Top 10 — GAC Essay Competition 2025

Essay Question

Germany, the United States, and the wider alliance are at a crossroads. We are entering a new era of international relationships, affecting dimensions such as global trade, defense, and security. This moment calls for a Transatlantic Transformation – a rethinking of how we collaborate, communicate, and confront global challenges together.

What are your ideas for redefining the transatlantic partnership in light of this transformation? How would you reinvigorate it for the future?

Title of the Essay

Africa, the Alliance's Proving Ground

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OPINION
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Illustration by ChatGPT

By Kaan Cihan Türkay

I grew up in a fragment of transatlantic history: a German-English primary school in Berlin that once served the children of American soldiers, just across from the United States Embassy. German and American children sat in the same classrooms, taught by both nations' teachers. Their families mingled at school fairs and football games. It was a daily lesson in the quiet trust that keeps alliances alive. That trust is fraying.

In 1945, the United States faced a defining choice. It could replay 1919, keeping Germany down, restricting its industry, ruling over it, or take a bold new course. The Marshall Plan chose cooperation over punishment: invest in recovery, integrate a former enemy, build an ally whose prosperity reinforced shared security. The lesson has not changed. Isolation breeds resentment; cooperation builds stability.

Today's test is not Europe's reconstruction. It is Africa's rise.

Africa's markets will help shape this century. The population is young and growing; the continent sits atop minerals and renewable resources that power the green transition. China saw this early. Through Belt and Road, it financed ports, railways and power systems, buying influence where the next generation of producers and consumers will emerge. Washington and Berlin have hesitated, distracted by fights over defense spending, trade rules and the uneven application of shared values, and now lag in both presence and perception.

Africa offers something rare in geopolitics: strategic importance without an immediate risk of war. It is a proving ground where the alliance can show that unity delivers tangible benefits, unburdened by the baggage of other arenas. Success would not only expand markets; it would restore the cooperative habits that help resolve disputes over defense, trade and values. But all of it hinges on one thing: credibility.

Across the Global South, Western unity on Ukraine is measured against hesitation in other crises. In the age of TikTok, two stitched clips (action for Kyiv in the first, inaction elsewhere in the second) can fix that inconsistency in the public mind before a statement is drafted. Authoritarian governments seize on the side-by-side contrast to claim moral equivalence. The remedy is not rhetoric but proof: apply principles consistently, explain hard choices plainly, and deliver results on timelines people can see at home and abroad.

The fastest way to prove credibility is to start with energy. Reliable, affordable electricity underpins everything else: jobs, industry, modern public services. Without it, economies are exposed to price shocks, climate stress and outside leverage. Africa's growth will outpace most regions; its median age is under 20; its solar and wind resources are world-class. Each year of delay deepens the gap, not only in infrastructure but in the credibility the alliance needs to counter China's influence.

For the United States and Germany, the world's second- and third-largest exporters, this is not charity. Prosperity depends on trade, and trade depends on markets that trust you. Trust grows from projects that work and contracts that are fair. It also strengthens both economies by diversifying critical-mineral supply chains, reducing dependency on strategic rivals and opening new export opportunities.

A Renewable Energy Marshall Plan can turn intent into results. Blend public and private finance to cut capital costs, with local-currency guarantees to shield projects from exchange-rate swings. Fund cross-border transmission and storage so power reaches factories and homes.

Build vocational pipelines and university partnerships so African engineers design, operate and maintain systems for decades.

Build it for proof, not press releases. No white elephants. Use open tenders, local co-ownership, independent audits and milestone-based payouts to keep delivery on track, and measure and publish grid uptime, household connections, tariff affordability, local content and women's participation. Set goals big enough to matter and clear enough to track: by 2035, connect 200 million people to clean power; within a decade, double Africa's renewable manufacturing; over the long term, cut U.S.-E.U. exposure to mineral shocks by 40 percent through diversified sourcing and recycling. Deliver early gains within two years; complete manufacturing and grid integration by 2035; advance mineral diversification thereafter.

Trade policy should lock in the gains. Align with the African Continental Free Trade Area. Lower targeted barriers for clean-energy inputs that meet strong labor and environmental standards. Use joint U.S.-E.U. procurement to create predictable demand for African-made components. Adjust export-credit and development-finance mandates to prioritize grid and storage projects with real local value-add.

Critics will point out that in some places, weak governance and flawed contracting have sunk investments and bred mistrust. This plan is built to avoid that. Clear rules, shared local stakes and independent audits from day one make misuse far harder and help ensure projects deliver the jobs, infrastructure and returns they promise. The benefits at home are tangible: more resilient supply chains, stronger export markets and fewer crisis-driven spending sprees later.

The stakes are clear: hesitate, and China will cement the standards that tilt markets toward its hardware and software. Dependency will harden around batteries, grids and digital infrastructure. Control of cobalt and rare earths will become leverage across sectors central to the green transition. State-linked media will keep amplifying the charge of Western hypocrisy, widening the gap between words and deeds.

Acting together in Africa can flip a potential fault line in transatlantic policy into a point of convergence. The alliance has proved before that integrating a former adversary can deliver decades of stability and prosperity. The core lesson from 1945 still holds: cooperate, and skeptics can become partners; isolate, and others will fill the vacuum. Then, it meant rebuilding Europe. Now, it means applying the same democratic values - transparency, the rule of law, human dignity, fair trade - to the places where the future is being shaped.

Light homes. Power factories. Publish the results. Act now, or watch others write the future without you.