



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

From Friends to Friends: Vision Building for a New Transatlantic Partnership

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Essay

German and American citizens do not need to submit to the short-term thinking shaped by electoral cycles which their politicians are subject to. As democratic citizens, they have the privilege and duty to engage in long-term thinking which ultimately reflects itself at the ballot box. This is important to remember at a time where the German-American relationship is at a crossroads, and leaders do little to reimagine it. When Russia attacked Ukraine, some political commentators suggested that this would reunite transatlantic partners¹. But the rifts in the transatlantic relationship cannot simply be bridged by an in-group – out-group conflict. The in-groups have so substantially changed that partners must reassess it structurally. Germans and Americans need to start exploring their shared future so that action towards a shared goal becomes the objective again. This is what the transatlantic relationship, and especially the relationship between the US and Germany, currently lacks at the most fundamental level: *a shared vision and a plan of how to achieve it*. After 80 years of assured security, direction, and growth from the US, Germany now has the opportunity and responsibility to rise to a position where it can meet the US eye to eye. The two partners need to understand their changed relationship dynamic and define future goals and pathways against it. Americans and Germans need to start looking towards the future and begin building shared visions of it as equal partners. To begin shared vision building, Germans and Americans must move away from problems which lock them in a stale mate of defense spending discussions – no matter how relevant they may be – and instead propel themselves towards a common future. This discussion must be pioneered by thought leaders and civil society, not politicians. While politicians hold substantial power in steering the direction of the partnership, they cannot be allowed to become their sole determinants. As democracies, Germany and the United States reflect citizens' perspectives in their decision making and strategy. This means that the fundamentals of a resilient, strategic partnerships must begin in the minds of the people. It must especially begin in the minds of those who are active in opinion making: political commentators and actors in journalism, on social media, and those working in administration and policy making.

This type of shared vision building can be facilitated. *Foresight* is the main tool which helps organizations, governments, and civil society to envision different futures. Originally developed for and by the military, it has found substantial application in businesses as corporate foresight, post-conflict reconciliation and sustainable development. Foresight describes a variety of analytical and anticipatory methods to expose and widen our thinking to a multitude of different possible futures. Using these methods to inform, develop, and strengthen policy and strategy is called *Strategic Foresight*².

The existence of a close transatlantic partnership has not been questioned in the past 75 years because, from the bottom up, the German and American people have believed in its united

¹ Emini, D & Marciacq, F. (2024). After Washington, Can NATO Rally Around the Flag of Democracy? *BiEPAG*. [BiEPAG - After Washington, Can NATO Rally Around the Flag of Democracy?](#)

² Bressan, S. & Korb, L. (2024). Making Foresight Count. Success Factors for Futures Analysis in Foreign and Security Policy. *Global Public Policy Institute*. [Bressan Korb 2024 Foresight-Success-Factors.pdf](#)



vision. This bottom-up and thereby democratic top-down belief in a shared future is what must be revived. In order to rejuvenate and reformulate the transatlantic partnership, its discussion must engage key individuals in policy and public spaces, as well as a diverse set of individuals from the public, in vision building exercises which help citizens *understand what Americans and Germans want from the future of their partnership*.

Foresight for shared vision building is less abstract or difficult than it initially sounds. Both in high- and low-stake environments, it removes people from the daily struggles and grievances with each other and their surroundings and helps them envision what may be rather than what is. During the peace and reconciliation process in South Africa following the end of Apartheid, the Mount Fleur Scenario Process brought together leaders and thinkers from across the political and social spectrum for a joint foresight process. During this process, different scenarios for the future of South Africa were constructed by highly polarized and opposing parties. Eventually, South African leaders agreed on one single, desirable future, despite the deep grievances between them³. The South African foresight process shows how foresight, even in extreme environments, can help actors to look beyond problems and towards solutions. It engages actors with a multitude of opinions and even grievances in a space in which they can begin creating participative futures together. Engaging in such a process would allow German and American thought leaders to explore the nature of a new alliance and the circumstances under which it might prosper, and advocate for it.

Foresight processes in communities at the city- or regional level show how civil society can be engaged in participative, inclusive futures processes. They help build ownership over the future and motivate individuals to become proactive in working towards and defending it. Legislature built on foresight exercises which include civil society has been adopted all around the European Union, for example in Sardinia, Flanders, or Helsinki-Uusima⁴. Small-scale foresight exercises between German-American partner cities, universities, or schools can help bridge the physical and psychological ocean between them and build grass-root ownership of the German-American friendship.

Involving thought leaders and civil society in reinvigorating the transatlantic relationship from the bottom up is the most sustainable and secure way to an inclusive, equal partnership on secure footing between democracies. Foresight exercises will help us build a sustainable foundation which our policy makers and politicians can build on. As Germans and Americans, we cannot allow ourselves to leave the future of our transatlantic partnership to politicians' short-term thinking. We must reimagine a partnership for the future, resilient, inclusive, and ready to meet the challenges which lie ahead.

³ Gordon, A. (2020). Limits and longevity: A model for scenarios that influence the future. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Volume 151, February 2020.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2019.119851>

⁴ European Committee of the Regions. (2023). Embracing Uncertainty: Harnessing Strategic Foresight for Regional and Local Progress. *Publications Office of the European Union*. [Strategic-foresight-Regional-and-Local.pdf](#)



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