

Jussi Hanhimäki. *Pax Transatlantica: America and Europe in the Post-Cold War Era*. Oxford University Press, 2021. Xviii + 208 pages. Hardcover, \$ 29.95.

To casual observers and persistent leftwing progressives or rightwing nationalists, the West is in decline. This sentiment is egged on by a chorus of politically inclined academics and journalists, many of whom appear ready to write the liberal world order's post-mortem. Even if inadvertently, this agenda often receives support from both Republican and Democratic officials who repeatedly decry European allies' lack of commitment to global security and condemn the E.U. for supporting unfair trade practices. In Europe, criticism of U.S. unilateralism in foreign affairs and Washington's failure to address climate change, provokes similar frustrations implying that the once solid transatlantic relationship is in disrepair if not beyond repair. This narrative of a weakened partnership is the target of Jussi Hanhimäki's brief but highly effective new book. A historian of international history and politics at the Graduate Institute Geneva, Hanhimäki in his familiar lucid style, argues that not only are transatlantic disputes hardly new, but they are also not nearly as fatal as the echo chamber of politics and media imply. The supposedly ever-imminent collapse of the West, he makes clear, is a much-overhyped phenomenon.

Bookended by a contextualizing introduction and an epilogue on the future of transatlantic relations, the book's core argument emerges through a careful examination of the twists and turns of U.S.-European affairs since the end of the Cold War. Chapter one examines the state of transatlantic relations after the collapse of the Communist bloc. It highlights that even if this was the beginning of an "age of post-ideological politics," (p.7) it was also a victory of diversity over uniformity. Despite frequent disagreements, there was more that united the West than divided it. The second chapter extends this conversation to security policy highlighting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) enlargement, its mission to counter Russian

aggression in Eastern Europe, and its growing involvement in de facto peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations from Kosovo to Afghanistan, and beyond. Chapter three, among the best of the book, highlights the extensive financials and trade connections that link the Atlantic world as well as the unifying importance of the collective accumulation of wealth. Hanhimäki is not blind to some of the wrenches thrown in the wheel of cooperation, including the collapsed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership or the frequent aggressive rhetorical broadsides fired across the Atlantic, but as he rightly notes rather than being signs of a collapsing relationship, the criticism of trading practices and labor standards are reflective of the ever-increasing economic integration. The fourth chapter discusses the political developments in the United States and Europe that in the 1990s and 2000s inspired the emergence of the Clinton/Blair/ Schröder “Third Way,” the rise of compassionate conservatism, and later Barack Obama. Because of the bad blood that still lingers from that period, some will undoubtedly question Hanhimäki’s emphasis on similarities rather than differences during these two decades, but he clearly highlights the comparable developments in Europe and the United States just as he effectively extends this parallelization to the more recent era of populist and nationalist sentiments after the Brexit vote. The final chapter deals with the impact of COVID on transatlantic relations and national policymaking on both sides of the ocean. As he points out, despite travel restrictions and lockdowns, transatlantic science and innovative collaboration surged. Furthermore, recent nationalistic rhetoric notwithstanding, the result of closed borders does not appear to be growing support for anti-immigrant parties but rather a desire for reengagement with foreign cultures and worlds. As importantly, if casting votes is the core idea of the West, early indications are that Corona virus has only spurred this participation. Collectively, all of this adds up to his conclusion that as a community and as an idea, the West

operates as it always has. Even the election of Trump and Brexit reflected “democracy at work, not autocracy ascendant” (p.120).

The West that Hanhimäki engages is principally a Cold War product. Cemented by the United States’ ideological commitment to the defeat of international Communism, it was institutionalized by the 1948 European Recovery Program and the creation of NATO in 1949. The result was a collective mindset defined not by perfect unity but by a shared sets of democratic values, principles, and ideas. Francis Fukuyama may have been wrong that the end of the Cold War also signaled the “End of History” or the global victory of liberal democracies, but as this book highlights from a multitude of angles, the West remains the most potent center of political, economic, security collaboration in the world. Existing fissures and disputes are in fact signs of democracy’s strength and the *Pax Transatlantica* more broadly speaking. In that sense, this is a comfort story, of sorts.

Hanhimäki uses his academic credentials to cast light on the present through the prism of the past. This enables him to define a relationship where ideas, accord and disagreements have historically emerged, resonated, inspired, and importantly crossed the ocean in both directions. His thematic emphasis on security, economics, and ideas makes clear that western nations share considerably more with one another than with anybody else. His emphasis on NATO expansion in terms of mission and size is reflective of this but even more impressive are the arguments about cross-Atlantic investment and how definitively these tie together western economies. For all the talk about trade disputes and tariffs, the threat of China’s rise as an economic power, or the fallout from the Great Recession in 2008, in relative and real terms, the West remains unified and dominant in the global economy. The disagreements that present-day pundits identify as radical threats to unity are in fact the norm. It may be popular clickbait to imply otherwise but

the data does not lie and Hanhimäki's persuasive statistics, tables, and graphs tell a substantive story of interdependence and strength.

The argument that the West is becoming more integrated, not less, is thoroughly persuasive. The principal problem – one only tangentially explored in this book—is that policies and politics are not always beholden to facts. Therefore, the future may be less rosy than the book implies. The opportunistic way the U.K Independence Party and the Trump phenomenon drove change prove that point. As long as their type of disregard for the truth can drum up an audience it will pose a threat to the established order. This threat is made more potent by modern technologies and one wishes that Hanhimäki had included a chapter exploring the peril posed by misconceptions and social media's ability to influence people in spite of the facts. Real unity of the kind he describes is all good and well but the potential for misleading ideas undermining that accord appears ever more real. In fairness, it is a tall order for anyone—a historian in particular—to speculate on the future. Even so, the fact remains that the biggest threat to the west may not lie in a foreign ideology, terrorism, or even economic downturns. It may lie in misconceptions, mistrust, and algorithms that guide people not toward truth but away from it.

Although the book is extremely well-written, the final chapter and the epilogue feel poorly edited and rather repetitive. One suspects that this was rushed to meet a deadline and to include details covering Trump's final days in office and thoughts on the early Biden Administration. These are thankfully small points of irritation. Hanhimäki has written an overwhelmingly useful book. It is a welcome addition to the current scholarship on our era. Like all good history, it forces the reader to think long after putting the book down. Never known for dabbling in common sense, ideologues on the right and the left will likely dismiss Hanhimäki's conclusions. Their *raison d'être* to a large extent depends on it. However, to those interested in

data-driven facts and persuasive evidence, it will be clear that rumors of the West's demise are greatly exaggerated.

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