

Dear Readers,

The first two years of Donald Trump's term as the 45th president of the United States have seriously damaged Europe's confidence in the US as a partner, and put a strain on transatlantic relations. However, this review of American foreign policy under Trump, which takes a look at how Europe and the US are actually cooperating in five regions and five policy fields, reveals a differentiated picture with some rays of hope. Trump has taken a more nationalistic, unilateral, and protectionist approach to policy, and adopted a more confrontational style. This has certainly reduced the number of overlaps between US and German interests, but it has not prevented pragmatic cooperation in key policy areas. Over the last two years, Trump's foreign policy has, in many respects, followed the route of traditional US policy. Thus, the preservation of the transatlantic partnership – for which Germany has no alternative, particularly in terms of security and economic policy – remains, just as it once was, both possible and necessary.

Continuity Generally Prevails in Foreign Policy

As our contributors highlight, the policies of the Trump administration – especially as relates to security issues and Russia – have been characterised above all by continuity. Despite all of Trump's rhetorical sabre-rattling, he has held fast to the key transatlantic alliance – NATO. Indeed, over the past two years, the US has ramped up its presence in Europe as a deterrent to Russia. In many respects, the US's approach to China also stands in continuity with its former policies, although it is being pursued much more aggressively and via other means. Trump's withdrawal from the Middle East ties in with Obama's policy. The termination of the nuclear deal with Iran represents a return to the traditional American Middle East policy and “corrects” the historical “anomaly” of rapprochement under Obama. The same applies to the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement. The apparently unilateral shift in US foreign policy is not really a break with the past. Instead, it follows the traditional American logic, which regards the multilateral system merely as a means to an end – the

enforcement of American security and economic interests. This being said, the new protectionism in trade policy does represent a clear break with the traditional maxims of US foreign policy; although the critical attitude towards the World Trade Organisation dates back to the era of President George W. Bush, and the US has always had its share of critical voices with regard to trade.

A New Transactional Style

First and foremost, it is the president's style and rhetoric that has changed. Trump's transactional, often erratic style has given US foreign policy a new rationale. True to his campaign slogan "America First" – an exaggerated extension of Obama's "Nation-Building at Home" –, US foreign policy is now more strongly geared towards domestic voter groups. Trump's policies are a symptom of a deeper process of domestic political change in the US. It takes into account the increasing divisions in American society, which have been emerging over many years as a result of changes in the country's economic and socio-political structures. As the US midterm elections showed, Trump's policies are supported by large sections of the American public. The same applies to the president's aggressive rhetoric, which clearly articulates this course.

There Is No Alternative to the Transatlantic Partnership

Following Trump's logic, transatlantic relations are now more than ever understood by the US as a means to an end, rather than a partnership of values. Even after Trump leaves office, it seems unlikely that the US will change its course given the aforementioned domestic political changes. The media's focus on Trump and the president's style and rhetoric have affected confidence in the US as a reliable, protective, and regulatory power. However, Europe has no alternative to the transatlantic partnership in terms of other world regions and shared values. Over the last two years, the congruence of common interests has diminished in the ten

areas examined. Nevertheless, our authors describe how nothing has stood in the way of pragmatic cooperation in many areas, and this seems set to continue. This applies first and foremost to cooperation in what is probably Europe's most important transatlantic field of cooperation – security policy, particularly as regards Russia, and the fight against international terrorism. The digital revolution is another area that will become increasingly important for both sides, and there is also potential for cooperation in Africa. With regard to China and Iran, the US and Germany are pursuing congruent goals, but arguing about the right means with which to pursue them. The US and Germany are diametrically opposed in the area of a rule-based, multilateral system, including on climate change, development policy, and international trade, and, with some exceptions, in their approach to the Middle East conflict.

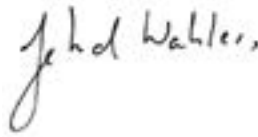
The Preservation of the Partnership is Possible

Over the next two years of the Trump presidency, it will, therefore, be important to maintain a dialogue with the US, and to shape relations in a pragmatic way. The rule-based world order is vital to Germany's interests, but it cannot defend it without the US – and certainly not against the US. However, the federal systems and different constellations of actors in the two countries offer opportunities for a multi-layered dialogue. A transatlantic friendship does not mean it is necessary to be in total agreement. Germany and the EU must have the courage to take a clear stand. For the US, the competition of ideas also applies to politics. In the US, objective criticism is also seen – if not by all, by many – as a strength and a sign of respect. It is therefore important to concretise, substantiate, and raise awareness of topics of mutual interest. With regard to the multilateral order, Germany and the European Union must actively advance into the areas from which the US is withdrawing. Efforts to find multilateral partners – such as Canada, Australia, the Latin American countries and Japan – may complement, but not replace, the transatlantic partnership. A key factor in maintaining relations with the US will be to increase the

European Union's internal and external capacity to act, and to assume more responsibility in international politics. The current "disenchantment" with transatlantic relations could act as a vital catalyst in this respect.

I wish you a stimulating read.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

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