

Policy Brief

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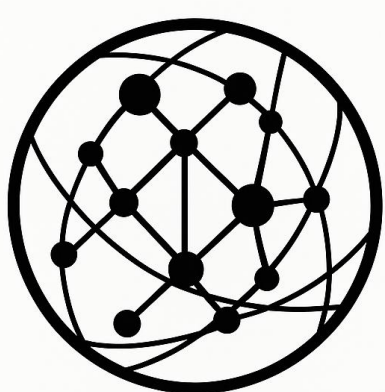
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From Representative of the West to Primary Node:

The Transformation of the United States in the Future Western and Transatlantic Political System

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Key Judgments

The United States is transitioning from representing the West to serving as its primary network node. This transformation reflects a structural evolution of the international system rather than a simple decline in U.S. power. The Western system is shifting from an alliance-based hierarchy to a partially aligned network configuration, within which strategic divergence is widening under conditions of cost pressure and asymmetric threat perception. Under systemic stress, this structure may evolve toward a dual-core configuration centered on the United States and Europe, characterized by conditional alignment rather than unified strategy. The principal systemic risk lies not in bloc fragmentation, but in declining coordination capacity and increasing proximity to nonlinear escalation thresholds, conceptualized here as the Loss-of-Control Threshold (LoCT).

Executive Summary

This policy brief argues that the United States is not losing its centrality within the Western system, but is undergoing a functional transformation in how that centrality is exercised. In the postwar order, the United States operated as the institutional, security, and narrative representative of the West, a role made possible by a relatively cohesive alliance structure and manageable cost distribution.

That structure is now eroding under the combined pressure of rising systemic costs, increasing divergence among allies, and growing system complexity. Cost-imposition dynamics have raised the marginal burden of sustaining global commitments, while differences in threat perception and strategic time horizons have weakened alignment across the transatlantic system. At the same time, conflict environments have become more networked and decentralized, reducing the feasibility of centralized control.

As a result, the Western system is transitioning toward a networked configuration in which alignment is selective, coordination is situational, and commitments are increasingly conditional. Within this system, the United States remains the most capable and connected actor, but no longer functions as the unified representative of Western interests. Instead, it operates as a high-centrality node that enables coordination across security, technological, and financial domains.

This transformation introduces new systemic risks. As coordination weakens and signaling becomes fragmented, the system approaches a Loss-of-Control Threshold, a tipping point at which escalation becomes nonlinear and increasingly difficult to manage. The future Western system is therefore unlikely to fragment into opposing blocs, but will instead evolve into a partially integrated and structurally differentiated network in which influence is exercised through connectivity rather than representation.

Policy Brief**1. The Traditional Structure: The United States as Representative of the West**

The postwar Western system was structured around a hierarchical alliance framework centered on the United States. Within this system, U.S. centrality was expressed through institutional leadership, security provision, and normative articulation. The United States functioned simultaneously as the architect of key international institutions, the ultimate guarantor of security through extended deterrence and force projection, and the primary source of the normative narrative underpinning the liberal international order.

These dimensions combined to produce a system in which U.S. action was widely interpreted as Western action. Representation was therefore not merely symbolic, but structurally embedded within the organization of the system itself.

2. Drivers of Structural Transformation

The erosion of this representational role is driven by three interrelated structural dynamics.

First, the logic of deterrence has shifted from dominance to cost imposition, as low-cost offensive capabilities increasingly generate sustained pressure on high-cost defensive systems. This transformation systematically raises the long-term cost of maintaining global order, progressively transforming leadership into a resource-intensive and structurally contested function.

Second, strategic divergence among allies has become more pronounced. While the United States increasingly prioritizes system-level stability across multiple theaters, regional actors often focus on immediate and localized security concerns. These differences in threat perception, escalation tolerance, and time horizon undermine the possibility of unified strategic representation.

Third, the structure of conflict itself has evolved toward a networked and decentralized form. Distributed actors, fragmented decision-making, and amplification-driven information systems reduce the capacity of any single actor to control or represent the system as a whole. Outcomes increasingly emerge from interactions within a complex network rather than from centralized direction.

3. The Emerging Structure: A Partially Aligned Western Network

The Western system is undergoing a transition from a cohesion-based alliance structure to a partially aligned network configuration. In this emerging system, alignment is no longer comprehensive or permanent, but selective, situational, and constrained by context. This pattern has become particularly visible in recent crises, including the war in Ukraine and the U.S.–Israel–Iran conflict, where variations in commitment, response tempo, and strategic priorities have exposed the limits of cohesive alliance behavior.

States increasingly cooperate on a modular basis, aligning across specific issue areas such as security, technology, or trade rather than through fully integrated commitments. Coordination is becoming event-driven and contingent, activated in response to particular crises rather than sustained through continuous institutional mechanisms. At the same time, commitments are increasingly limited by domestic political constraints, fiscal pressures, and differentiated strategic priorities.

Taken together, these dynamics do not merely reflect adaptation, but signal a structural reconfiguration in which cohesion gives way to conditional alignment, and integrated order is replaced by layered and modular connectivity.

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4. The Transformation of the U.S. Role

Within this emerging networked system, the role of the United States is undergoing a structural reconfiguration. This transformation does not reflect a loss of centrality, but a shift in how centrality is exercised, moving from representational authority to network-based influence.

The United States no longer functions as the unified representative of Western interests, but instead occupies a position of maximum centrality within a distributed network defined by connectivity, dependency, and systemic embeddedness. Influence is increasingly derived not from speaking for the system, but from linking and stabilizing it. This position confers not absolute control, but structural indispensability within a system that no longer admits centralized authority.

At the same time, U.S. power is less frequently exercised through direct control of collective action and more through structuring the conditions under which coordination occurs. This involves facilitating interaction across fragmented actors, enabling interoperability between heterogeneous systems, and anchoring network dynamics through institutional, technological, and operational linkages. Leadership thus becomes a function of network positioning rather than directive authority.

This shift is further reflected in the transformation of U.S. power from traditional order provision to platform-based structural influence. The United States increasingly shapes global outcomes through the infrastructures it controls, including security networks, technological ecosystems, and financial systems. Rather than imposing order directly, it defines the architecture within which other actors operate.

5. Transatlantic Reconfiguration: Toward a Dual-Core Western System

Under conditions of intensified strategic distrust, asymmetric threat perception, or systemic shock, the transatlantic system may evolve toward a dual-core configuration. This does not imply institutional collapse, but rather a functional differentiation within an interconnected system, in which two primary centers of power emerge with partially overlapping but increasingly distinct roles.

The United States constitutes one core, characterized by global military reach, technological infrastructure, and financial centrality. Europe constitutes a second core, increasingly defined by regulatory authority, industrial policy autonomy, and regionally grounded security capacity. The relationship between these cores is best understood as structured interdependence under conditions of partial divergence, in which cooperation persists alongside growing competition and underlying strategic distrust.

This configuration reflects not a division between civilizations, but a structural differentiation within a shared institutional and civilizational framework. Unity is preserved at the level of identity, but increasingly fractured at the level of strategy, producing a system that is formally unified yet operationally divided.

6. Systemic Risks in a Networked Western Order

The transition to a networked system does not eliminate systemic risk, but redistributes it across a more complex and less coordinated structure. In such a system, instability emerges not from a single point of failure, but from the interaction of multiple actors operating under conditions of uncertainty and partial alignment.

As decision-making becomes more distributed, the capacity for timely and coherent collective action declines, reducing the effectiveness of coordinated responses to crises. At the same time, signaling becomes fragmented as multiple actors generate overlapping and sometimes contradictory messages, increasing the likelihood of misinterpretation and unintended escalation.

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These dynamics converge toward a Loss-of-Control Threshold (LoCT), defined as the point at which system-level interactions exceed the capacity for coordinated control, generating self-reinforcing and nonlinear escalation dynamics. Crucially, crossing this threshold does not require deliberate escalation by any single actor, but instead emerges from the cumulative interaction of decentralized decisions within a complex system.

Proposition (Loss-of-Control Threshold):

In a networked conflict system, as coordination capacity declines, signaling coherence fragments, and the number of interacting actors increases, the probability of crossing the Loss-of-Control Threshold rises nonlinearly, producing escalation dynamics that are increasingly decoupled from intentional strategic control.

Conclusion

The transformation of the United States within the Western system reflects a broader structural reconfiguration of international order. What is changing is not the position of the United States within that system, but the mechanism through which its centrality is exercised.

Rather than moving from center to periphery, the United States is transitioning from a model of representational authority to one of networked connectivity. In this emerging configuration, power is expressed less through authority than through influence, order is sustained less by hierarchy than by connectivity, and stability depends less on dominance than on resilience.

This shift marks not just a transformation, but a structural break in how order is produced, coordinated, and sustained under conditions of systemic complexity. The Western system is not dissolving, but it is becoming progressively harder to coordinate, harder to interpret, and ultimately harder to control.

Final Statement

The United States will remain central not because it leads the West, but because it is the only actor still able to hold together a system that is already slipping beyond full control.