



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

Democracies, Dependencies and Idealism

Author

Jean Philipp Donie (Bachelor-student at [Hasso-Plattner-Institute](#))

Essay

Democracies, Dependencies, and Idealism

Why the Transatlantic Bond Must Break to Survive

Eighty years of transatlantic partnership were built on an unspoken promise: America would guard Europe, and Europe would stand with America. That promise is breaking.

Picture this: A NATO crisis meeting in Brussels, screens flickering with news from two fronts – Chinese warships encircling Taiwan, and Russian forces massing near the Baltic. In Washington, resources are finite, choices are brutal, and Europe is no longer the top priority.



In 2025, the Atlantic feels wider than ever. President Trump's second inauguration has only confirmed what has been building for over a decade: Washington's gaze is fixed westward across the Pacific, not eastward across the Atlantic.

And the question now is no longer *if* the United States will step back from Europe's defense, but *how far*.

In both the U.S. and Germany, growing voices dismiss democracy as slow, corrupt, and ill-suited for today's challenges. They point to authoritarian models as if efficiency were worth the price of liberty. This is more than a policy debate – it is a crossroads. We can now follow the path already chosen in Washington, or we can forge a new one.

Therefore, I propose a new idea – ***idealistic utilitarianism*** – as a way out. By “*idealistic utilitarianism*” I mean a doctrine that aligns hard interests with democratic purpose: short-term utility, long-term values. It is a marriage of strategic realism and moral conviction, building a partnership where both sides stand on their own feet, not on each other's shoulders.

The signs are already plain. In early 2025, President Trump paused military aid to Ukraine, forcing President Volodymyr Zelensky into negotiations[1] – a precedent later mirrored in trade talks with the EU. But this was no sudden turn. In 2024, then-Senator JD Vance argued in *The New York Times* that arms bound for Ukraine should go to Taiwan[2].

The pivot to Asia is not a Republican idea – it is bipartisan orthodoxy, from Obama's “Asia pivot”[3] to Biden's declaration that the Indo-Pacific is America's “*critical region*” for the future[4].

The conclusion is unavoidable: defending both Taiwan and Europe is seen in Washington as too expensive, too impractical. Russia is Europe's problem; China is America's.

For Europe, this should be the wake-up call we can no longer ignore. Dependency on the U.S. for our defense is not a safety net – it has become a leash. And when the hand holding it turns toward Asia, we will be left standing alone.



Idealistic utilitarianism answers both sides' needs. For the U.S., a Europe capable of defending itself frees resources for the Indo-Pacific. For Europe, autonomy means not only survival, but the ability to contribute meaningfully to global security – perhaps even in Asia if needed – which is in turn useful again to the US.

But this will not happen by tinkering at the margins. It requires breaking old habits:

1. **Reshaping NATO** – Create a “NATO-Europe” sub-command with independent strategic authority, including control over a shared and expanded European nuclear deterrent.
2. **Turning dependency into discipline** – The U.S. should deliberately reduce military commitments in Europe to force rapid European self-reliance. A short-term gap in comfort is better than a long-term collapse in capacity.
3. **Building a democratic arc** – Form a “Democratic Security Compact” with Japan, Australia, Canada, and willing partners in the Global South, so Europe is not only looking to Washington, but outwards to a wider democratic coalition.
4. **Preserving democratic credibility** – Democracies undermine their own legitimacy if they defend shared values only when convenient; true commitment means standing together in both principle and cost.

The unipolar moment is over. The next choice is clear: A bipolar world dominated by Washington and Beijing, keeping ally's dependent. Or a multipolar order, where strong democratic poles act as equal partners.

Europe can be such a pole – but only if we act.

These steps would save the U.S. billions, bolster Europe's standing, and prove that unity among democracies is not dependent on charity.

Sceptics may fear an independent Europe could become another systemic rival like China. But in a multipolar democratic bloc, strength is not zero-sum. Power shared among free nations is not diluted – it is magnified. A capable Europe would not weaken the U.S.; it would make the democratic world harder to intimidate, harder to divide, harder to defeat.

It would entice competition, keeping both poles fierce, focused and ambitioned. Yet on the world stage, both stand together to protect shared values. It is a chance to grow together.



That is the double edge of *idealistic utilitarianism*:

- **Utilitarian:** Relieves U.S. defense burdens and strengthens the West's global position.
- **Idealistic:** Proves that democracies can act together without one holding the other in dependency.

Implementing such shifts will be difficult, and resistance inevitable. Yet watering them down would cost us dearly in crisis, whether it happens tomorrow or in ten years.

Furthermore, we are on a tight schedule, as China[5] and Russia[6] continue to invest greatly in their militaries. If we want to have a chance, this change must be implemented by 2035 at the latest. And therefore, the work begins now:

We must therefore fund new capabilities, unify our strategy, and build public will on both sides of the Atlantic. For only if Europe embraces 1–4 fully, can idealistic utilitarianism succeed. The choice is not between alliance and independence – it is between an alliance of equals, or no alliance at all.

It will be this new alliance that marks the reinvigoration of the transatlantic alliance: As a union connected by shared democratic values, acting as equals on the world stage. Societies connected by shared values will prevail through all crises ahead of us.

The original transatlantic promise was forged in the fires of crisis. Its renewal will require something harder: courage – not just to defend each other, but to empower each other. Only then will the Atlantic be what it was always meant to be: not a divide, but a shared horizon.

References / Bibliography

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- [4] <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2025/01/10/the-united-states-enduring-commitment-to-the-indo-pacific-region/>
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