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TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY COOPERATION TOWARD 2020

EDITED BY ALEXANDRA DE HOOP SCHEFFER AND MARTIN QUENCEZ



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Transatlantic Security Cooperation Toward 2020

Internal and external challenges have reshaped the transatlantic security partnership in an unprecedented way since the election of Donald Trump in 2016. He has accelerated the evolution in U.S. leadership that had begun during the presidency of Barack Obama and also questioned his country's traditional alliances in a new way. In parallel, the United States' European partners have launched initiatives to strengthen their defense cooperation and increased their defense budgets to gain in credibility. They have failed, however, to resolve their deep strategic and tactical divergences that prevent Europe from emerging as a united and coherent security actor. Finally, the assertiveness of China and Russia has taken new forms and materialized in new areas, leading to an increasingly global competition among great powers, as recognized by the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy.

These developments are likely to lead to a different kind of transatlantic relationship. In this context, the German Marshall Fund of the United States conducted a scenario exercise¹ involving U.S. and European policymakers, strategic thinkers, and defense-industry representatives to identify the strategic, political, social, economic and environmental trends that will influence the future of transatlantic security cooperation and to formulate policy recommendations. The evolution of Europe's and the United States' relationships with Russia and China, as well of the Trump administration's policy toward Europe, were identified as the most outstanding developments that will define the future of the transatlantic partnership. The ideas and reflections exchanged during the scenario exercise were used by the authors of the three chapters of this paper to study the complex interactions of U.S. and European strategic priorities, and to present conclusions as to what to expect in the next two years.

All three chapters highlight the challenge Europeans face as they are torn between action and reaction to U.S. decisions. With regard

¹ The event took place in Berlin on November 29, 2018, with the support of Airbus and in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

to Russia, the Trump administration has become a dividing factor in Europe, where the debate has become paralyzed by the mixed signals coming from Washington. Unable to propose a clear agenda for their future relationship with Russia, Europeans want to retain reinforced U.S. security guarantees while preventing the further deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations. The prospect of great-power competition between the United States and China is also a concern for Europeans, who aim to find a balance between the former's geopolitical pressures and the latter's economic power. The U.S. policy shift to great-power competition also means that Washington will increasingly seek to shift the burden of crisis management and counterterrorism to regional partners, including in Europe. This trend in the United States is largely bipartisan and will likely outlast the Trump presidency. Thus Europe needs to adjust its strategy and to achieve full strategic autonomy in crisis response, across the whole spectrum of operations, especially in its southern neighborhood.

More often objects than subjects of the major trends affecting transatlantic security cooperation, European countries are unlikely to find the solutions to the issues they will face in the near future. Moreover, Russia, China and even the United States may benefit from European disunity, and actively seek to use the continent's existing fractures to their advantage. In this context, defending its common interests and sovereignty should become the priority of Europe in the coming years.

Another defining factor present in all three chapters is the unclear path of the United States' policy vis-à-vis its European allies. Uncertainty is the buzzword of the Trump era, to the point of almost becoming a cliché. Yet, it will continue to define the transatlantic dialogue on foreign policy and security issues, as various interpretations of the Trump administration's actions in Europe compete with each other. According to one of these interpretations, Trump has promoted a very transactional approach to the transatlantic relationship and aims to obtain concessions from allies that, in his views, have taken advantage of the United States' naivety and post-World War II

multilateral commitments. In this context, European countries are experiencing a phase of renegotiation of the terms of the transatlantic partnership. Another interpretation highlights the more ideological aspects of Trump's discourse and argues that his administration has a transformative agenda for the transatlantic relationship in terms of values and interests. According to this, the administration perceives

“ *Relations between China and the United States in particular will affect all other issues.* ”

the EU as a competing ideological project and is actively aiming to weaken European actors and institutions that support a “globalist” narrative. Finally, a third interpretation argues that there is no U.S. policy or strategy vis-à-vis Europe, and that looking for a coherent scheme in the discourse and actions of the current administration is not pertinent. The divergences of views within the administration, and also between the administration and Congress, only increase the level of uncertainty. Europeans have come to the conclusion that strategic ambivalence toward them is a feature of U.S. policy that will

outlast Trump, including under a Democrat administration. They are therefore looking at crisis scenarios in which they will need increasingly to “lead from the front.”

Studying three key policy issues—transatlantic (dis)unity vis-à-vis Russia, the next two years of EU-U.S. relations, and Europe's strategies in Asia—the following chapters consider each topic separately and draw upon realistic assessments of the transatlantic relationship to study the evolutions of key policy developments. In reality, transatlantic actors will have to face all three issues at the same time. Relations between China and the United States in particular will affect all other issues, as the growing competition between them will define the place of European countries in the U.S. strategy at the global level. Similarly, tensions among the transatlantic partners will influence and be influenced by the evolution of U.S. engagement with Russia. In all scenarios, the multiplicity of variables underlines the fragility of the transatlantic relationship today and the risks of its further weakening. While the chapters highlight how these issues may evolve in the near future, they also provide insights on the consequences of simultaneous crises, and recommendations on how to address them more efficiently.

Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer and Martin Quencez

THE NEXT TWO YEARS IN EU-U.S. RELATIONS: BAD, WORSE, WORST?

JANA PUGLIERIN

Transatlantic relations have been in a permanent state of emergency since President Donald Trump took office in 2017: for the first time since World War II, a U.S. president is not only calling into question his country's security guarantee for Europe but also being openly skeptical of, if not hostile to, the EU. Never before have Europeans heard sentences like this one from the White House: "The European Union. Sounds so nice, right? They are brutal...They formed in order to take advantage of us on trade."¹ Other presidents have also taken the United States' European allies to task or been wary of the EU as an institution, but Trump is the first to see the transatlantic relationship as a "bad deal" for his country, whereby the Americans are ripped off by their supposed friends.

What should Europeans expect over the next two years from the United States under a president who holds these views and also considers the liberal world order, primarily guaranteed by the United States since 1945, a relic of the past and instead sees the world in terms of a competition of great powers?

Based on the political dynamics of the last two years, there is no reason to assume that the United States will soon return to its established role in Europe. This chapter evaluates the plausibility and discusses the consequences of three possible scenarios for relations between the EU and the United States, all of which presume that their relationship will deteriorate to various degrees from a European perspective and address core European fears: an intensification of the Trump status quo, a

¹ "President Trump holds MAGA Rally in Council Bluffs, Iowa", RealClear Politics, October 9, 2018.

A heartfelt thanks goes to Julie Smith and Hans Kundnani who kindly commented on the draft of this text.

post-American Europe, and the proactive division of the EU by Trump. In the three scenarios, it is expected that Trump's rhetoric will get even sharper in the next two years, as he seeks to fire up his base ahead of his upcoming reelection campaign.

Intensification of the Trump Status Quo

In the first scenario, President Trump intensifies his policy towards the United States' European allies, but without causing any great rupture in the relationship. In tweets and interviews, and at political rallies, he continues to attack heavily European countries and the EU, as well as questioning the usefulness of NATO.

Transatlantic relations increasingly become a divisive topic in U.S. politics as the 2020 presidential election nears and his violent rhetoric targeting Germany and other European countries gains traction. With Secretary of Defense James Mattis having resigned, there is no longer any influential advocate within the administration for maintaining the traditionally close relationship with European allies, and certainly none who dares to contradict the president.

Trump keeps ruthlessly trying "Making America Great Again" with no concern for European sensibilities. He primarily sees relations with European allies through the prism of the United States' great-power rivalry with China and Russia, and vehemently demands more burden sharing and a reduction of the EU-U.S. trade deficit. He values European countries only to the extent that they enhance the United States' strategic position, and he increasingly puts pressure on Europe to take

the side of the United States in its growing struggle with China.

However, in this scenario the European countries are spared fundamental changes to U.S. policy in Europe or NATO, such as a withdrawal of troops from the continent. The United States' military engagement in Europe, in

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particular the reassurance of NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe, carries on seamlessly; and the nuclear security guarantee is not called into question.

A continuation of the Trump status quo for two more years would mean that the president's aggressive rhetoric toward Europe continues to catch on among his base and in much of the Republican Party, influencing how the transatlantic relationship is perceived. The already noticeable split between Republicans and Democrats with regard to transatlantic relations and NATO would grow even deeper. Republicans are now more critical of NATO than they were two years ago—and much more so than Democrats.²

European countries would remain deeply unsettled by the rhetoric coming from the White House, but different ones would continue to interpret it in different ways. The Central and Eastern European countries would take a significantly more positive view of U.S. engagement in security policy than would others. For example, Germany, where many in the political class now assume that Europe and the United States will permanently drift apart in strategic terms.³ The

² See Julie Smith, “Transatlanticism, Interrupted,” Project Syndicate, January 16, 2019.

³ See Heiko Maas, “For a balanced transatlantic partnership,” *Handelsblatt*, August 22, 2018.

European countries would presumably be unable to organize themselves and develop a powerful common security and defense policy that is not completely dependent on the United States. Even under Trump, as Jeremy Shapiro has observed, most Europeans “still prefer relying on the United States for their security rather than relying on one another.”⁴ They would probably try to wait Trump out and to muddle through for two more years, hoping that spending more on defense in NATO would convince Trump that the United States' allies are pulling their weight. In the process they would likely try to build as many bridges as possible to other political actors in the United States, like members of Congress or state governors, until Trump's presidency ends—in the hope that the next president will have a greater affinity for the traditional values of the transatlantic community and will be satisfied with the country continuing to do most of the heavy lifting in European security.

Simply keeping up the Trump status quo without a constructive agenda could, though, hollow out the transatlantic relationship. And hope for the time after Trump could also prove to be unfounded.

A Post-American Europe

In this scenario, President Trump is more and more absorbed with domestic politics and personal scandals during the second half of his presidency. On the foreign policy front, he has the United States give up its role as a “shaping power” and increasingly opts for isolation rather than cooperation with European countries. Trump largely allows powers outside the transatlantic alliance, namely China and Russia, to set the international agenda, and they continue to fill the power-political vacuum the United States leaves behind.

The president's fight with Democrats over the federal budget and the government shutdown is just the beginning of a long period of domestic battles that polarize even further the political class, the media, and the country. American society is locked in a brutal

⁴ See Jeremy Shapiro, “Why Trump Can Safely Ignore Europe,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 15, 2018.

battle over the future. This dispute dominates the 2020 presidential election campaign. Trump's border wall with Mexico symbolizes his effort to close off the United States from the world, to end costly military campaigns abroad, and to stop European allies from free-riding on the U.S. security guarantee.

By redeeming his promises to bring America's "boys" home, restrict free trade for the benefit of American products and workers, and give up the country's job as

“ *On its own, Europe would immediately lose influence and the ability to shape events.* ”

policeman of the world, Trump succeeds in attracting domestic support, and not just from his core supporters. He also strikes the right chord in the general public where the permissive consensus around the "liberal international order" has largely eroded.

Trump publicly threatens to pull the United States from NATO as allied military spending continues to lag behind the goals he has set. U.S. foreign policy is limited to the pursuit of transactional relationships with other countries, a mercantilistic approach in economic policy, and the promotion of nationalism and unilateralism.

Transatlantic relations suffer while the United States is navel-gazing, essentially only existing on paper. Allies on both sides of the Atlantic concentrate on keeping up an acceptable degree of cooperation but are no longer capable of determining a common agenda or coordinating their actions.

The European countries would be forced to ask themselves to what extent they are capable of taking care of their own security and of maintaining the multilateral order without the United States. On its own, Europe would immediately lose influence and the ability to shape events, a setback for which enhanced cooperation with other actors like Japan or Australia would not compensate. The European

countries would also be unable to replace the United States' military capabilities, even in the medium term.

A lot would depend on whether in a post-American Europe, the continent's countries would be able to overcome their previous difficulties in acting more jointly and to develop a strong, common foreign and security policy. If Europe were more unified and capable of action on this front, it would be able to tip the international scales without the United States.

How likely is it that the United States' retreat from the word stage would bring European countries closer together? Three factors speak against it happening. First, after a decade in crisis mode, the latter are deeply divided on essential political questions. Never before since they set up on the path of European integration has there been so little agreement about which goals they want to pursue through it. A few current governments even base their political legitimacy on their open rejection of "Brussels". It is hard to imagine that the EU member states will, in the next few years, find the energy and political will to set aside their disagreements and focus on the common interest. Second, there is trend of navel-gazing in Europe too. Many states are limited or even paralyzed by domestic challenges, from Brexit in Britain to the yellow vests movement in France to the transformation of the party system in Germany. In this context, it is not clear which country would be capable of leading Europe. Third, European integration is not only an internally driven process. It is often forgotten that it was the United States' security guarantee that first made European integration after 1945 possible, and that it has repeatedly contributed to Europe's political unity. If U.S. support falls away, it would become even clearer that Europe is itself an unstable structure.

A Proactive Division of the EU

In the third scenario, President Trump is not only indifferent towards the EU, but sees it as a hostile institution that needs to be eliminated. He actively undermines its cohesion and pursues a divide-and-rule policy toward the member states.

Trump more than ever makes “America First” the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy and judges his country’s allies through the prism of whether they are an asset or a liability. The European countries are for him objects of U.S. politics. He puts more and more pressure on them by linking economic and security policy; for example, to buy American weapons systems or liquefied natural gas. In the process he gives European countries the impression that the U.S. security guarantee is only for those allies who really deserve protection. Germany is the main focus of his criticism.

“ *Trump could only succeed in splitting the EU if its members allow themselves to be split.* ”

Trump openly sympathizes with Euroskeptical forces in the EU. He sees “Brussels” as a dictatorship of bureaucrats and supports the renationalization of Europe, openly criticizing the European Commission’s attempt to press “progressive social policy” on member states. In his interactions with the EU members, he ditches transatlantic institutions in favor of bilateral relations and special deals. Trump also feels closest to the European governments that emphasize national sovereignty and reject globalization and migration. He shares their conviction that Western civilization is at risk of decline and under threat from “radical Islamic terrorism.” Issues of democracy and the rule of law no longer matter when dealing with European governments. The political alignment between favored European countries and the United States, in the form of an “illiberal axis”, precipitates the undermining of the transatlantic relationship and the EU.

The divisive potential of such a policy would be enormous, as the EU members would be forced to prioritize either their European or transatlantic connection—in other words to choose between the U.S. security guarantee and European economic interconnectedness. This would run counter to the idea that the stability of Europe rests on two

pillars: unity through the EU and close transatlantic ties through NATO.

However, Trump could only succeed in splitting the EU if its members allow themselves to be split. His ideas about the EU are met with much approval in some of them. There are rising forces in Europe that want to create a looser union of strong nation states as a more favorable environment for those countries that no longer want the EU to “dictate” their values and rules to them. Some member states would also be more likely to embrace Trump’s transactional approach to security alliances than others. For example, In September 2018 President Andrzej Duda of Poland tried to curry favor with Trump by appealing to his vanity, calling for the United States to build a military base to be named “Fort Trump” in his country and offering to contribute \$2 billion to this.

The not entirely unlikely prospect of this scenario coming to pass shows how little success Europe’s previous strategy of “compartmentalizing” relations with Trump can have if the United States links trade issues with security guarantees. Even if the European countries tried to limit transatlantic conflicts to specific areas (for example, the Iran nuclear deal) and prevent escalation, it would not work with Trump in office.

Conclusion

Each of the scenarios considered here represents one of the trends in U.S. foreign policy since the start of Trump’s presidency: antagonism, isolationism and divide-and-rule. At the moment, they all seem plausible. They are also far from mutually exclusive; in fact, it is likely that in the next two years elements from all three will play out. The best-case scenario for Europe is that as much of the Trump status quo as possible is maintained. However, the president’s announcement that he wants to pull U.S. troops out of Syria and Afghanistan, like his threat to put tariffs on European automobiles, suggests that it will be difficult to avoid further deterioration in the transatlantic relationship and damage to European interests. Trump is not going to change his mind about Europe.

To a degree the three scenarios are different versions of the same dark timeline. However, a “Black Swan” event or a major crisis could have an imponderable impact on transatlantic relations. After all, President George W. Bush followed a neoconservative foreign policy approach only after 9/11 happened, and President Barack Obama was not hugely interested in relations with Europe until Russia annexed Crimea.

European countries are not only objects of Trump’s policy choices. They can determine their own destiny. In every scenario, they need to act together to advance their interests. If Europe were more unified and capable of joint action in foreign policy, it would be able to tip the international scales without the United States. However, so far the EU member states have not been able to develop a unified policy to react to Trump: some have gone for confrontation, others want to wait things out, and others have tried to ingratiate themselves with him. While some leaders have made strong statements—German Chancellor Angela Merkel famously said that Europeans “must take [their] fate into [their] own hands”—there have not been practical steps taken to follow these up. Unfortunately there is no reason to assume that Trump, in any of the scenarios described here, will become a unifying factor in Europe.

Cracks in transatlantic relations are also always intra-European cracks. European countries will continue to have different interpretations of the Trump administration’s policies, in part because it has no uniform policy towards them. The first two years of Trump’s presidency look completely different to, for example, Poland and Germany. That is why there is no single European reading of “America First” and why it would be difficult to answer it with “Europe United”. Some European countries will come to terms with the situation better than others and be more open to bilateral and transactional relations with the United States over the next two years.

As Hans Kundnani and I have previously argued, Europe is caught between a rock and a hard place. The uncertainty

about U.S. engagement in Europe should drive European countries to move quickly toward greater “strategic autonomy.” Yet there is no consensus in the EU about this, due to the absence of a single European transatlantic reality and very different threat perceptions

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among European states. The simple fact is that European countries cannot defend themselves without the United States in the short or even medium term, and that would not immediately change even if they moved quickly to fill the void. Worse, while it calls on them to become more independent, the United States also views with mistrust their efforts to this end, such as developing their own defense industrial base instead of buying American. Thus Europe’s push for more autonomy may create a sense in Washington that it is going its own way and thus further undermine the U.S. commitment.⁵

There is, moreover, no member state of the EU that has the power, credibility, and political will to rally the others behind it. It is hard to imagine that, say, Poland or the Baltic states would back an EU that France and Germany lead away from the transatlantic alliance. If transatlantic relations in fact deteriorate further, European states might have to choose what is more important to them, unity or ability to act. It might well be that the latter cannot be achieved with all member states. The logical conclusion is that some member states may be forced to move ahead with a selected group of like-minded partners that are ready to act together. They may be forced to put the achievable ahead of the aspirational.

⁵ Hans Kundnani and Jana Puglierin, “Atlanticist and ‘Post-Atlanticist’ Wishful Thinking,” German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2018.

THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE AND RUSSIA: CHOOSING BETWEEN BAD AND WORSE SCENARIOS

JONATHAN EYAL

When Ambassador Sergei Kislyak, who represented Russia in the United States for almost a decade, went back to Moscow in 2017, not long after President Donald Trump stepped into the White House, the questions he faced from Russian journalists in a press conference were mainly about one matter: whether the two countries are now locked into a new Cold War. “Not yet,” he replied hesitantly—a qualified answer that said it all. For all the props of the Cold War have reappeared. The tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions. The frequent alleged discoveries of “plotters” and arrests of spies. The economic sanctions that Russian sources characterize as “unleashing a trade war.” The complicated cloak-and-dagger operations such as the attempt to murder Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military intelligence officer living in the United Kingdom, with a chemical nerve agent. And in 2018 the most extensive NATO and Russian military maneuvers in decades.

Yet, these trappings aside, are we standing at the onset of a new Cold War? The answer is reassuring and worrying at the same time. No, that conflict will not return. But confrontation between the West and Russia is likely to intensify, and it may be more unpredictable and therefore more dangerous than was the case during the Cold War.

The Cold War preoccupied the minds of every single leader in the East and the West and was fought relentlessly every single hour, for four long decades. It was pursued directly on the streets of Berlin, where the barrels of U.S. and Soviet tanks faced each other at a distance of a couple of metres, and one soldier careering into a wrong street could have unleashed a hot war. It was pursued around the world. And, although there were big and recurring differences between Europe and the United States over how it was conducted, there were no differences about the ultimate aim, which was to defend Western democracies

and to reduce, as far as possible, the effects of Germany’s division, and of Eastern Europe’s dictatorships.

The truth remains that, for President Vladimir Putin, confrontation with the West is not the exception but the rule, and since Russia is by far the weaker side in this game, most of what it does entails secret destabilization and subversion operations. The aim of this chapter is to outline the plausibility of three scenarios that may confront Western decision-makers in the short to medium term: the continuation of the current strategic landscape with the addition of a few “topical” complications introduced by the Trump presidency, a scenario in which there is an improvement in relations with Russia, and a nosedive in Western-Russian relations. For every scenario, the emphasis is on what would be the implications for the transatlantic alliance, and how certain key actors in Europe are likely to react.

The Trump Status Quo

The first scenario can be termed as the “Trump status quo,” in which the U.S. president continues to seek an accommodation between the United States and Russia, while European countries offer no workable alternative and therefore try to maintain simultaneously good relations with the United States and a workable relationship with Russia. Meanwhile, Putin continues to find opportunities to create mischief in Europe as well as between Europe and the United States.

Of all the policy promises Trump made during his election campaign, none has been more prominent or more durable than that to forge a new strategic partnership with Russia. It has been repeated so often

and in such categorical terms that it has spawned a wave of conspiracy-theory explanations.

There is a more humdrum and perhaps more persuasive explanation: that the U.S. president genuinely believes in the advantages of friendship with Russia, or at least that he does not comprehend the full impact of what he is trying to do. Trump's admiration for Putin is partly explainable by the broader popularity that the Russian president has enjoyed for years among far-right political circles in the West. Putin's ability to reject "political correctness" and defy the current political wisdom by exposing current Western societies as morally bankrupt has made him hugely popular with Western right-wingers. Like Trump, the Russian leader also has a real-estate view of international relations: Putin's world is divided between properties he either owns or wants to own, and those owned by competitors. The similarities between their two visions are, therefore, compelling.

There are doubts about the ability of this rather unusual "Trump status quo" to deliver on what Russia or a Trump-led United States wants. Even if they genuinely try, the two presidents will soon discover that what they are prepared to offer each other is not very appealing to either, while the price each partner expects to extract from the other for such a strategic deal will be deemed unacceptable by both sides. This is the story of a divorce slated to occur before even the partners even went out on a date, let alone married.

Although Trump has never spelt out in detail what he wants from Russia, it is clear that there are two tasks for which he deems the country useful. The first is cooperation to "eradicate completely from the face of the Earth" what he calls "radical Islamic terrorism," as he put it in his inauguration address. The second is potential support in cornering China, which Trump sees as presenting the United States with the biggest and most sustained strategic challenge.

Russia has very different objectives. It is happy to cooperate with the United States on counter-terrorism, but it sees that as merely a diversion from its top priority, which is to regain its status as a global power whose support is required in the management of any future world crisis. For Russia, that means it should be allowed its own spheres

of influence in Europe and Central Asia, without which it is difficult to see why the United States should allow Russia, a country with a population not much bigger than Japan's and an economy not much bigger than Italy's, a permanent place at the top table. The continued crisis in Ukraine is largely about getting Western approval for the establishment of a Russian sphere of influence, and Putin has no intention of compromising on this quest.

At the same time, although it has its own reasons to mistrust China, Russia has no intention of cooperating with the United States in containing its Asian neighbor. That is partly because China would retaliate by challenging Russia's already declining influence in Central Asia, but also because it is in Russia's interest to have a powerful China as a permanent counter-balance to the United States. Russia may well be tempted to engage in its own China-hedging. Yet it will do that—and, arguably, is already doing so—with older partners such as India or Vietnam, rather than with the United States, which could later dump Russia by playing the "China card" against it, as in the 1970s.

Even if one assumes that Trump is prepared to put the China question aside and forge a partial strategic deal with Russia over Europe and the Middle East, it is difficult to see how this will be accomplished, or what purpose it would serve. The United States could abandon Ukraine to Russia by simply stopping all economic and military assistance to that country. But it could not deliver Eastern Europe to Russia as a sphere of influence even if it wanted. This is not 1945 when, at the end of World War II, countries could be bartered away with the whisk of a pen.

Nor is it very obvious what Russia can actually eradicate terrorism. Its military can drop bombs on terrorists, but bombs are a commodity the United States does not lack either. On almost every other count, Russia is part of the problem, rather than part of the solution to terrorism: its internal problems with domestic separatists and the marginalization of its own Muslim minorities feed into further violence, and it has one of the highest rates of people volunteering for fighting with terrorist organizations abroad. A true counter-terrorism

partnership between the United States and Russia should entail a change in domestic Russian policies, which neither Putin nor Trump are seeking.

In sum, it is doubtful that the kind of Russian-U.S. relationship Trump wants can deliver what either side may expect. As partners they are not merely incompatible, they do not even understand each other's aspirations, and most certainly have no incentive to address each other's needs. The only remaining question is if Trump wants to keep pursuing his dream or whether, like a good businessman who realizes that he is faced with a dud proposal, he cuts his losses soon and moves on to other projects.

The key question under the Trump status quo scenario is whether as it is now it is actually stable and able to lead to strategic stability. The answer is emphatically "no." The status quo in Europe is already changing due to the following factors.

- Trump's persistent questioning—explicitly and implicitly—of the validity of NATO's Article 5 security guarantee.
- The United Kingdom's impending departure from the EU, which raises questions about the contribution of one of the key military powers in Europe to the future stability of the continent or to Europe's ability to conduct a coherent military policy.
- Europe's efforts to gain strategic autonomy.
- A deepening of east-west divisions, and lingering north-south ones, within the EU.
- Profound political changes within European countries, with established political parties coming under increased stress, and the rise of populist movements that, although not directly challenging the viability of the EU, challenge the viability of the principles and visions that guide its current policies.

Overall, "status quo" is a misnomer, and its preservation an unlikely cause to be pursued.

Upswing

The second scenario is that of an upswing in relations with Russia. In it, having secured Russia's strategic interests in places like the Middle East, Putin is prepared to scale down his strategic challenges to the West, offers to settle the "frozen conflicts" in Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine. He may even outline a political succession after his current term of office ends in 2024, something that offers the hope of more cooperative Russia. In this scenario, Western governments reciprocate by conceding to Russia a sphere of influence and by revising and updating key arms-control agreements.

Given its serious moral implications for Western societies, many would see this scenario as an appeasement of a bully, very much like the Munich Agreements of 1938, and a negation of everything the West stands for. There should also be skepticism of a scenario that envisages a smooth and predictable transfer of power in the Kremlin or one that will produce a Russia that is more cooperative with the West and is more willing to become a security provider in Europe in a way that meets the rest of the continent's expectations.

Even if one treated this scenario as realistic, there is serious doubt that such an arrangement could work, provide stability, and avoid a very serious crisis in Europe's alliance with the United States. Russia may well feel satisfied if it is conceded a sphere of influence in places such as Belarus, Ukraine and the Caucasus, and this could form the basis for a plausible accommodation, if not friendship, with the West. However, a division of the continent into spheres of influence is unlikely to prove stable, for the following reasons.

- It can never be sustained before European public opinion.
- There is no neat way or process for all sides to agree on such spheres of influence.

- Countries assigned to spheres of influence are unlikely to take this as given.
- In regions such as the Balkans, such an arrangement could actually increase the potential for violence.

There is no reliable way of ensuring that Russia will not seek a further, wider sphere of influence after a first agreement.

Far from having a stabilizing effect, a division of the continent into spheres of influence would be catastrophic for Europe's security. Even a discussion about this would invite conflicts and potential wars, as countries scramble to avoid the fate assigned to them. Nor are Europe and the United States likely to agree on delineating spheres of influence and on how a newfound cooperative mood with Russia should be developed. Far from eliminating the sources of dispute across the Atlantic, such an arrangement would only be likely to make them far worse. And finally, far from increasing its internal cohesion, the mere talk of a 19th century-style accommodation with Russia would deprive the EU of its most important instrument of influence, namely the promise that the door to European integration remains open for countries that are Europeans and fulfill its democracy and development criteria.

In short, such a scenario would be the worst of all worlds: it would deliver no stability to Europe, the United States, or Russia. And it could also herald the start of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the continent because it is difficult to see how a United States that has conceded a sphere of influence to Russia and has, therefore, sacrificed the security interests of some European countries, would still be able to credibly claim that it nevertheless remains committed to protecting the security of other EU states—the reputation of the United States as the upholder of the European order would be shot to pieces.

Nosedive

A third alternative may be termed as the nosedive scenario. In it a U.S. administration—be it the current one, which

may change course once it becomes clear that Russia will not deliver on what Trump expects, or a successor one eager to differentiate itself from its predecessor—adopts a more hawkish approach to Russia, and this unleashes a major transatlantic crisis affecting NATO. The risk of an open conflict increases as evidence of Moscow's destabilization efforts in parts of Europe such as the Baltics or the Balkans mounts, and so do tensions across the Atlantic over what is the most appropriate policy in dealing with a resurgent Russia.

To a certain extent we may be approaching precisely such a scenario. The new Democrat-controlled House of Representatives is intent on being harsher on Russia, especially when it comes to the imposition of new economic sanctions. The Republican-controlled Senate is not particularly keen on Russia either. A harder stance against Moscow is one policy on which most Republicans and Democrats agree. Furthermore, the link between policies toward Russia and U.S. domestic politics has never been stronger; Trump is basically incapable of launching any initiative with the country without risking further criticism and accusations of colluding with Putin.

At the same time arms control as a regime to manage tensions in Europe and as a concept to manage international relations is virtually collapsing. Trump's decision to pull the United States out of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty has been met with cries of despair from Europe, although the real surprise may well be not that this happened, but that it took place much later than originally anticipated. Still, the demise of what was the last Cold War-era disarmament accord marks a historic turning point. And it is almost certain to herald a dangerous new nuclear arms race, although not one of the United States' own making, and not one for which Trump will necessarily carry the blame. Despite the shocked response of European leaders, all knew for years that the treaty was heading to history's scrapheap, but they could not muster even one practical proposal about what should be done to rescue it.

Still, the INF Treaty was the first agreement in history that actually reduced stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and one of only a handful of treaties to eliminate an entire class of

weapons. Its demise means that there are few arms-control agreements Russia and the West; the old days of strategic dialogue are over and will not return soon. Gone too are the confidence-building measures, the military inspections designed to reassure the world's top powers of each other's intentions and faithful observance of arms-control agreements.

Deep misgivings have been expressed about NATO's ability to conduct successfully its strategic re-adaptation plans in a scenario in which the security environment in Europe is constantly deteriorating. The fundamentally changed security environment will confront Europe with the following profound, almost existential, questions that cannot be ducked.

- How should Europe respond to the demise of the INF Treaty when its publics are in no mood for a new arms race?
- How much of the United States' developments in missile technology and nuclear strategy—which affect its strategic calculations about China, not just Russia—be shared with its European allies?
- Would Europe be able to refuse demands for the pre-positioning of U.S. new missile systems on the continent?
- What would be Europe's response to a decision by Trump to revive President Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" initiative?

The reality is that Europe will have to make serious choices about what it means with its ideas of strategic autonomy, what defense technologies it wishes to develop on its own, which ones it chooses to rely on the United States to provide, and which ones it never hopes to have or to benefit from. The decision is not only Europe's; it also has to include a new transatlantic consensus about a new division of labor on security questions, something which is difficult to achieve with the current U.S. administration, and particularly so if the strategic landscape deteriorates quickly.

Of all the three scenarios considered here, this third one is the more likely and the bleakest one.

Conclusion

The fact that all these three scenarios were treated and discussed by the participants in the exercise as plausible speaks volume about the current state of transatlantic relations. Participants strongly agreed with the proposition that, although China may now be regarded by decision-makers in Washington as the United States' biggest and most immediate strategic rival, Russia continues to pose a profound challenge to global security and established order, and is by far the biggest source of potential transatlantic discord.

In all the scenarios, EU unity would be essential, if only in order to manage potential disputes with the United States over priorities. Political leadership from Germany would also be required to forge such unity, buttressed with French and British military might. At least for the moment, Russia's behavior has helped the Europeans maintain their solidarity; its defiance of the established rules of international behavior has been so egregious that it has served to unite the Europeans. But Putin is unlikely to oblige us all the time; any subtle shift in Russia's strategy could fray the EU consensus on how to deal with the continent's security.

What is clear—and this is the ultimate dilemma facing transatlantic policymakers—is that de-escalation in the confrontation with Russia is unlikely to produce an outcome beneficial to European security if this means accepting some of its strategic demands, while increasing the pressure on Russia is unlikely to win acceptance from either the current occupant of the White House or some key European capitals. Unfortunately, however, merely hoping that the current status quo will prevail and that matters will not get any worse is not a strategy—and it is not sustainable either.

EUROPE'S STRATEGIES IN ASIA: TOWARD A TRANSATLANTIC CONSENSUS?

BART SZEWCZYK

Three years ago, the EU's Global Strategy—which states that the union seeks to promote peace, guarantee the security of its citizens and territory, advance the prosperity of its people, and uphold a rules-based global order—provided a general framework for Europe's policies in Asia.¹ It argued that there is a “direct connection” between European prosperity and Asian security, and sought “to make greater practical contributions to Asian security” through partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and others. With respect to China, the strategy recommended engagement based on “respect for rule of law, both domestically and internationally” and expanding connectivity with Asia. Implementing these political guidelines, the European Commission and the European External Action Service, in a joint communication to the European Parliament and Council in September 2018, proposed concrete policies to improve connections between Europe and Asia, including through interoperable transport, energy, and digital networks.² This EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy is meant as a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative. In March 2019, the Commission and the External Action Service also released a joint communication on a strategic outlook for EU-China relations, identifying a range of policy areas where both sides would either cooperate, negotiate, compete, or rival each other.³ Generally, European strategies toward Asia are likely to be compatible with the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy introduced by the Trump administration

1 “A Global Strategy for the European Union (2016).”

2 “Joint Communication, Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy (2018),” (the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy).

3 Joint Communication, EU-China – A strategic outlook (2019).

This chapter benefited extensively from an EPSC roundtable in Brussels, a GMF workshop in Berlin, and a GMF roundtable in Paris. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the European Commission.

in recent speeches by senior U.S. officials, but some tensions between the two approaches are also likely.

More broadly, three geopolitical factors—the return of great-power rivalry, China's growing assertiveness, and emerging U.S.-Chinese frictions—have raised anew the question of what should be Europe's strategy toward Asia. What are its core interests and objectives in the region, and how much commonality or diversity of interest is there within Europe in its relations with Asia? What are the main instruments that the EU or individual member states have at their disposal to serve their interests in Asia? And who are Europe's potential partners and competitors in the region?

Formulated at this level of generality, it is evident that no single strategy will likely be able to articulate the set of advisable and politically feasible policies that European decision-makers—representing 500 million people and 28 countries—can and should pursue toward a region of 4.5 billion people and around 50 countries. Yet, it is possible to outline key elements of a strategic approach that the EU and individual member states should adopt as part of their overall posture in Asia, as well as how to coordinate their approaches with the United States to develop a transatlantic consensus. China is the key factor in developing European and U.S. strategies, but it should not exclusively determine the approach of either. This chapter sets out the strategic context in Asia, describes Europe's core interests and objectives there, and sketches out policy options for Europe and the transatlantic community.⁴

4 To analyze these questions and their implications for transatlantic cooperation, GMF recently hosted an off-the-record scenario-planning workshop with senior officials from the EU and its member states, as well as former officials, think-tankers, and academics.

Strategic Context

For Europe, the central dynamic in Asia has been rapid economic growth there, particularly in China, and the opportunities this offers for trade and investment. Asia, with roughly 60 percent of the world population, accounts for 35 percent of the EU's exports (€618 billion) and 45 percent of the EU's imports (€774 billion).⁵ Between 1989 and 2016, GDP per capita growth rates in Asia were more than double those in the EU and the United States (3.25 percent compared to 1.47 and 1.39 percent, respectively), and in China and India in particular people grew wealthier on average by 8.76 and 4.85 percent, respectively.⁶ Recently, the EU has concluded trade and investment-protection agreements with Vietnam and Singapore, as well as a strategic and economic partnership agreement with Japan. It has also opened trade talks with Australia and New Zealand.

The security situation in Asia is tense, with an ongoing acute crisis with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program, tension over China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and the militarization of its newly constructed artificial islands there, the dispute between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, and periodic tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Moreover, terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Central Asia pose a security concern for the region and have a direct impact on Europe's security. Any escalation of these conflicts has the potential to disrupt European trade in Asia.

Generally, Europe has relied on U.S. military primacy in Asia to provide regional security and stability, as much as regional powers such as Japan, South Korea, India, or Australia have done. European countries, with the exception of France and the United Kingdom, have shown only limited interest in security in the Asia-Pacific. On the diplomatic front, Europe has been a staunch supporter of international law and promoted a rules-based order in the region. EU statements carry weight with actors in the region and are well noted, be it protesting the introduction of an air defense identification zone by China in the East China

⁵ "EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy," p. 1.

⁶ Data from [World Bank Open Data](#).

Sea or the judgment against China by the Permanent Court of Arbitration with regard to the South China Sea dispute (which was viewed as a helpful endorsement of the process and of the other regional claimants, such as the Philippines.) France has periodically run freedom-of-navigation operations in the region, which could be deemed by outside observers as a type of EU rule-of-law mission, to contest China's claims and to support the law of the sea.

“*European countries, with the exception of France and the United Kingdom, have only shown limited interest in security in the Asia-Pacific.*”

Europe generally has good relations with many countries in Asia, particularly India, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Interactions with China, however, have gone through a significant evolution in recent years, given the country's rapid rise in economic, military, and political power, and its growing assertiveness.

Since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, it has become a global economic player, expanding as an investor and trading partner and no longer only being seen as a low-cost manufacturing base. The 2008 financial crisis created numerous opportunities in Europe for China to exploit by deploying its vast savings in the form of investments or loans. Finally, the appointment of Xi Jinping as China's president in 2013, as a compromise candidate among various factions of the Communist Party, and his subsequent elimination of term limits have further centralized power in the country. Generally, the West's hope that economic liberalization in China would gradually lead to political liberalization has not materialized. In fact, the two trends have moved in opposite directions.

- China respects the EU as an institution, but views Europe as a region divided into the following four parts.
- Big states—Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.
- Northern Europe—the Scandinavian states, Ireland, Iceland, etc.
- Central and Eastern Europe—Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, etc.
- Southern Europe—Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Malta, etc.⁷

China's 16+1 format for engaging with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been a success of its diplomacy, yet their enthusiasm has been curbed by China's failure to deliver on the high (and sometimes outsized) expectations of the participating nations. The countries involved form a very diverse group including EU member states and accession candidates in the Balkans. China's Belt and Road Initiative is a central mechanism for the expansion of its economic and political influence, with around 80 countries now participating, but here too many large-scale projects have stalled notwithstanding signed memoranda of understanding, including with several European countries.⁸

China's December 2018 policy paper on the EU is a laundry list of demands and instructions (such as treating Taiwan and Tibet as taboo subjects, and expecting to be granted market-economy status), and largely tone deaf in terms of building a relationship with the EU. On the other hand, China reportedly has funded various think tanks and academic initiatives in Europe to ensure that a pro-China line emerges within public debates. Globally, its growing economic and political presence also manifests itself in international organizations, such as the UN, where any criticism of the country is actively countered. Yet, for all its

⁷ See, for example, Philippe Le Corre, "China's Rise as a Geoeconomic Influencer: Four European Case Studies," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2018.

⁸ See generally, European Parliament, "Research for TRAN Committee: The new Silk Route - opportunities and challenges for EU transport," (2018).

material prowess, China has few real friends and allies, particularly in Asia, where public opinion of it is very low in some countries.

An overarching factor in Europe's strategic context in Asia is the evolving U.S. policy in the region, particularly toward China, as articulated in recent speeches by senior officials such as Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary

“ *An overarching factor in Europe's strategic context in Asia is the evolving U.S. policy in the region.* ”

of State Mike Pompeo. Generally, the U.S. strategy is more confrontational toward China than Europe's, through trade tariffs and other measures, and seeks to maintain military and political primacy in Asia, because China is a direct strategic competitor and potential military adversary for the United States.

Interests and Objectives

Primarily, Europe's core interest is in promoting its economic prosperity through greater trade and investment with Asia, and in particular with China with its flow of direct and portfolio investment. This interest is short-term and long-term, and is likely to overshadow other interests related to democracy promotion and human rights or security in Asia. It may even become accentuated over time as China expands its economic presence in Europe and turns its trade and investment relationships into political leverage. For some European countries—particularly France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—economic interest will also include arms exports to the region.

Second, Europe has a vital interest in protecting its way of life and the wider liberal order—based on democracy, human rights, rule of law, fair trade, and a social market economy—from illiberal forces. But it is an open

question whether China poses the same political threat to this European interest as Russia, or whether it simply wants mutual non-interference in internal affairs. After all, democracy and human rights in Europe do not, *ipso facto*, pose a threat to China's political and social structure, while they are perceived by the Kremlin to do so to Russia's due

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Over the near-to-medium term, Europe's primary policy instrument in relation to Asia is likely to continue to be economic.

to their infectious effect on neighboring countries such as Ukraine and on opposition groups within Russia. Apart from its heightened sensitivities on Taiwan and the One China Policy as well as on Tibet, China's regime remains relatively secure domestically and one-party rule can be expected to continue for decades.

Third, with respect to regional security, Europe prefers the status quo of U.S. military primacy in Asia as the best-case scenario. It also has a particular interest in the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to its Asian allies, such as Japan or South Korea, as an indicator of the credibility of U.S. guarantees to NATO. For this reason, it has a unique stake in the outcome of the North Korea crisis, and would view a deal that addresses solely the long-range missile threat from the country as unsatisfactory (as it would be perceived to serve U.S. interest over allied interest). In the event of growing military tensions between the United States and China, Europe is likely to prefer to remain neutral for all intents and purposes, beyond diplomatic support, and to avoid getting involved in conflicts in the region, which it may view as quagmires. The Vietnam War experience would be a central analogy in such debates.

Fourth, Europe wants to promote the so-called rules-based global order, which provides for a degree of predictability and stability in interactions with Asian countries, and can help guide the rise of China toward positive global

contributions. It would prefer these rules to be liberal, but above all, it prefers the presence of rules to the lack thereof.

With respect to democracy and human rights, Europe wants to promote universal values in Asia, and may be able to leverage its trade and investment agreements there to promote better labor regulations, anti-corruption mechanisms, legal reforms, and political transparency. But any positive changes are likely to be gradual and to involve numerous regressions and setbacks, rather than transformational improvement akin to the 1989 democratization wave in Central and Eastern Europe.

Policy Options

Over the near-to-medium term—the next two to five years—Europe's primary policy instrument in relation to Asia is likely to continue to be economic, through trade and investment agreements. Traditionally, its economic policy has been used to maximize prosperity and commercial opportunity, but it could consider further strengthening within economic negotiations stricter political criteria, such as human rights, democracy, rule of law, labor standards, anti-corruption, and transparency—as it has done with the partnership agreements with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. In addition to further bilateral treaties with countries in the region, the EU could join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership with 11 Pacific states as a way of reviving the high standards that characterized the prior TPP from which the Trump administration withdrew. In navigating new trade deals, the EU will need to contend with the new U.S. policy to isolate “non-market” countries, such as China, through a so-called poison pill in the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (which gives the other signatories the right to withdraw if one signs a free trade agreement with a non-market country).

Beyond trade and investment policies, the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy provides a wider framework for economic engagement in Asia and responding to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). But the devil will be in

the details, and in the scale to which various concrete transport, energy, infrastructure, communications and digital projects will be funded. The challenge will be to maintain an overarching strategic narrative encompassing various disparate initiatives and ensuring credibility of commitments; arguably, China's BRI has been successful on messaging, but less on delivery.

A new set of policy considerations that Europe will need to process will be centered on protecting its way of life from illiberal forces. For instance, efforts to screen foreign direct investment into Europe for security concerns have quickly galvanized. As a consequence, Huawei's 5G technology, though cost-competitive and advantageous in terms of communications speed, is suspect and may be rejected in European countries, because it could facilitate surveillance by China's security services. The same dynamic will characterize other decisions related to scientific cooperation, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence. Another policy option would be to obtain credible mutual guarantees of political non-interference, which may be possible between Europe and China. However, this would require Europe sacrificing its support for democratic and human rights values in China, and may not be politically palatable.

Europe has several formats for consultation and engagement with Asia—in particular the Asia-Europe Meeting of 53 partners across Europe and Asia, the EU-ASEAN format, and the EU-India strategic partnership—that it can strengthen and utilize to promote a liberal order in Asia with like-minded partners. The open question is whether there will be sufficient interest in Europe and Asia to

organize collective action on issues related to this, which are inevitably diffuse, of general interest and shared benefit, with long-term consequences but short-term costs, and thus the most difficult to galvanize political effort for.

Finally, apart from France and the United Kingdom, Europe has limited military assets in Asia. However, the EU could explore launching civilian missions or military operations, pursuant to its Common Security and Defence Policy, to help advise on rule of law, security-sector reform, the national security process, or military training, as it does in 16 such missions and operations across Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. This kind of assistance in states such as Sri Lanka or Myanmar could be a valuable contribution to regional security.

Conclusion

The EU Global Strategy aims for “an appropriate level of ambition” for Europe’s “ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders.” This applies with special force to Europe’s strategies in Asia, which span multiple layers of abstraction, encompass numerous decision-makers and political entities, and need to balance a range of diverse and potentially conflicting interests. Yet, Europe’s economic scale, internal resilience, institutional stability, diplomatic and political reach, confidence in its values, and military potential give it a vast range of tools and policy options to design sophisticated and successful strategies for the future, regardless of what scenarios emerge in Asia.

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