



# De Suez a Ormuz

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# The true nature of alliances and the structural limits of Western strategic solidarity

## Executive summary

International partnerships are often described in normative terms: communities of shared values, mutual commitments and strategic solidarity between partners. However, historical analysis shows that partnerships do not work primarily on moral grounds, but on calculations of national interest.

The U.S.-led Western system of alliances is no exception. Since the end of World War II, Washington has exercised as a hegemonic power of the Western bloc, structuring the liberal international order through its military, financial and political superiority. However, such hegemony has never involved an automatic subordination of U.S. interests to those of its allies, nor a mechanical solidarity in all conflict scenarios.

The history of Western alliances reveals a constant pattern: States cooperate when their interests converge and diverge when they cease to do so. Sharing formal alliances, ideological affinities or common institutional frameworks does not eliminate the primacy of national interest as the guiding principle of international policy.

The current context of tensions around Iran, the Strait of Ormuz and the growing strategic divergences between Washington and several European capitals once again reveal this structural reality. Moreover, it suggests that the Western system of alliances could be entering a new phase of readjustment, marked by the transition from a unipolar order dominated by the United States to an increasingly multipolar international environment.

## I. The real logic of partnerships: cooperation conditioned by national interest

Contemporary political rhetoric tends to present alliances as permanent partnerships based on shared values and mutual loyalties. However, this idealized vision rarely resists rigorous historical analysis.

Alliances are, in essence, instrumental mechanisms of strategic cooperation. Their purpose is not abstract solidarity, but the maximization of the national interest of its members in a context of international competition.

This implies that:

The Western post-war bloc, despite its high degree of institutionalization, has not altered this basic logic of international operation.

## II. The paradox of hegemony: the one who sustains the system the most is the one who benefits most from it

Since 1945, the United States has been the central axis of the Western system of alliances. Its military, economic and financial superiority allowed the construction of the post-war international liberal order, from NATO to Bretton Woods.

This has generated a deep-seated perception of American political discourse: the idea that Washington bears a disproportionate burden in maintaining international order.

In part, this perception is correct.

However, this view is incomplete if you omit the fact that hegemon is also the main beneficiary of the system you lead.

The liberal international order has provided the United States with extraordinary structural advantages:

The reality, therefore, is dual: the hegemon bears greater burdens, but it also obtains higher systemic benefits.

Understanding this duality is essential to correctly interpret the history of the Western system of alliances.

### III. When Washington did not back its allies: historical precedents

The narrative of automatic solidarity within the Western alliance is denied by numerous historical precedents in which the United States chose not to fully support its allies when doing so contradicted its own strategic interests.

#### The Algerian War (1954–1962)

During the war of Algerian independence, France deployed nearly half a million troops to maintain its control over a territory it considered an integral part of the French Republic.

Despite being a central ally of NATO, Paris received very limited US support. Washington considered decolonization inevitable and feared that explicit support for the French colonial effort would damage its strategic position in the Arab world and push new independent States into the Soviet orbit.

Allied solidarity was subordinated to the U.S. global strategy.

#### Turkish invasion of Cyprus (1974)

When Turkey, a NATO member, invaded Cyprus in 1974 after a coup backed by the Greek junta, the United States avoided intervening militarily despite a direct conflict between allies.

Washington prioritized avoiding an intra-NATO escalation and preserving the overall stability of the alliance rather than fully aligning itself with one of the parties.

Again, systemic interest prevailed over bilateral solidarity.

#### Western Sahara and policy towards Morocco

The United States has repeatedly supported positions in favour of Morocco with regard to Western Sahara, even when this has contravened Spanish interests or sensitivities.

This pattern shows that even close allies can see their interests sacrificed when Washington considers other regional relations or higher strategic calculations to be priorities.

## IV. Suez: the founding moment of European strategic subordination

The 1956 Suez Crisis is probably the most paradigmatic example of the real limits of the strategic autonomy of European allies under US hegemony.

Following the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the United Kingdom and France coordinated with Israel a military operation aimed at regaining control of the canal.

However, far from supporting the operation of its allies, Washington rejected it head-on.

The Eisenhower Administration exerted massive diplomatic and financial pressure on London and Paris, including threats of destabilization of the pound sterling by selling American reserves.

The result was the Anglo-French withdrawal and acceptance of a ceasefire.

Suez unequivocally demonstrated that:

Suez thus marked the full birth of the Atlantic order under American primacy.

## V. When Washington was interested: European solidarity as a strategic investment

The reverse pattern has also been historically evident.

When the actor concerned was hegemon himself, European allies have often tended to support American initiatives even when their immediate interests did not fully coincide.

### Iraq and Afghanistan

During the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, numerous European allies offered:

More than 1,100 European soldiers died in support of U.S.-led operations in such theatres.

This support was not only due to ideological affinity or political loyalty, but also to a rational strategic calculation: maintaining good relations with the hegemonic power was in itself a strategic investment.

## VI. Ormuz and the possible transition to a new systemic balance

The current crisis around the Strait of Ormuz could represent a turning point comparable — in structural terms — to Suez.

Not because both situations are identical, but because both highlight deeper transformations in the global distribution of power.

In 1956, Suez symbolized the definitive end of British and French imperial autonomy.

Today, Ormuz could symbolize the visible beginning of a new phase: the progressive erosion of the uncontested American primacy.

The United States remains the main global power:

However, it no longer operates in an incontestable unipolar environment.

China's growing influence, the greater room for manoeuvre of regional powers and the fragmentation of the international order point towards a progressive multipolarization of the system.

In this context, the Ormuz crisis can reveal a new reality:

America is still hegemon, but it is no longer an uncontested hegemon.

## Conclusion

The history of Western alliances shows that strategic solidarity has never been automatic or unconditional.

Alliances do not eliminate the logic of national interest. They structure, moderate and channel it, but do not replace it.

The United States-led Atlantic system has worked for decades because it offered mutual benefits to its participants, albeit asymmetrically. However, such a balance could be entering a phase of structural adjustment.

Just as Suez symbolized the irreversible decline of British and French primacy within the Western bloc, Ormuz could end up symbolizing the visible beginning of a new era: one in which the United States remains the main global power, but can no longer define the strategic horizon of the entire West on its own.

Alliances will persist. National interests will continue to guide them. But the order on which they rest is changing.

## Note

An original and more extensive version of this analysis was published by Juan Ángel Soto in The European Conservative on 8 April 2026 under the title From Suez to Hormuz and the True Nature of Alliances. Available from: [<https://europeanconservative.com/articles/analysis/from-suez-to-hormuz-and-the-true-nature-of-alliances/>](<https://europeanconservative.com/articles/analysis/from-suez-to-hormuz-and-the-true-nature-of-alliances/>)