed of five members chosen by the Norwegian parliament (Storting).

[7] B. Jones, *The Corning Clash? Europe and US Multilateralism under Obama*, in: *The Obama Moment...,* p. 73.

[8] *An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe,* http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,6825987,An_Open_Letter_to_the_Obama_Administration_from_Central.htmlixzzlrjtlM06E (accessed 14.08.2010).

[9] The new plan is described in more detail in: *Nowa strategia budowy systemu obrony przeciw rakietowej przez USA,* „Stosunki Międzynarodowe" 19.09.2009, http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/artykul,483,Nowa_strategia_budowy_systemu_obrony_przeciwrakietowej_przez_USA_?_q_and_a (accessed 18.10.2011).

cision was a great disappointment for leaders of Poland and the Czech Republic who perceived location of parts of the missile defence system in their countries as Americans' greater commitment to the countries' defence. For that very reason, in summer 2008, the two countries signed agreements with the United States, despite protests of large parts of Polish and Czech population. The date the US announced its new decision was very unfortunate, as it was the date of the 70th anniversary of the USSR's attack on Poland in 1939. Obama's decision was seen as Russia's success and as a proof that America's interest in maintaining strong ties with its European allies kept decreasing. Americans' desire to improve US-Russia relations proved to be their priority.[10]

Americans wanted to mitigate political consequences of their decision. The US Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced plans to deploy interceptors Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) in Poland in 2015. He also called for ratification of earlier agreements, including the agreement on the status of US forces - *SOFA* (signed on 11 December 2009). He announced that as George W. Bush promised, Patriot missiles would be installed in Poland.[11] It should be noted that, despite dissatisfaction of Poland and the Czech Republic, the idea of involving all allies in the anti-missile defence system met with positive reactions of NATO member states. Paradoxically that move of Obama may be interpreted as one strengthening the alliance and stopping differentiating between European countries on the basis of their support for US foreign policy.[12]

Nevertheless, Obama's refusal to join two important European events at the beginning of his term, i.e. the 70th anniversary of World War II outbreak in Gdańsk and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, was also perceived as a further proof of the lessening importance of European allies. Furthermore, the American president did not come to the annual summit of US and EU leaders (EU-US Summit) in Madrid in May 2010. His absence was explained by a need to address urgent domestic policy issues, especially Obama's healthcare reform. A "Wall Street Journal" commentator predicted at the time that Europeans would soon start longing for the times of G. W. Bush when transatlantic relations regularly made newspaper front pages everywhere.[13]

American Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Phillip Gordon made an accurate assessment of the place of transatlantic relations in the foreign policy agenda of the new US administration. He stated that "Obama's election was greeted with […] high expectations around the world. Compared with those [...]

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[10] *Obama Abandons Missile Defence Shield in Europe,* "The Guardian" 17.08.2009, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/17/missile-defence-shield-barack-obama (accessed 13.01.2012).

[11] *Nowa strategia budowy systemu obrony przeciwrakietowej przez USA*...

[12] More in: P. Matera, R. Matera, (2004), *Transatlantyckie rozbieżności w dobie wojny z terroryzmem*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" No. 1, pp. 40-43.

[13] *Obama Won't Attend Annual EU Summit,* http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10 0014240 52748704 722304575037650352214396.html (accessed 04.02.2012).

expectations, our cooperation with Europe might not be so impressive […]. A more realistic assessment, however, I think reveals that the United States and Europe are working extraordinarily well together even on problems […] that so divided us in the past."[14]

ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN THE PERIOD OF FINANCIAL CRISIS

The annual EU-US summits of leaders are meetings at which a wide range of co-operation issues is discussed. At the 2009 meeting in Washington, D.C. it was noted that economies of the United States and the EU were closely connected and that both the US and the EU led in provision of development assistance. The EU-US co-operation was recognised to be vital due to the impact of both economies on global economy and responsibility to overcome difficulties it experienced.[15]

That was particularly important in the time of financial crisis which began to the end of G.W. Bush's presidency and quickly spread to European markets linked to the US economy. The beginning of the crisis is associated with the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers investment bank which specialised in financial services for companies. It was considered to be a most reliable financial institution in the United States. Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy brought about long-term declines in stock markets (Dow Jones lost 4.4% at the time). European leaders blamed Americans for the crisis caused by irresponsible policies of their financial institutions.[16]

The US and the EU have been the largest economic partners in the world. According to the 2009 data, US companies provided half of Europe's FDI and their investments were worth $ 1.7 trillion. At the same time, European investments in the United States amounted to $1.5 trillion, that is 63% of direct foreign investment in the US. All those investments together created 4 million workplaces on both sides of the Atlantic.[17]

The US and the EU have seemed perfectly well prepared to upkeep their joint leadership in global economy and to bear responsibility for shaping institutions that govern it. Although the joint population of the US and the EU in 2009 was only 12% of world population (818 million people), the US and the EU together gener-

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[14] P. H. Gordon, *The US-Europe Partnership Under the Obama Administration, Remarks before the Council on Foreign Relations,* Washington DC, 9 December, 2009, http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2009/133417.htm. (accessed 30.12.2011).

[15] *2009 US-EU Summit Declaration,* November 3, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-eu-joint-declaration-and-annexes (accessed 22.05.2011). *Cf.* C. Bergmann, *The Trials and Tribulations of Transatlantic Ties,* "Deutsche Welle" November 28, 2011, www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15556631,00.html# (accessed 23.05.2011).

[16] See also: P. Pacuła (2009), *Kryzys finansowy w Stanach Zjednoczonych i jego możliwe konsekwencje*, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" January-February, pp. 105-117.

[17] R. J Ahearn, *US-EU Trade and Economic Relations: Key Policy Issues for the 112th Congress*, Congressional Research Service, February 17, 2011. http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu/transatlantic-topics/Articles/economy/U.S.-EU_Trade_and_Economic_Relations_CRS.pdf (accessed 24.02.2012).

ated almost 50% of gross world product (GWP). The flow of goods and services between them neared 40% of global trade.[18] That interdependence, however, made them more susceptible to the effects of the financial crisis. While in 2010 the US economy seemed to be recovering from its deep recession, some EU countries, i.e. Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland, still struggled with the debt crisis which slowed down economic growth of the whole European Union.

In April 2009, a G20 summit was held in London. Its final declaration included provisions to create an additional pool of funds in the IMF to aid countries which were most affected by the crisis: Iceland, Hungary and Ukraine. The G20 countries committed themselves to non-protectionism in trade, fostering development of poorer countries, cooperation in introducing countermeasures against so-called tax havens, and stated that they would endeavour to regulate income of big corporations' leaders at the international level.[19] European leaders tried to mediate the G20 summit to reconcile conflicting interests of the United States and the emerging economic powers.[20]

The EU-US summits held during Obama's first term confirmed the need to continue and intensify the work of the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC[21]) set up in 2007 to start a dialogue enabling cooperation in high-tech sectors (mainly consultations prior to the introduction of any regulations) and to further reduce barriers to trade and investment. In the times of crisis, declarations stating that countries would endeavour to reform their financial systems and withdraw protectionist measures have been particularly important. Declarations of intent to create new workplaces by means of structural reforms were repeated and so were the calls to avoid actions that could deepen the crisis, especially any attempts at devaluing currencies to boost export.

In 2010, the global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis dominated over economic cooperation issues. While in 2009, the United States and European countries tried to establish rules of cooperation, in 2010 different macroeconomic policies began to be implemented. Europeans did not accept the American stimulus plan as it involved extension of tax breaks for American entrepreneurs, but they could in no way alter that decision. Americans, on the other hand, tried to exert influence on their partners. While at the beginning of May 2010, European leaders worked on the *European Financial Stability Facility* (*EFSF*)[22], President Obama insisted that they take relevant decisions as soon as possible.[23]

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[18] *Ibid.*

[19] D. Hamilton, N. Foster, *op. cit.,* p. 40.

[20] *European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2010, Multilateral Issues,* http://www.ecfr.eu/scorecard/2010/issues (accessed 13.04.2011).

[21] At the EU-US summit in April 2007, the leaders present obliged themselves to intensify trade relations further by eliminating barriers to trade and investment. A free transatlantic market was to be created by 2015. The Transatlantic Economic Council was created then, and its general objective is to promote and monitor actions undertaken with that goal in mind.

[22] It is a programme offering financial support to countries struggling with economic problems due to the crisis. It was adopted on 10 May 2010.

[23] *European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2010, United States,* http://www.ecfr.eu/scorecard/2010/usa (accessed 13.04.2011).

ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANTISTAN

Cooperation in the foreign policy area was the most important aspect of transatlantic cooperation during Obama's first term. The unprecedented NATO decision to get involved in operations in Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was put to a serious test. Inability to defeat the Talibans and bring peace to Afghanistan, lack of spectacular successes and the growing number of coalition deaths made the public press governments to end the Afghanistan mission. Extended presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan, operating under the name of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), pressed Obama to adopt a new strategy.[24]

American Secretary of Defense Robert Gates introduced a new strategy at the NATO summit in April 2009. Americans posited to withdraw troops from Afghanistan after the Afghan forces were ready to ensure security to local people. It was emphasised that the situation in neighbouring Pakistan had a negative impact on the length of the conflict. There, the Taliban had bases from which they attacked the territory of Afghanistan. Therefore, a joint strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af/Pak Strategy) was adopted. Gates did not ask for any declarations and obtained support for the Af/Pak Strategy from other NATO members. On one hand, it was a positive gesture toward the allies. On the other hand, it was a proof that the European military presence in Afghanistan was not a key issue for the US. Consequently, it can be concluded that Europe was not an important partner for the US when it came to military cooperation.[25] Americans knew that European public opinion was against increasing the size of contingents, so they decided to avoid public discussions not to weaken the Alliance.

In December 2009, Obama announced that the American contingent in Afghanistan would be increased to 30 thousand soldiers. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen supported that plan, stressing that the whole North Atlantic Alliance and not just the United States was responsible for the mission. He declared that in 2010 NATO members would provide an additional contingent of at least 5 thousand soldiers.[26] Among countries which approvingly responded to that challenge were: Poland (committed to provide additional 600 soldiers), the UK (500 soldiers), Italy (1,000 soldiers), Slovakia (250 soldiers) and Albania (85 soldiers). Other countries delayed their explicit declarations (e.g. France and Germany), while Canada and the Netherlands intended to withdraw their troops in 2010-2011.[27] At the same time Europeans offered a different kind of support for Afghanistan. Although in January 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel decided to send only additional 500 soldiers to Afghanistan, she also decided to provide Afghanistan with USD 70 million

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[24] J. Dobbins, *Obama's Af/Pak Strategy,* in: *The Obama Moment...,* pp. 141-150.

[25] B. Jones, *op. cit.,* pp. 74-75.

[26] V. Morelli, P. Belkin, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*, Congressional Research Service, 3 December 2009, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33627.pdf, pp. 2-8 (accessed 14.08.2011).

[27] "Gazeta Wyborcza" 4.12.2009.

to support the country development. Those who criticised such solutions pointed out that because European soldiers followed a very well-defined frame of engagement, American soldiers were the ones who were victims of attacks. The ISAF abbreviation was ironically spelled out as *I Saw Americans Fight*.[28]

Decisions of some countries to greatly reduce their contingents or withdraw them completely, led to misunderstandings within NATO. Still, the need to cooperate in the face of on-going war meant that NATO internal divergences were not publicised. Declarations about preparing Afghan forces to defend their country unassisted and provide stability in their homeland were very important, but it was hard to foresee how the withdrawal of the Alliance from Afghanistan would affect both Afghanistan and the cohesion of NATO itself.

COOPERATION ON IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

In comparison to Bush's position on Iran suspected of wanting to acquire nuclear weapons, Obama's approach was more pragmatic. On 20 March 2009, Obama gave a speech to citizens of Iran, declaring the end of isolation policy toward Iran. However, due to the lack of diplomatic relations with Teheran, the burden of negotiations with Iran was supposed to fall, just as before, on the shoulders of EU countries. From their point of view, the declared by the US president willingness to cooperate promised them US potential support in the negotiations.

During the Bush administration, France, Germany and the UK carried negotiations with Iran. Their aim was to persuade Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment programme in exchange for economic concessions. However, that approach did not bring tangible results. Every now and then Teheran would break negotiations and take further steps to acquire nuclear weapons. Consequently, the negotiating EU countries together with the US began to promote the idea of the UN imposing sanctions on Iran. Results were very limited because of resistance from China and Russia.[29]

The EU policy toward Iran was impaired by two factors: dependency on crude oil supplies and the necessity to coordinate its strategy with US objectives. The European perception of Iran was less ideological than the American one. Nevertheless, it did not mean that the leaders wanted to allow the Iranian nuclear programme to continue. It was more a matter of rhetoric, greater openness to negotiations and granting of economic concessions.[30]

In November 2011, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) prepared a report which read that Iran worked on nuclear weapons development in 2010 or

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[28] W. Drozdiak (2010), *The Brussels Wall,* "Foreign Affairs" May/June, p. 10.

[29] R. Miller, *The European Union's Counterproductive Iran Sanctions. The Case for Pulling Back, "*Foreign Affairs" 23 February 2012. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ 137298/rory-miller/the-european-unions-counterproductive-iran-sanctions (accessed 04.05.2012).

[30] R. Parsi, *The Obama Effect and the Iranian Conundrum,* in: *The Obama Moment...,* p. 157 and 163-165.

even earlier, and that some of its activities might have been continued. Although the document was meant to be read by the UN Security Council only, its contents unexpectedly leaked to the media (probably as a result of a controlled information leak). In result of the leak, the United States, the UK and France imposed sanctions on the Iranian banking sector. The United States introduced also restrictions on companies supplying equipment and technology to Iranian companies in oil and chemical industries.

In response to the sanctions, at the end of November 2011, the British Embassy in Teheran was stormed by protesters. The UK decided to close down its embassy and expel Iranian diplomats from London. It did not break its diplomatic relations with Iran in order to keep the door to negotiations on the nuclear programme open. At that time, China and Russia became more willing to support new UN sanctions. France called on the EU to consider imposing an embargo on Iranian crude oil and freezing European assets of the Central Bank of Iran. In a gesture of solidarity, Germany, France and the Netherlands recalled their ambassadors in Teheran. Experts were afraid that Europe's withdrawal from the negotiations would result in the situation in Iran getting out of control. However, European countries evidently lost patience for Iran, which constantly broke its promises, and decided to increase their pressure. It brought them closer to the position of the US as America long supported such an approach.

In December 2011, the EU tightened sanctions on Iran in energy, transport and finance sectors. However, the issue of an embargo on crude oil exports was problematic at the time of crisis and the EU's dependence on Iranian oil was high. Talks between the United States, the EU and some Arab countries were held in Washington, D.C. Representatives of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) unofficially declared that they were ready to compensate for lost Iranian supplies to Europe if the decision about sanctions was taken. The United States organised the meeting in order to support its European allies and to encourage them to maintain their tough stance against Iran.[31]

European countries paid a higher price for the sanctions than the United States which did not have such intense economic relations with Iran. Nevertheless, in January 2012, the EU decided to suspend imports of crude oil and its derivatives from Iran, block technology and equipment imports for Iranian industries, temporarily stop signing new contracts and terminate contracts which were already in force by 1 July 2012. It meant that a complete embargo on oil deliveries to the EU began on that day. Freezing the assets of Iran's Central Bank was also an important measure putting pressure on Iran.[32]

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[31] M. Landler, *United States and Its Allies Expand Sanctions on Iran,* "The New York Times" 6 March 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/ll/22/world/middleeast/iran-stays-away-from-nuclear-talks.html?_r = 1 (accessed 12.04.2012).

[32] *US, Europe Set New Talks with Iran on Nuclear Dispute; Obama Says Time for Diplomacy, not War*, March 6, 2012, http://fftimes.com/node/249693 (accessed 12.04.2012).

Already in February 2012, negative effects of the sanctions on the Iranian economy became noticeable. After the initial retaliation (Iranian ban on oil exports to France and the UK), the Iranian government became more willing to re-enter negotiations about its nuclear programme. In March 2012, Iranians agreed to let the IAEA inspectors into the country, and Obama conducted intensive talks with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who considered a military action against Iranian nuclear facilities. The American president, despite Republicans' criticism, was against such a solution. The head of European diplomacy, Catherine Ashton, declared that five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany had agreed on a new round of talks about the Iranian nuclear programme, although the West, remembering previous rounds, was sceptical about its chances to succeed.[33]

REACTION OF THE ALLIES TO THE ARAB SPRING

The revolution in the Arab world began on 18 December 2010 in Tunisia with speeches against President Ben Ali. An internal conflict in Egypt was a much bloodier affair. Protests against President Hosni Mubarak began at the beginning of January 2011.[34] After revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, protests swept almost all Arab countries, except for Qatar and Lebanon.[35]

The events in Arab countries caught Western countries by surprise. It is worth remembering that both the EU countries and the United States maintained good relations with authoritarian regimes in Arab countries and in some cases supported those regimes. In consequence, their credibility among the peoples of North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula who rebelled against their governments, was rather low. It was difficult to predict the course of events, which was why the West initially assumed the position of an observer, wondering what might the potential consequences of overthrowing the dictators be. The reaction of the EU and the US to the Arab Spring was seen as a dilemma between concerns about the stability of the region (particularly the impact of the events on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) and satisfaction with democratic reforms. European leaders also worried about the impact of the events on their countries' internal security because of the influx of new immigrants.[36]

Considering the level of distrust toward both the former European colonial powers and the United States, initial reservations were understandable. Nevertheless, NATO countries, and especially its European members, could not afford to remain

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[33] R. Miller, *op. cit.*

[34] Mubarak resigned from office on 11 February 2011.

[35] W. Repetowicz (2011)*,"Arabska wiosna" - szanse i zagrożenia,* Brief Programowy Instytutu Kościuszki, April, http://www.ik.org.pl/cms/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/arabska-wiosna.pdf (accessed 11.05.2012).

[36] *EU-Washington Forum ONLINE, Debate Summary,* http://www.iss.europa.eu/regions/ united-states /washington-forum-debate/ (accessed 23.02.2012).

passive in the face of the events taking place in very sensitive regions. Ben Ali's resignation on 14 January 2011 and the outbreak of protests in other Arab countries convinced the West that a coherent strategy needed to be developed. The West was aware that complex interests and relations between countries of the region had to be taken into consideration and thus a decision to take military action was made only in the case of Libya though many other Arab countries experienced dramatic events.

NATO INTERVENTION IN LIBYA

The uprising against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi began in Benghazi situated on the Mediterranean Sea. Protesters announced the 17th of February to be a "day of rage" against the dictator who was in power for 41 years. The rebellion quickly spread to other Libyan cities and shortly turned into a civil war between the opponents of the regime and military troops that remained loyal to Gaddafi. As soon as on the 28th of February, the EU introduced sanctions against the Libyan regime: an embargo on arms sales, freezing of assets and visa restrictions. The Libyan National Council was set up in Benghazi on the 5th of March, and it declared itself to be the only representative of the nation. Five days later, the Council was recognised by France, which from then on started to play the biggest role in persuading other NATO members to take military action to support Gaddafi's opponents. That solution was sanctioned on the 17th of March with a resolution of the UN Security Council. It introduced a military no-fly zone over Libya and allowed for the use of military means to protect civilian population.[37]

That decision was still a far cry from a full consent of all NATO countries to pursue military intervention. The United States was already engaged militarily in two Muslim countries, namely Iraq and Afghanistan, and at first was very reluctant to support the solution. Americans would have preferred ceding responsibility for the military mission in Libya to Europeans. On the other hand, there was the fear that a limited engagement would not be sufficient and Gaddafi would remain in power. It was said that he could still be tolerated by the West if, after negotiations, he agreed to make some concessions e.g. a division of the country and a government of national unity, not to mention him guaranteeing the rebels' safety. It was clear that it would be difficult to monitor whether those conditions were respected and the US would not station its troops in another Muslim country.[38] Nevertheless, the United States was the first country which limited the access of the Libyan regime to its financial resources in American banks by freezing Libyan assets worth in total 32 milliard dollars. The US persuaded other countries to take similar actions.

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[37] Five member countries of the UN Security Council abstained from voting: Russia, China, Germany, India and Brazil.

[38] M. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly in Libya: What the United States Should Learn from Its War in Kosovo*, "Foreign Affairs" 30 March 2011, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67684/michael-ohanlon/winning-ugly-in-libya (accessed 23.11.2011).

President of France Nicolas Sarkozy strongly supported a military action. After having successfully pushed through the idea of establishing a no-fly zone over Libya at the UN forum, he tried to make sure that the potential military action would be carried out by NATO. He decided that putting the Alliance in charge of the operation would make more countries take part in it. The UK was also in favour of this solution and it supported France in the UN Security Council. Stabilisation of the situation in Libya was of key importance to Italy too, which, because of its geographical location, had many economic interests in Libya. Italy was therefore inclined to support the NATO intervention. Turkey, which for a long time opposed the use of NATO armed forces, finally agreed to offer a limited support sending its warships to the territorial waters of Libya.[39] Germany refused to engage in a military action of any sort. It only agreed to freeze financial assets of the Libyan government.[40]

Differences in opinions between the allies resulted in the United States, France, the UK, Canada and Italy taking part in the initial phase of the operation codenamed Odyssey Dawn which mostly involved bombarding targets connected with Gaddafi's forces from the air. Support was also offered by such NATO member countries as Belgium, Denmark, France, Spain, the Netherlands and Norway.[41] Although during the first two weeks Americans delivered most air strikes (370, the same number as all other countries together), Obama did not want that operation to be perceived as one carried under the command of the US. He argued that American role was supporting.[42]

On 27 March 2011, the North Atlantic Alliance reached a consensus. It was agreed that NATO would take control over the military campaign against Gaddafi under the codename Unified Protector. The aim of the Alliance was to monitor whether the arms embargo was respected, to patrol the no-fly zone and to protect civilians, which translated into bombarding ground forces loyal to Gaddafi.[43]

Aside from military actions, the allies launched an initiative called Libya Contact Group which was established at London conference on 29 March 2011. The founding meeting was attended by representatives of 40 countries and organisations. Shortly after, on 5 August 2011, representative of 28 countries and 6 international organisations met in Istanbul. They represented the UN, EU, NATO, the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the African Union. Meanwhile, forces of the rebel government (National Transitional Council - NTC) captured Tripoli. The NTC was recognised by the Contact Group as the legitimate representation of the Libyan people. Leaders of the Libyan Council approached NATO asking to con-

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[39] At the beginning, despite its official support for the NATO mission, Turkey kept its diplomats in Tripoli, suggesting that it still recognised Gaddafi's government.

[40] *Editorial: Discord Among Allies*, "The New York Times" March 23, 2011, http://www. nytimes. com/ 201 l/03/24/opinion/24thul.html (accessed 16.08.2011).

[41] I.H Daalder, J.G. Stavridis (2012), *NATO's Victory in Libya,* "Foreign Affairs" March/April, p. 3.

[42] E. Schmitt, *US Gives Its Air Power Expansive Role in Libya,* "The New York Times" 28 March 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/29/us/29military.html (accessed 16.08.2011).

[43] I.H. Daalder, J.G. Stavridis (2012), *op. cit.,* p. 3.

tinue its military engagement in Libya until all UN objectives were met. However, the main topic discussed by the Contact Group was the provision of further financial and military assistance to Gaddafi's opponents. It was decided that they would be given financial assets of the former regime which were frozen at the beginning of the campaign. Aid in rebuilding the country after the war was also offered but in order to avoid accusations of occupation, it was stressed that Libyans would be in charge of organising the assistance available.[44] The whole operation ended on 31 October 2011. It was then acknowledged that Gaddafi's opponents took over the control of the whole country and could create a new government.

ATTITUDE OF WESTERN COUNTRIES TOWARD NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES

European countries and the United States were aware that their greater engagement in the protest-stricken Arab countries could inflame the situation. The prevailing opinion was that by refraining from intervening, they would demonstrate trust and respect for local societies that should establish governments in their countries on their own. Offering discreet help to countries which managed to overthrow dictators was a better solution. The Deauville Partnership initiative was adopted at G8 summit in France in May 2011 and a commitment to support those countries in their political and economic transformation was made. Allies shared the responsibility for provision of economic help: Europeans were to become more involved in North Africa and the United States in the region of the Persian Gulf.[45]

During his visit to Warsaw in May 2011, Obama spoke about Poland as a role model for Arab countries which overthrew their dictators. It was a consequence of the fact, that the United States wanted to cede responsibility for North Africa to Europe. Obama stressed that democracy could not be brought about by force, thus distancing himself from his predecessor's strategy. He hoped that US allies would apply soft power to stabilise the situation in the region.[46]

In most cases, however, societies of the rebelling countries hardly had any chance of succeeding against the military machine of the regimes. It was clear in the case of Syria. According to UN estimates, 9 thousand people died there in 12 months since the conflict began in March 2011.[47] The situation in Syria caused the greatest

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[44] *Conclusions of the Libya Contact Group Meeting,* Istanbul, 25 August 2011, Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/conclusions-of-the-libya-contact-group-meeting_-istanbul_-25-august-2011.en.mfa (accessed 15.11.2011).

[45] S. Serfaty (2012), *The New Middle East Will Test Europe,*" Current History" March, pp. 118-119.

[46] J. Kiwerska (2011), *Obama w Warszawie i amerykańskie posłannictwo,*"Biuletyn Instytutu Zachodniego" No. 56, http://www.iz.poznan.pl (accessed 28.04.2012).

[47] *Advance Team of UN Observers Arrives in Syria to Report on Cessation of Violence*, "UN Daily News" March 16, 2012, http://www.un.org/news/dh/pdf/english/2012/16042012.pdf (accessed 28.04.2012).

concern in the West and therefore it was the most often discussed issue at high-level meetings. Americans closed their embassy in Damascus and got actively involved in the work of the Friends of Syria Group.[48] They also expanded the scope of sanctions against the government of Bashar al-Assad (e.g. all its assets in the US were frozen, all American citizens were forbidden to engage in any transactions with Bashar al-Assad and his officials, the import of Syrian oil was stopped). A military intervention in the country was excluded as an option.[49] The EU also introduced sanctions against Syria. It was decided to freeze Assad's financial assets and 9 members of his government were forbidden to enter the EU territory.[50]

SECURITY COOPERATION: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

The 2009 EU-US summit declaration read that in the face of terrorism and transnational crime, which were recognised as common threats, cooperation of ministries of justice and home affairs was necessary. The importance of new agreements regulating that cooperation was also underlined, i.e. ratification of the US-EU Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements, the work of the High Level Contact Group on protection of personal data, and the agreement between the US Department of Homeland Security and the EU border security agency Frontex. The Passenger Name Record Agreement on the conditions of transferring data of flight passengers was successfully negotiated, and cooperation on blocking financing terrorist organisations was to be continued. The parties also agreed to strengthen their cyber-security dialogue aimed at providing security in the cyber-space and identified areas of possible cooperation. For this purpose a special working group was established, i.e. the *EU-US Working Group on Cyber-security and Cyber-crime*[51].

NATO remained the most important pillar of transatlantic cooperation for security. The Lisbon Summit in November 2010, at which NATO's new Strategic Concept was adopted (the previous one was enacted in 1999), was relevant for NATO's future. The Strategic Concept listed security threats for NATO member states, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and cyber-crime. The Concept confirmed agreement on collective defence and cooperative security,

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[48] The first meeting of the Friends of Syria Group took place on 24 February 2011 in Tunis and the second one in Istanbul on 1 April 2012. The purpose of the meetings was to exert pressure on the regime in Damascus. The Syrian National Council was recognised as "representing all Syrians" at the meeting in Istanbul (83 countries took part in that meeting).

[49] J.M. Sharp, C.M. Blanchard, *Unrest in Syria and US Sanctions Against the Asad Regime,* Congressional Research Service, 16 February 2012, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/ RL33487.pdf (accessed 28.04.2012).

[50] *EU Imposes Sanctions on Syria's Assad,* http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/23/us-syria-idUSLDE73N02P20110523 (accessed 28.04.2012).

[51] *2009 US-EU Summit Declaration....*

and promised closer EU-NATO cooperation. Crisis prevention, conflict monitoring and assistance in stabilising countries where military operations ended were identified as its objectives. Despite scepticism in countries neighbouring with Russia, a wish to warm relations with that country, an important ally in the fight against terrorism and drug-trafficking, was declared[52].

In Lisbon, the Allies decided to develop a missile defence capability to protect NATO's populations and territories in Europe. Russia was offered a cooperative inclusion in the project implementation. The new system, as announced by Obama, was supposed to be less expensive and implemented within 10 years.[53] The objectives and provisions of the new strategy clearly indicated that NATO, while defending its security, would act primarily where most risks originate, i.e. outside territories of its member states. The wide-ranging cooperation with international organisations and countries outside NATO confirmed significant changes in the nature of the organisation.

The intervention in Libya was an important test for the Alliance. According to many commentators, the operation highlighted NATO's weaknesses but was successful. No casualties among NATO soldiers participating in the mission and, given the scale of the bombing, a relatively small number of casualties among Libyan civilian population were recognised as achievements. Europeans, who had often been criticised by the US for their insufficient military involvement in foreign missions, stood up to the challenge. Therefore the United States, which contributed most to neutralising Gaddafi's air defences, could be satisfied with the division of the operation costs.[54] Commentators also emphasised good coordination of actions, as evidenced by the commencement of the operation only four days after the decision to hand control over to NATO was taken. It was also important that, despite some countries' refusal to participate in the operation (e.g. Germany), no NATO member chose to block the intervention by vetoing it. Getting support for the operation from

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[52] 2010 Strategic Concept: *Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,* Lisbon, 19-20 November 2010, http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf (accessed 17.05.2011).

[53] S. Erlanger, J. Calmes, *NATO Agrees to Build Missile Defense System*, "The New York Times" 19 November, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/ 2010/11/20/ world/europe/20prexy.html (accessed 19.03.2011).

[54] Among European countries, the largest military engagement was on the part of France and the United Kingdom that performed over 40% of air strikes and destroyed one-third of the targets set. Denmark, Norway and Belgium, together destroyed as many enemy targets as France (C. M. O'Donnell, J. Vaïsse, *Is Libya NATO Final Bow?,* The Brookings Institution, December 2, 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/1202_libya_odonnell_vaisse.aspx). The United States, in addition to participating in the bombings and determining their targets, provided fuel and important intelligence. Italy carried out many reconnaissance missions and, like Greece, availed their airbases. Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Norway and the UAE deployed fighters. Help in enforcing the no-fly zone was given by the forces of Jordan, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Qatar. Most of the above-mentioned countries, as well as Bulgaria and Romania, sent their warships to the conflict area in order to monitor compliance with the arms embargo (I. H. Daalder, J.G. Stavridis (2012), *op. cit.* p. 5).

the UN Security Council also constituted a success.[55] Furthermore, it turned out that NATO was well prepared to deal with such crises. It had the needed military means and, above all, a structure capable to efficiently coordinate military actions. In Libya, NATO coordinated actions of 18 countries, i.e. 14 NATO members and four partners (the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar, and Sweden), all under one command.

The relatively little involvement of the US was considered the most important reason for concern about the future of NATO and its missions.[56] The worry was not about US military contribution but giving up leadership. It can be assumed that without the practical support of Americans, the operation would be more difficult to coordinate, it could also take much longer and its outcome would be uncertain. However, leaving aside such speculations, it should be remembered that in the case of Libya, France was the most active country mobilising other members of the Alliance to take action.

According to Ivo Daalder, the US permanent representative to NATO, and James Stavridis, the Commander of NATO in Europe, there was still too much divergence of interests between members of the Alliance. They emphasised that although no country blocked the Libyan intervention, only 14 states, i.e. half of the Alliance member states, were actively involved.[57] Some chose not to participate in the intervention due to lack of necessary resources. Some simply did not have any interest in Libya, so they considered their passiveness justified. Germany's attitude was the greatest disappointment, as it abstained from voting in the UN Security Council when the possibility of a military intervention was being approved. Daalder and Stavridis feared that it could be the beginning of the Alliance's split into a group of countries ready to participate in humanitarian missions and a group that did not feel the need to support partners in a spirit of solidarity.

Daalder and Stavridis called on European states to invest more in military objectives. They reminded that during the Libyan operation the United States was responsible for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in 75% and provided about 75% of fuel for combat aircrafts. In 2011, European members of NATO spent on average ca. 1.6% of their GDP on military objectives while the US spent 4%. It meant that the US allocated three times more money than other members.[58]

The intervention in Libya was followed by a debate on the future of security cooperation in transatlantic relations. It is difficult to challenge the statement of Dan Allin that the interest of the United States was more focused on the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, the financial crisis pressed for reduction of defence budgets and

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[55] C. M. O'Donnell, J. Vaïsse, *op. cit.*

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] The following countries were variously involved in the operation: Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Turkey, United States and Great Britan, Albania, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia limited their involvement to political support or humanitarian aid.

[58] I. H. Daalder, J.G. Stavridis, (2012), *op. cit.,* p. 6.

plans of gradual withdrawal of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. According to Allin, economic problems would have an impact not only on domestic policies but also foreign policies of superpowers. He predicted that European states' incapacity to support Americans in key military missions would weaken mutual trust and transatlantic bonds. According to Allin, the greatest threat to NATO was that the US might lose interest in NATO's existence. He hoped that such a perspective can be an incentive for Europe to be more active.[59]

When scanning the list of Obama's foreign policy priorities, one can notice that in the implementation of most of them, the United States needs cooperation with European states. But, being tired with Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans may insist that Europe intervenes in conflicts important to European interests on its own.[60] Experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya are likely to make the US even more cautious about taking military actions abroad. Probably, the US involvement will be conditioned by the commitment and contributions of other coalition members. If the use of military force becomes necessary, the planned cuts in the US defence budget put Europeans, who are unable to develop common defence mechanisms, in an uncomfortable situation. Moreover, in addition to the US traditional postulate to increase defence outlays, the US expects that its partners develop strategies to deal with crises, i.e. take more responsibility for security, at least in their close vicinity.

Expert on transatlantic relations William Drozdiak believes that the Alliance can be revived through greater coordination of cooperation between NATO and the EU. He writes that the combination of military force and soft power instruments will make the two organisations more willing to overcome current threats and face competition from Asian superpowers. The very title of his article - *The Brussels Wall* - illustrates the absurdity of the situation in which despite the headquarters of the two organisations being located in one city, their cooperation is minimal.[61]

For a long time, attempts to establish a permanent cooperation scheme between the EU and NATO failed, mainly because of distrust between the US and France. France had long not joined the military structures of the Alliance and endeavoured to organise a European defence system as a counterweight to NATO. However, when in March 2009 Sarkozy announced France's return to NATO's integrated military command structure, possibilities for closer cooperation opened up. In 2012, 21 countries were members of both the EU and NATO and the crisis forced reduction of defence spending. Sharing the spending rather than duplicating it, was a solution. Integrated efforts of both organisations would increase the effectiveness of Western initiatives in global politics. Jointly, they would be able to increase funding for peacekeeping,

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[59] D. Allin, *Beyond Europe - Transatlantic Relations in a Global World*, in: *European Security*..., pp. 62-67.

[60] C. M. O'Donnell, *The Future of EU-US Security and Defense Cooperation: What Lies Ahead?*, EU Institute for Security Studies, 30 October 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/10/03-us-eu-defense-odonnell (accessed 16.02.2012).

[61] Only as late as in 2009, the decision was made that the Head of the European foreign policy and NATO Secretary General would meet for breakfast once a month.

humanitarian aid, programmes promoting trade and investments in the Middle East, etc.[62] It can also be assumed that differences in the approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between the United States and Europe would be overcome, which could increase mediation effectiveness in peace talks.

Drozdiak anticipated that the Lisbon Treaty would encourage the EU to take bolder steps on the international stage. At the same time he noted that the EU was unwilling to improve its military capacities. EU low spending on defence, lack of necessary equipment (e.g. transport aircrafts) hampered its commitment. According to Drozdiak, Americans should accept that conflict resolution requires a simultaneous use of two most effective tools: NATO command structures and EU assistance programmes[63].

CONCLUSIONS

During his visit to Europe in May 2011, Barack Obama stated explicitly that the twenty-first century will be America's Pacific Century. However, global events during his first term made it clear that the United States needs to cooperate with Europe, both in world politics and on stabilising the economy. Joint actions were not always successful, but most of them were long-term and assessing their effectiveness is not yet possible. Joint initiatives and close relationships are vital for the West if it wants to successfully face challenges of new powers. Political polarisation in the United States and the EU inability to purse a common foreign policy are often considered greatest obstacles to a coordinated policy.[64]

It needs to be recognised that although interests of the EU and the US in world politics are similar, their priorities and ways of achieving their objectives often differ. It is hard to imagine pursuing a common foreign policy by the allies and thus they have to act differently. For example, conditionalities relevant to the EU-Russia relationship are different from those of the US-Russia relationship. The EU policy toward Arab states is also different as the EU borders with Muslim countries and has a large community professing Islam within its borders.[65]

Despite the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is divided on e.g. its strategy toward Russia, common energy policy and engagement in Afghanistan. Obama has been actively involved in domestic affairs. In his foreign policy, withdrawing US troops from Iraq and preparing to leave Afghanistan were priorities[66]. However, the

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[62] W. Drozdiak (2010), *op. cit.,* p. 10.

[63] *Ibid.,* pp. 7-12.

[64] C. Bergmann, *The Trials and Tribulations of Transatlantic Ties,* "Deutsche Welle" 28 November 2011, www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15556631,00.html# (accessed 25.03.2012).

[65] D. Calleo (2008), *Why EU and US Geopolitical Interests are no Longer the Same,* "Europe's World" Summer (accessed 20.03.2012).

[66] K. Volker, *The 'Obama effect' Has Been to Lay Bare Deep Transatlantic Tensions,* "Europe's World" Spring 2010, http://europesworld.org/2010/02/01/the-obama-effect-has-been-to-lay-bare-deep-transatlantic-tensions/#.UoZo003xLV0 (accessed 20.03.2012).

capability of European countries to carry diplomatic actions and their financial assistance were invaluable in helping new democracies in North Africa. Sharing responsibilities there was therefore a very important aspect of transatlantic cooperation.

Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed to the need of consolidation and broadening of the notion of the "West" to include North America, Europe (also Russia and Turkey), South Korea and Japan if the United States wants to maintain its superpower leadership. He believed that Americans should not neglect Europe and underestimate its potential. At the same time the US should upkeep its strong commitment to NATO and support European countries in their efforts to involve Turkey and Russia in some cooperation projects with the West.[67]

It should be emphasised that the United States and Europe continue to cooperate in many areas. New initiatives are not always spectacular but the range of shared interests is very wide and cooperation often brings positive results. When arguing that transatlantic relations have weakened during Obama's first term, many experts proposed to create a collaborative organisation covering all areas of activities of the United States and Europe. That proposal was not new. It was put forward when allies' stances diverged during the Cold War and after its end, when the need to maintain close ties was questioned, e.g. in NATO when the USSR collapsed. However, the United States and the EU are members of so many organisations and have so many separate forums for dialogue on various issues that the creation of a new body would be pointless. The key to success may be an effective cooperation in the framework of existing agreements and both parties' compliance with rules agreed. Europeans must also accept the fact that in the new balance of power situation in the world, they are not the United States' only allies.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present the policy of the United States of America toward Europe during the presidency of Barrack Obama (first term) in the context of a changing concept of American involvement worldwide. Economic cooperation and discrepancies among allies at the time of financial crisis are considered. The following instances of American involvement in international conflicts are analysed: mission in Afghanistan, attempts to mediate the Near Eastern peace process, developments of the "Arab Spring" and NATO's intervention in Libya. The US and European countries cooperated also to eliminate other threats to global security such as: Iranian nuclear programme and international terrorism. Despite a change of priorities in American foreign policy, the transatlantic alliance remains its major pillar.

[67] Z. Brzezinski (2010), *Balancing the East, Upgrading the West,* "Foreign Affairs*"* January/February, pp. 97-104.