

The Fall of the Hegemon: How an Exhausted America Loses Its Empire

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While Brussels debates percentage points and technological sovereignty, the foundation of the transatlantic alliance is crumbling at breakneck speed. In a devastating interview with Nima Alkhorshid, [Colonel Larry Wilkerson](#), former chief of staff to Colin Powell, paints a picture of an America that no longer has the means to realise its imperial ambitions. The question is not whether hegemony is over, but how quickly Europe's vassal states will face up to it.

By Frank Dumon

The Catch-22 of a Depleted Arsenal

In the world of military strategy, there is an unwritten rule: you cannot win a war with words alone—only with materiel. And in that regard, the United States finds itself in an existential crisis that the Pentagon itself barely dares to admit. Years of interventions in the Middle East, endless support for Ukraine, and escalating tensions with Iran have drained American ammunition stocks to the bone.

[Colonel Larry Wilkerson](#), a man who operated for decades in the highest echelons of American foreign policy, puts it bluntly in his conversation with Alkhorshid: American generals "no longer know what to do" [[1]]. It is a remarkable confession for a

military apparatus that had presented itself for decades as the world's undisputed police force. The U.S. armed forces find themselves in what literature calls a Catch-22: they cannot fulfil their imperial obligations with the materiel they have left, yet political loyalties and loss of face forbid them from strategically capitulating or withdrawing.

The figures are alarming. Precision-guided munitions, the backbone of modern warfare, cost hundreds of thousands to millions of euros per unit. When a conflict escalates—as is currently the case in the Middle East—these stocks are consumed at a rate that the industrial capacity of the United States simply cannot keep up with. The American defence industry, once the beating heart of the Western war machine, suffers from structural capacity problems, shortages of specialised personnel, and a supply chain increasingly vulnerable to disruptions.

Denial in the White House

What makes this material exhaustion even more dangerous is the lack of realism at the highest political levels. Wilkerson points to a leadership that ignores the physical limits of American power and clings to the illusion of absolute supremacy. He describes a situation in which the president—in his analysis embodied by a demented Trump—does not realise that his weapons stocks are depleted and that he has manoeuvred himself into an untenable position.

This is not a new dynamic in American history. An empire tends to deny its own decline until it is too late. The British Empire continued for decades after World War II to act as though it were still a world power, while the economic and military reality told a different story. The United States is now in a similar phase: the rhetoric of intransigence masks a fundamental strategic exhaustion.

American generals, Wilkerson argues, are trapped in this paradox. They know they cannot win the war with the means they have, but they cannot admit this openly without risking their careers or undermining the political order. The result is a military strategy that runs on bluff, empty magazines, and a fundamental misunderstanding of the new multipolar reality.

The Destruction of the Israeli Project



This material depletion has the most dramatic consequences in the

Middle East, and more specifically in Israel. Wilkerson predicts bluntly in his interview that the Israeli part of Palestine will be destroyed. It is a prediction that would be dismissed as blasphemy in Western mainstream media, but which follows from a cold military calculus.

The myth that air superiority and advanced technology can sustain an occupation forever has been shattered. Israel has long relied on American military support, from Iron Dome to advanced fighter jets and precision-guided munitions. But when American supply lines come under pressure—through a combination of its own wars, logistical challenges, and political priorities—Israel stands alone.

Israel's regional adversaries, particularly Iran, have understood this vulnerability perfectly. They are not waging a conventional war that would highlight Israel's technological superiority, but a war of attrition that precisely targets those weak points. Drone swarms, asymmetric attacks, and striking American bases and supply lines in the region: these are all tactics that undermine the logistical chain of the Israeli-American alliance.

Wilkerson points out that Israel "has no way out" anymore. The options are limited: either the conflict escalates into a nuclear confrontation that would set the entire region ablaze, or Israel accepts a strategic defeat that would mean the end of the Zionist project. Both scenarios are catastrophic, not only for Israel itself, but for the entire Western presence in the Middle East.

The Collapse of American Logistics



What many analysts overlook is that modern warfare is first and foremost a logistical enterprise. You can have the best fighter jets and the smartest algorithms, but if you cannot get ammunition, fuel, and spare parts to the front, you are powerless. And precisely in that area, the American system shows deep cracks.

The U.S. Navy, once the undisputed ruler of the world's oceans, is plagued by structural problems. Ships lie in dock for months for maintenance, crews are overworked, and the capacity to simultaneously support multiple conflicts has been severely compromised. When Wilkerson speaks of American destroyers being "harassed" by Iranian attacks, he is referring not only to physical damage, but to the psychological shock that runs through the entire military apparatus: invincibility is over.

The Air Force, the backbone of American power projection, faces similar problems. Tanker aircraft, essential for keeping combat jets airborne over distant war zones, are scarce and overstretched. The industrial base that maintains and replaces these aircraft has shrunk to a fraction of what it was during the Cold War. The result is an Air Force that looks impressive on paper, but in practice can barely sustain prolonged operations.

The Blind Vassal: Europe's Strategic Mistake

And then there is Europe. While American hegemony crumbles before our eyes, European leaders continue to act as if nothing is wrong. They increase their defence budgets, buy American weapons systems, and integrate their military structures ever deeper into NATO. It is a strategy based on a fundamental misconception: that American power is infinite.



[Alex Karp](#): "In 2025, his net worth exceeded \$18 billion, making him among the wealthiest 200 people in the world as reported by [Forbes](#) and the [Bloomberg Billionaires Index](#), and [Time](#) magazine named him on the Time 100 list of the world's most influential people of that year".

The truth is that Europe has chained itself to a sinking ship. The billions invested in American defence contracts, in Palantir software, in NATO infrastructures, are investments in a system that cannot prevent its own defeat. When American supply lines fail, when Washington decides that Europe is no longer a priority, when the logistical backbone of the empire breaks, Europe will be left alone—with an army dependent on American technology, American ammunition, and American intelligence.

This is the strategic crime of our time. While we debate percentage points of GDP and bureaucratic standards, we are building a defence apparatus that is structurally dependent on a power that has reached its own limits. It is like insuring your house with a company on the verge of bankruptcy: the policy looks good, but when you need it, no one pays out.

Historical Parallels



Those who study history see that empires rarely collapse overnight. It is a process of gradual erosion, followed by a sudden, catastrophic collapse. The Roman Empire continued for decades to pretend it ruled the world, while its borders had long become untenable. The British Empire continued for years after World War II to harbour imperial pretensions, while the economic and military reality had long told a different story.

The United States is now in a similar phase. The rhetoric of intransigence masks a fundamental strategic exhaustion. NATO allies, who have relied for decades on the American security umbrella, now face a painful choice: continue to believe in an illusion, or prepare for a world without American protection.

Wilkerson's analysis is not doom-mongering, but a cold calculation of logistical and strategic limits. The era of American hegemony is on its last legs. The question is not whether this will happen, but when—and whether Europe will have built sufficient autonomy by then to stand on its own feet.

Conclusion: The Awakening Is Coming

Wilkerson's predictions are not abstract geopolitical speculations, but a warning based on decades of experience in the highest circles of American power. When an insider like him says that the empire is exhausted, that the generals no longer know what to do, and that Israel will be destroyed, it is time to listen.

For Europe, this means a fundamental reorientation. We can no longer outsource our security to a power that has reached its own limits. We must invest in our own capabilities, our own technology, our own logistics. Not because we are anti-American, but because reality forces us to do so.

The question is whether we will learn this lesson in time, or whether—like so many vassal states before us—we will only wake up when it is too late. History teaches us that empires fall, and those who have relied too long on their protection suffer the hardest blows. It is time to wake up.

The European Illusion: Palantir, NATO, and the Price of Blind Loyalty

Now that we have established in our previous articles that the American military and logistical backbone is breaking, the pressing question arises: why does Europe continue to chain itself to their digital and physical infrastructure? The billion-dollar contracts with Palantir, the deep integration into NATO structures, and the rhetoric about 'digital sovereignty' mask a fundamental strategic error: we are building our security on the foundation of a collapsing empire.

The NATO Paradox: Outsourcing Security to a Failing Power

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was founded in 1949 with a clear goal: to protect Europe from the Soviet Union through an American security guarantee. For decades, this system worked. European countries could keep their defence budgets low, while Washington carried the heavy burden. It was a comfortable deal: Europe got security, America got influence. But this deal was based on an implicit assumption: that America was infinitely powerful. That assumption is now outdated. As we demonstrated in part 1 of this diptych, the United States is in a state of strategic exhaustion. Ammunition stocks are depleted, logistical capacity is overstretched, and the political will to defend European interests is crumbling.

Yet European leaders continue to act as if nothing is wrong. They increase their defence budgets to the unattainable NATO norm of 5% of GDP, buy American weapons systems, and integrate their military structures ever deeper into the alliance. It is a strategy based on wishful thinking: the hope that America will continue to play its imperial role, even though it no longer has the means. The NATO paradox is that we are chaining ourselves to a system that cannot prevent its own defeat. When American supply lines fail, when Washington decides that Europe is no longer a priority, when the logistical backbone of the empire breaks, Europe will be left alone—with an army dependent on American technology, American ammunition,

and American intelligence.

Palantir and the Digital Vendor Lock-in

The dependence on America is not only physical, but also digital. In March 2025, NATO signed a contract with the American data analytics company Palantir for the so-called Maven Smart System, an AI platform designed to process intelligence, accelerate targeting, and improve decision-making. The deal was finalised in just six months, a record pace for the alliance. Admiral Pierre Vandier, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, (they love bombastic titles) defended the purchase as pragmatic: "They said: we take something off the shelf that the United States already used." It was the fastest solution, not the most strategically responsible one. But Vandier also warned of the risks: "As far as I know, there is no real competitor to Palantir today."

This is a disturbing confession. It means that NATO—and by extension European security—depends for a core function of modern warfare on a single company, based in a single country, subject to that country's laws and political priorities. The system is installed in Brunssum (Netherlands) and SHAPE (Belgium), but the data flows, algorithms, updates, and maintenance contracts run through American servers and American engineers. This creates what in the tech world is called a vendor lock-in: once an organisation has implemented a deeply embedded software system, switching to a competitor becomes extremely difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. The company that supplies the system possesses the knowledge of which data is most valuable and how the algorithms are precisely tuned. NATO stresses that the contract is not exclusive and that there is no technical lock-in, but in practice, disentangling such a deeply integrated system is anything but trivial.

The Illusion of Digital Sovereignty



See my articles at <https://jakobijn.be/nl/AI-Open-Source>

In Brussels, Berlin and Paris, the call for 'digital sovereignty' has grown into one of the most used buzzwords in recent years. The idea is simple: Europe must retain control over its own data, infrastructure, and technology, without surrendering to the whims of foreign powers or Silicon Valley monopolists. But peeling away the rhetoric

of European autonomy reveals a stubborn reality. Creating a full-fledged European alternative to American technology is not a matter of simply ticking a box, but a titanic struggle on three fronts: political, technical, and economic.

The first and perhaps biggest hurdle is political in nature. Europe is not a monolithic state, but a patchwork of 27 member states, each with its own security interests and technological preferences. While countries like France traditionally emphasise strategic autonomy and protecting the European defence industry, many Eastern European member states look to Washington for their security guarantees. For them, American technology is not a 'threat' to their sovereignty, but a necessary insurance against external threats.

On the technical front, Europe's lag is structural and spans the entire technological chain. The backbone of modern data analytics is cloud computing, and this market is globally dominated by the American 'hyperscalers' (Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud). Europe lacks the scale and the massive data centres to compete at this level. Without a sovereign cloud, sovereign AI is an illusion.

On the economic front, the challenges make switching to European alternatives a huge financial risk for the taxpayer. Once an intelligence service or military branch is set up on the software of an American giant, the switching costs are astronomical. It requires retraining thousands of employees, migrating huge, classified databases, and completely re-engineering operational processes. This is not only expensive, but in times of war or terrorist threat, also operationally irresponsible.

The Social Bill: Guns versus Butter

Increased defence spending does not stand alone; it directly competes with other public sectors. In times of declining purchasing power, an ageing population, and persistent pressure on healthcare, education, and social housing, citizens rightly ask what the opportunity cost is of these billion-euro investments. Every euro spent on a long-term defence contract is a euro that cannot be invested in poverty reduction, renewable energy, or infrastructure.

Critics point out that the 'war economy' and the profits of the defence industry often come at the expense of the purchasing power of the working population. The question "who pays the bill?" is therefore not merely an accounting issue, but a deep societal question about the priorities of a society. The resentment that sometimes arises towards the eccentric CEOs of these tech companies and their indispensable role in controversial international operations (such as raids or military actions in the

Middle East) fuels the feeling that the moral and financial burden is unfairly distributed.

Palantir recently published a manifesto arguing that free and democratic societies need "hard power" to survive. The company plays an indispensable role in operations of the Israeli military and in the controversial raids of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). When a company with such an ideological load supplies the core infrastructure of European security, the question arises whether the values of that company are compatible with the rule-of-law principles that Europe claims to defend.

The Search for Alternatives: Glimmers of Hope or Wishful Thinking?

There are cautiously positive signals. France's ChapsVision recently won the contract of the German domestic intelligence service. The French data system Artemis is attracting interest from Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Romania, and Canada. France and Germany announced a joint "sovereign digital backbone".

But technology experts warn that these initiatives are still years away from the operational maturity of Palantir. Spanish Prime Minister Sánchez ordered state companies not to sign any new Palantir contracts. Germany and France are switching to ChapsVision. The Netherlands wants a European alternative within two years. But reality is stubborn. Technology expert Paul Verhagen (HCSS) therefore proposes a radical economic measure: a levy on European organisations that run on American technology while European alternatives exist. Such a measure could steer the market, but requires a political courage that many governments currently lack, for fear of higher costs and complex short-term implementation.

The Geopolitical Risk: What if Washington Turns Off the Tap?

Dependence on American technology was always a theoretical risk, but the political reality of recent years has made that risk tangible. The threats from the Trump administration, the rhetoric about annexing Greenland, the pressure on NATO allies who did not cooperate with American military operations, and the open doubt about whether Washington still wants to respect the NATO treaty: these are all signals that the American security guarantee is no longer self-evident. If the US president decides that a European country does not deserve his political support, can access to crucial

military software then be used as leverage? Can Washington decide to suspend Palantir's services to a specific European intelligence service? As long as the code, servers, and maintenance contracts remain in American hands, the answer to those questions is uncertain. And in the world of defence and intelligence, uncertainty is synonymous with vulnerability.

Conclusion: The Clock Is Ticking

Europe and NATO's strategic dependence on American technology companies is not an abstract geopolitical debate. It is a daily operational reality that goes to the heart of what sovereignty means: the ability to decide for oneself about one's own security, one's own data, and one's own future. Europe faces a choice. Either it accepts that its security remains structurally anchored in the decisions of another continent, with all the attendant risks. Or it makes the painful, expensive, and time-consuming investments needed to build its own technological base.

The NATO purchase from Palantir was pragmatic, fast, and functional. But it was also a signal: Europe cannot do it alone today. The question is not whether Europe must break that dependence, but whether it has the political will, patience, and money to actually do so—before geopolitical reality forces the continent to operate without American support. As long as Europe fails to build a unified, competitive, and ethically responsible technological alternative, its citizens will continue to foot the bill—both in the form of missed social investments and in the loss of strategic autonomy. An open, critical, and honest debate about these billion-euro flows is therefore not a luxury, but an absolute necessity for any modern democracy.

The clock is ticking. And this time, there is no American cavalry coming to save us.

Sources

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