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# INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

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## Looking West

An Assessment of the  
Transatlantic Partnership



# INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

1 | 2019

Dear Readers,

The first two years of Donald Trump's term as the 45<sup>th</sup> 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.

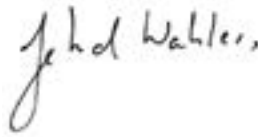
### **The Preservation of the Partnership is Possible**

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,

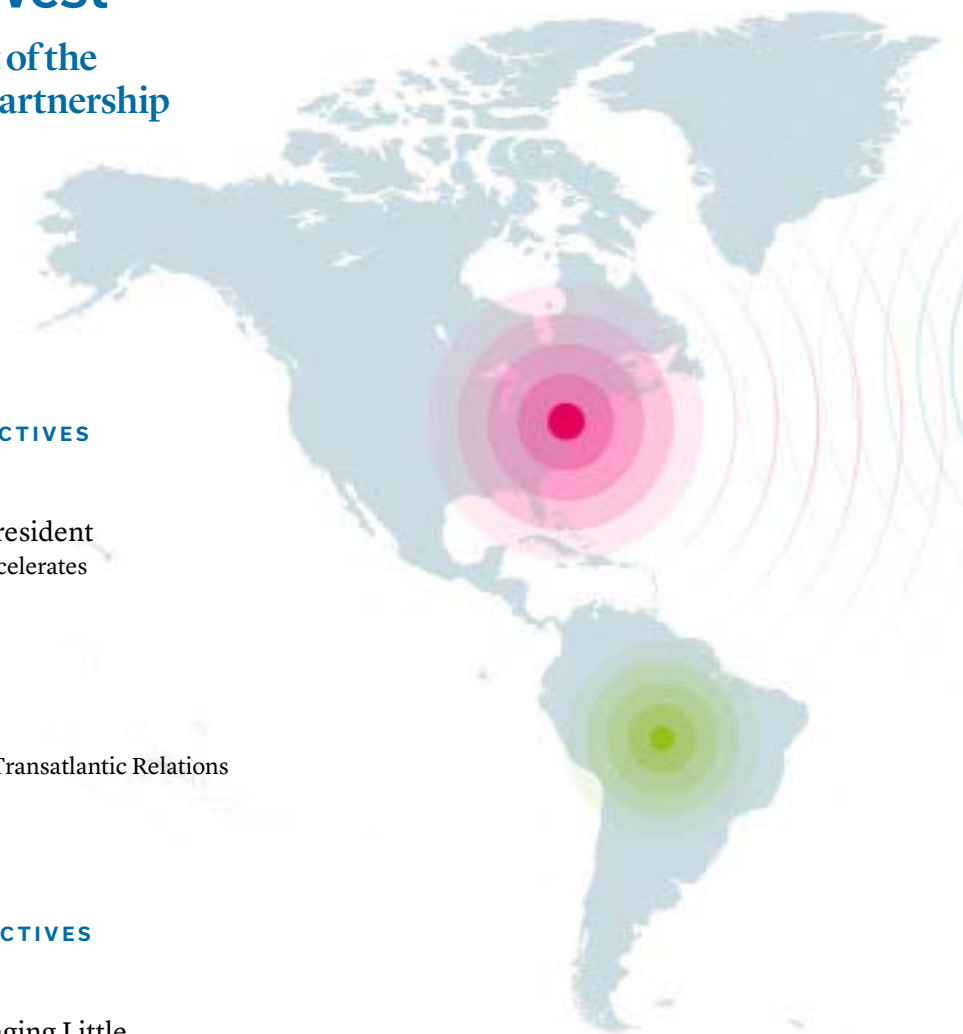
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'G'.

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# Looking West

## An Assessment of the Transatlantic Partnership



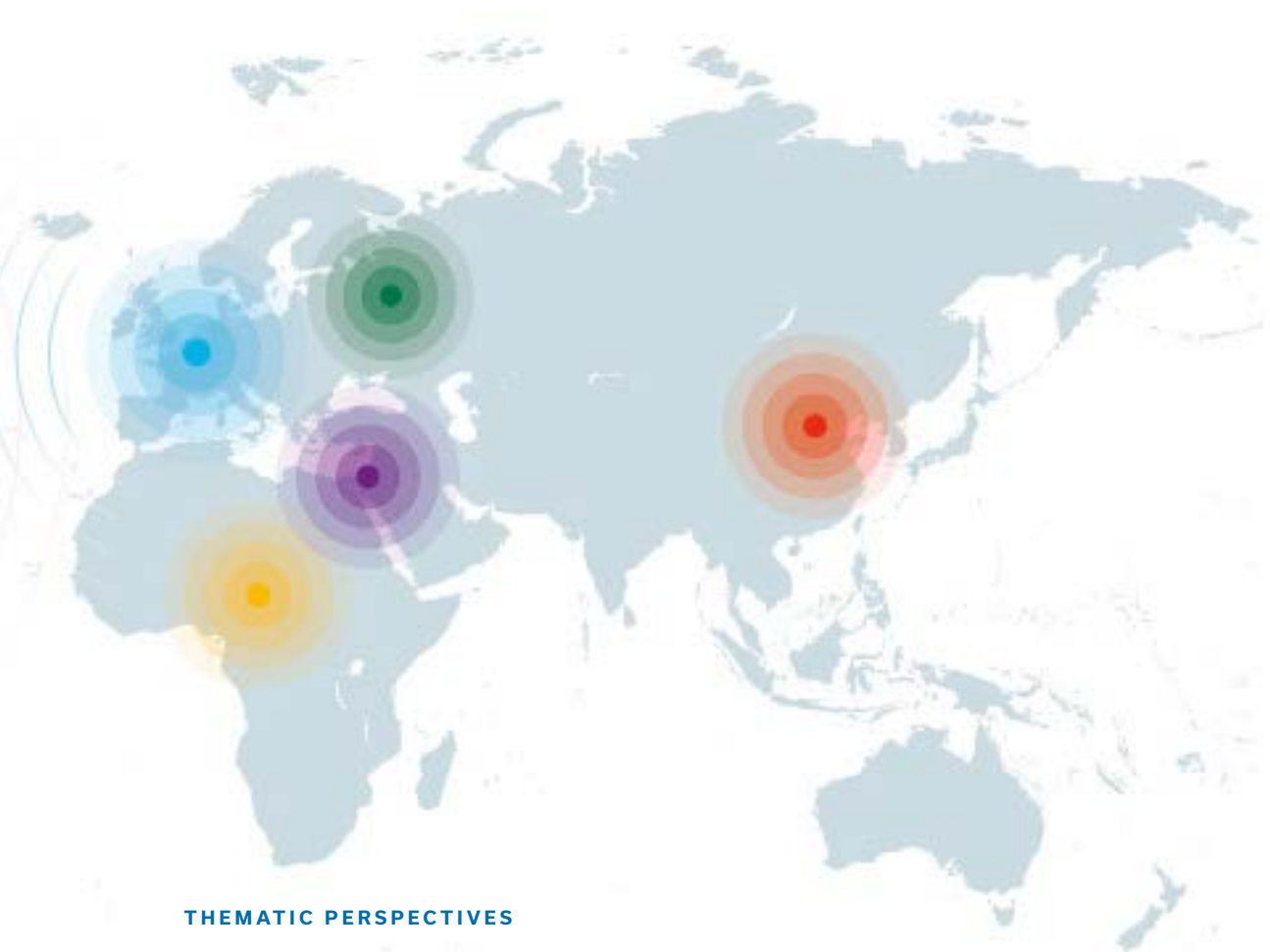
### INTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

- 8 ● The Fast-Forward President  
How Donald Trump Accelerates Long-Term Trends  
[Paul Linnarz](#)
  
- 18 ● Disenchantment  
The European View of Transatlantic Relations  
[Olaf Wientzek](#)

### REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- 28 ●●● Talking Much, Changing Little  
Relations with Russia in the Wake of Trump  
[Claudia Crawford / Philipp Dienstbier](#)
  
- 39 ●●● Less Trump, More Europe!  
America's Tilt Away from the Middle East Requires Stronger European Commitment  
[Edmund Ratka / Marc Frings](#)
  
- 51 ●●● Much Ado About Nothing  
Trump's Africa Policy and Its Consequences for Europe  
[Christoph Plate](#)
  
- 62 ●●● Trump, China, and Europe  
What Remains of the "Pivot to Asia"  
[Rabea Brauer / Alexander Badenheim](#)
  
- 71 ●●● More than Walls  
Latin America's Role in the Triangle with the US and Europe  
[Hans-Hartwig Blomeier / Patricio Garza Girón / Christian E. Rieck](#)





## THEMATIC PERSPECTIVES

83 ● ●

### “America First”

Transatlantic Relations in the Trump Era

[Benjamin Fricke / Nils Wörmer](#)

94 ● ●

### A Transatlantic Relic?

The Future of the WTO and Its Role in the  
Transatlantic Economic Relations

[David Gregosz / Stephen Woolcock](#)

105 ● ●

### Between Innovation and Regulation

The Necessity of Transatlantic Cooperation  
in the Digital Sphere

[Sebastian Weise](#)

116 ● ●

### America Alone

Transatlantic Challenges with Regard to  
Climate Change and Energy Policy

[Céline-Agathe Caro](#)

126 ● ●

### Denier of the Liberal World Order?

Trump’s Unilateralism and Its Implications

[Andrea E. Ostheimer](#)



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[Looking West](#)

# The Fast-Forward President

How Donald Trump Accelerates Long-Term Trends

Paul Linnarz

Hopes that Western allies would be able to better assert themselves following US mid-term elections are unfounded; preparations for the current political position begun long ago. However, new agreements remain possible. Within the US, resistance to President Trump's position is growing.

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More than two years after his assumption of office, Donald Trump can confidently be regarded as unique in his style of communication. His statements on-camera and via Twitter annoy, affront, and even shock not only political opponents in his own country, but also allies abroad. Those who hoped that Trump would strike a more conciliatory tone after the US mid-term elections on 6 November, and try to find common ground with his allies abroad, were disabused of this notion in the weeks that followed.

In early January, the US president said at a cabinet meeting, "I don't care about Europe. I'm not elected by Europeans."<sup>1</sup> Only days later, it became known that the US government, as of 2018, is no longer officially treating the EU delegation in Washington as an embassy, but merely as representatives of an international organisation. The downgrade had apparently not been coordinated with Brussels.

To journalists, Trump expressed sympathy for the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, saying, "Terrorists were going into Russia. They [the Soviet Union] were right to be there." At the same time, he said, the conflict triggered the collapse of the Soviet Union: "Afghanistan made [the Soviet Union] Russia because [the Soviet Union] went bankrupt fighting in Afghanistan."<sup>2</sup> The Afghan government was outraged at this justification of the invasion and requested immediate clarification from Washington. Meanwhile, Vice President Mike Pence confirmed at least a partial withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Shortly before Christmas, Donald Trump had announced his intention to withdraw troops from Syria. "We have defeated ISIS in Syria," the President tweeted, "my only reason for being

there during the Trump Presidency."<sup>3</sup> European allies reacted to this decision with astonishment and concern; the move was also met with incomprehension among members of Congress and the administration. One day after the president's announcement, Secretary of Defense James Mattis submitted his letter of resignation.

Fundamentally, however, these controversial positions held by the US president are far from new. For one thing, Trump continues to hold fast to demands that he formulated for the most part even before taking office in January 2017: Europe: Okay! Trade: Sure! NATO: Gladly! But only as long as these things are "fair" from an American point of view. But more decisively, despite the great differences in style and tone, certain positions and tendencies of US policy can be traced back for years and sometimes decades.

### **Foreign Policy Has Seen it all Before**

When Washington announced in mid-2017 that it was leaving the Paris Agreement, the fact that the US had refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol back in 2001 under President George W. Bush seemed almost forgotten. Economic policy considerations prompted Bush to reject maximum limits for carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. At a campaign rally in October 2018, Donald Trump announced that he would withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia, waking memories of 2002, when the US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM).

Donald Trump's term of office is not the first time that Iran has been accused of supporting terrorists in the Middle East. Former President Bush added Tehran to the "Axis of Evil" in 2002

based on just such accusations. Trump made the same accusation (“The Iranian regime is the leading state sponsor of terror”) in May 2018, at the beginning of his announcement that the US would withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA).<sup>4</sup>

And then comes the matter of trade: In this area, tariffs on steel and aluminium imports were not invented by the current administration, either. Back in 2002, President Bush considered such tariffs a suitable means of supporting an ailing US metal-processing industry. Unlike today’s White House, however, Bush did not justify his actions by citing “the effects on national security”. Instead, he said during a visit to Egypt, “[...] we’re a free-trading nation and in order to remain a free-trading nation we must enforce [the] law. And that’s exactly what I did. I decided that imports were severely affecting our industry – an important industry [...] And therefore [tariffs of up to 30 per cent] provide temporary relief so that the industry can restructure itself.”<sup>5</sup> His predecessor, Bill Clinton, had accused Bush of doing too little to protect workers from cheap imports – during a period in which “free trade” was one of the core principles of Republican policy. Incidentally, the steel workers’ union and leading Democrats then criticised the Republican president in 2002 for not raising the tariffs to at least 40 per cent.

However, in face of the fact that steel imports were declining anyway, few economic experts were surprised when the World Trade Organisation (WTO) declared the tariffs illegal at the end of 2003.<sup>6</sup> This example shows why Washington is still either sceptical of binding multilateral arbitration or rejects it altogether. In August, Donald Trump described the founding of the WTO two and a half decades ago as “the single worst trade deal ever made”. The organisation had treated the US “very badly”, he said. “If they don’t shape up, I would withdraw from the WTO.”<sup>7</sup>

Then there is NATO: The members of the alliance had agreed in a 2002 Prague meeting that they would allocate sufficient resources

to defence. The reference point that was stipulated was two per cent of each country’s gross domestic product. At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, the two per cent benchmark was confirmed: “Allies whose current proportion of GDP spent on defence is below this level will: halt any decline in defence expenditure; aim to increase defence expenditure in real terms as GDP grows; aim to move towards the 2% guideline within a decade with a view to meeting their NATO Capability Targets and filling NATO’s capability shortfalls.”<sup>8</sup> In sum, as the website of Germany’s Federal Ministry of





Faded glory: Trump supporters associate his presidency with the hope for the old times to return. [Source: © Joshua Lott, Reuters.](#)

Defence somewhat more succinctly notes, it is intended “that by 2024 at the latest, all NATO allies will spend two per cent of their national gross domestic products on defence measures.”<sup>9</sup>

Of course, in his countless tweets, Donald Trump does not keep up with the very carefully crafted diplomatic formulations used in the NATO decision such as “aim... to move towards”; in essence, however, he is attacking an open flank with his repeated demands for greater defence spending on the part of allies. During President George W. Bush’s first

term, the public debate about greater financial expenditures was largely overshadowed by the withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol. The fear of unilateral US actions grew among allies when the White House announced in 2001 that the US Senate would not take up ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The willingness of the US to act unilaterally in the “War on Terror” also exacerbated disputes within NATO at the time.

Stanley R. Sloan considers that “the stimulus for the crisis was provided by failure of European

states to build sufficient military capabilities to make significant contributions to post-Cold War security problems and the resulting loss of US confidence in the extent to which it could count on its European allies.” In his 2008 analysis, Sloan said that, in future, the George W. Bush administration “may [...] be seen either as the main cause of the crisis or simply as the igniter of a fire that had been waiting to happen, as allies on both sides of the Atlantic tried to adjust their perceptions and priorities to new strategic realities that emerged following the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union.”<sup>10</sup> Even though the public discussion today, a good ten years after Sloan published his article, has been largely reduced to what financial demands President Trump will make via Twitter, there is much to suggest that the process of adaptation to new strategic realities on both sides of the Atlantic that Sloan postulated is either still incomplete, or has long faced new challenges in the form of other fields of conflict (Crimea crisis, the Asia-Pacific region, migration, and cyberspace).

### **Despite their obvious differences, the rhetorical distance between Obama’s call for “Nation-Building at Home” and Trump’s “Make America Great Again” is fairly small.**

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And – again, despite all obvious differences – Barack Obama, too, pushed this process in the direction it is now headed. In 2014, during his term of office, the two per cent target was confirmed at the NATO summit in Wales. But after the gruelling experience of the bloody, and costly war operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Democratic former president had already told US citizens in 2011, “America, it is time to focus on nation building here at home.”<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, even commentators who are critical of Trump must concede that the rhetorical

distance between Obama’s statement – and its associated political implications, which included the idea that the US, formerly a global stabilising power, would withdraw incrementally from the Middle East conflict – and Trump’s mantra-like “Make America Great Again” is rather small. The global reactions to Donald Trump’s statement shortly before Christmas 2018 that “The United States cannot continue to be the policeman of the world”<sup>12</sup> should not disregard the fact that his predecessor addressed the American people with practically the same formulation in 2013.

In short, the expectations and points of contention with which the trans-Atlantic relationship is now occupied at the highest political level almost all have a long history. There is really nothing that indicates that the US government will heed the requests of partners abroad and either initiate a course change or take the pressure down a notch. On the contrary, as a KAS country report already stated in July 2018, many administration officials are working under the assumption that Donald Trump has merely pressed the fast-forward button.<sup>13</sup> This is also true of US domestic policy.

### **Polarisation Is a Double-Edged Sword**

The impression that the president is tackling long-standing grievances more consistently than all of his predecessors is assiduously cultivated among his base. For instance, he uncompromisingly maintains his campaign promise to build a wall along the Mexican border. Yet this project did not fundamentally originate with this administration, either. Bill Clinton laid the foundation for it, although the scope was much more modest. Via Operation Safeguard and Operation Hold the Line, the former president approved the financing of border fences in Texas and Arizona in the mid-1990s. Under his Republican successor, George W. Bush, the Secure Fence Act to further expand the barriers was passed in 2006. The Act was supported by 64 Democrats in the House of Representatives, and 26 Democrats in the Senate. Among the latter were Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Today, however, the construction of a wall along

the Mexican border symbolises everything that the Democrats deeply reject about Donald Trump. While they bitterly oppose the billion-dollar plan, an AP VoteCast poll<sup>14</sup> showed that around 90 per cent of Republicans favour it. Almost 80 per cent of Republicans also believe that illegal immigrants must be deported, while only 19 per cent of Democratic voters hold this view. The political camps are equally divided in other key areas of domestic policy.

While, during the mid-term elections, a majority of both Republican (63 per cent) and Democratic (75 per cent) voters thought that the health system should be comprehensively reformed, only eight per cent of Democratic voters thought that President Obama's Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, should be repealed. In contrast, 90 per cent of Republican voters are in favour of repealing the law. Just over 90 per cent of Republican voters strongly support the 2017 tax reform, against only eight per cent of Democratic voters. Even the economic situation is assessed very differently by both sides: it is thought to be good to excellent by 61 per cent of Republicans, while 78 per cent of Democrats think that it is not that good or even bad. The divide could scarcely be greater. Accordingly, during the mid-term elections, only nine per cent of all voters stated that the US is strongly united, while 76 per cent thought that US society is moving apart. The thesis put forward by Robert Kagan in 2003 in "Of Paradise and Power" that "Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus", in a figurative sense also describes the political realities within the US today.

The US president did not trigger this increasing split, but in the first half of his term of office, Trump has pushed forward societal polarisation more than any of his predecessors. Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election thanks to his confrontational strategy; continuing and sometimes hair-raising attacks against his opponents in politics and the media; and the mobilisation of his base ("Trump Gets Negative Ratings for Many Personal Traits, but Most Say He Stands Up for His Beliefs"<sup>15</sup>) with slogans

and formulations that made even some moderate Republicans break out in a cold sweat. From August 2018 until the elections, Trump conducted 30 campaign rallies in important rural states with high percentages of white residents. In other words, the same method saved the Republicans from a worse defeat in the House of Representatives in the November mid-terms, and contributed to a slight expansion of their slim majority in the Senate. Since the beginning of January, the House of Representatives has been made up of 235 Democrats and 199 Republicans. In the Senate, there are 53 Republicans, 45 Democrats, and two independents. The independents vote with the Democrats. Almost one quarter of seats in the House of Representatives are now filled by freshman congressmen; 1992 and 2010 were the only elections in the last four decades that saw greater turnover.

The result of the elections was, in itself, neither surprising nor unusual. Although the president does not face re-election during the mid-terms, they are nevertheless traditionally viewed as a referendum on the job he is doing. The loss of a majority in at least one of the houses of Congress in the mid-term elections is the rule rather than the exception. What was atypical, however, was that the Republicans lost their majority in the House of Representatives, but were able to slightly expand their majority in the Senate. Nevertheless, the Republican strategy has, of course, worked only partially. Donald Trump was both a blessing and a curse to them in the mid-terms.

### **Trump's confrontational style mobilised the entire electorate, across parties and age-groups.**

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Certainly, the president was able to repeat his performance of very effectively mobilising his base. Among this population group, he still enjoys extremely high approval ratings of 80 to 90 per cent. Trump's confrontational style and tone also mobilised his political opponents in

November. As a result, voter turnout was just over 49 per cent, higher than any other mid-term elections in the last 50 years. 1966, the turbulent high-water mark of the Civil Rights Movement, saw a mid-term turnout of 48.7 per cent. In some voting districts, almost as many votes were cast last year as in presidential election years, and in others even more (presidential elections since 2000 have seen an average voter turnout of 55 per cent). In Ohio, voter turnout was a good 40 per cent higher than in 2014, in Florida 33 per cent, and in Texas the increase was as high as 90 per cent. These mid-terms

were also unusual because more young voters (aged between 18 and 29) participated. Voter turnout among this demographic was just over 30 per cent, higher than any mid-terms in the last 25 years. Overall, young voters accounted for 13 per cent of all ballots cast.

Professor Michael McDonald, who heads the University of Florida's United States Election Project, thinks that there is a simple explanation for the comparatively high voter turnout: "Clearly, something has changed here in our politics. The only logical explanation for the thing



The white block: More than 100 female Representatives were newly seated in the congress due to the last mid-terms, including African-Americans, Latinas, two Muslims, and descendants of Native Americans. [Source:](#) © Jonathan Ernst, Reuters.



that has changed is Donald Trump.”<sup>16</sup> This assessment is supported by the fact that 60 per cent of all registered voters who participated in an October Gallup poll<sup>17</sup> stated that they wanted, by means of their vote in the mid-term elections, to send a clear message of approval or rejection to the president. Since 1998, those wanting to send a message to the incumbent president with their vote averaged only 47 per cent. Donald Trump was thus more firmly the focus in 2018 than his predecessors have been in previous mid-terms.

In the sparsely populated rural areas of many states, Republican candidates were able to score points with the president as their figurehead. Most metropolises and the hotly contested suburbs fell to the Democrats, even those away from the coasts. These urban centres have been growing continuously for years. In Texas, for instance, 43 per cent of all ballots cast statewide were from the five metropolitan districts. The result was that the Republicans only came away with a narrow majority. The president’s confrontational, polarising style is also off-putting, especially to women voters. Their proportion of all votes in the mid-terms was 52 per cent. Almost 60 per cent of women throughout the country voted for Democratic candidates – almost 13 per cent more than men. Republican Senator John Cornyn therefore described the mid-terms as a “wake-up call” for his party. The question now is whether Donald Trump will take these currents in public opinion and the changed sensitivities within his own party into consideration. At first, it seemed as though he would.

### **Confrontation with an Uncertain Outcome**

“Hopefully,” said Trump the day after the November mid-terms, “we can all work together next year to continue delivering for the American people, including on economic growth, infrastructure, trade, lowering the cost of prescription drugs. These are some of things that the Democrats do want to work on, and I really believe we’ll be able to do that. I think we’re going to have a lot of reason to do it.” Trump even included environmental protection in his

statement: “We want crystal-clean water. We want beautiful, perfect air. Air and water, it has to be perfect. At the same time, we don’t want to put ourselves at a disadvantage to other countries who are very competitive with us and who don’t abide by the rules at all. We don’t want to hurt our jobs. We don’t want to hurt our factories. We don’t want companies leaving [the US]. We want to be totally competitive, and we are.”<sup>18</sup> The limits of bipartisan cooperation would, however, be reached for this president if the Democrats – as one journalist put it in his question – hit Trump “with a blizzard of subpoenas on everything from the Russia investigation [...] to your tax returns”. “If that happens,” Trump said, “then we’re going to do the same thing and government comes to a halt.” In that case, the Democrats would be at fault, the president said.<sup>19</sup>

### **The political conflict regarding the wall construction project led to the longest government shutdown so far.**

A standstill followed almost at once. But not because of the Russia investigation. In December, a dispute broke out over the billion-dollar project to build a wall along the Mexican border. The bitter political conflict led to the longest government shutdown in the history of the United States, and is an eloquent testimony to how deep the rift in American society has become in slightly over a decade since the Secure Fence Act, and not just on this question.

As has been mentioned, Trump is not the first US President whose party has lost the majority in at least one house of Congress during his first mid-terms. Bill Clinton still won re-election two years later, as did Barack Obama. So it is quite possible that Donald Trump will continue to confront the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives – where, for the first time, more than 100 female Representatives were seated in January, including African-Americans,

Latinas, two Muslims, and descendants of Native Americans – and that he will also pursue a tough confrontational course in other political fields, as well. This strategy for re-election was already successfully pursued by Harry Truman after he lost the majority in both houses of Congress to the Republicans in the mid-terms.

The president would be assisted in such efforts by the American electoral system. The president is not elected directly, but through the electoral college made up of representatives from all federal states. Critics argue that the composition of the electoral college favours rural states with whiter, older populations (demographics that favour Trump) over more urban states, which are younger, better educated, and more diverse (demographics that tend to be critical of Trump).

It is not at all certain whether the strategy of polarisation and mobilisation will work in the 2020 presidential election, when Trump and his Vice President, Mike Pence, are up for re-election. In any case, the power struggle over the wall shows how much the November mid-terms weakened the president. While the Democrats know that a lengthy or repeated government shutdown will hurt them in the long term, Democrats in Congress, especially women and minorities, do not give the impression that they will either settle for what Donald Trump is offering, or allow him to reduce the checks and balances within the system, without a fight. At the same time, Trump is increasingly facing criticism from within his own party. Shortly before entering the Senate, former presidential candidate Mitt Romney wrote in an op-ed piece that “the Trump presidency made a deep descent in December.” The president’s “conduct over the past two years, particularly his actions last month, is evidence that the president has not risen to the mantle of the office. [...] With the nation so divided, resentful, and angry, presidential leadership in qualities of character is indispensable. And it is in this province where the incumbent’s shortfall has been most glaring,” Romney went on.<sup>20</sup> His fellow Republicans in the Senate were somewhat stunned by

this public criticism of Donald Trump. But it was essentially the starting gun for the 2020 presidential election.

*-translated from German-*

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[Looking West](#)

# Disenchantment

The European View of Transatlantic Relations

Olaf Wientzek

The result of the US presidential elections in 2016 came as something of a surprise for political leaders in the EU. During the campaign, many of Europe's heads of state and government and also the heads of EU institutions had made it clear to a greater or lesser extent that they backed Hillary Clinton to be the next US president.<sup>1</sup> Now they had to adjust to an American president whose programme seemed to be a declaration of war against established European positions and interests in many respects.

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The initial shock that followed in the wake of the election has now given way to something that can best be described not as relief or horror but as disenchantment. While the Europeans' fears about certain issues (particularly concerning relations with Russia and NATO) have not yet been confirmed, in other areas (such as trade and climate policy) the Trump administration has proved to be the difficult partner that Europe expected it to be.

The uncertainty caused by the new transatlantic relationship has sparked a wide range of responses in Europe. On the one hand, there is the search for alternative partners in specific policy areas. At the same time, Europe is trying to keep the line of communication open with Washington. Internally, the EU has proved to be very stable – contrary to the hopes of the EU's opponents, Trump's election failed to trigger a process of disintegration in the EU. On the other hand, it has not (yet) led to decisive steps being taken towards creating strategic autonomy within the EU. We can observe initial, albeit rather tentative, approaches to an internal process of reflection on the EU's role in the world and the consequences for its trade, foreign, and defence policies. In short, the EU feels a sense of disenchantment. It has suffered a rude awakening from a transatlantic dream in which the USA is an eternally reliable, selfless partner that is prepared to relieve the Europeans of major burdens in their partnership and in global politics.

### **A New Transatlantic Unpredictability**

In many ways, from a European point of view, the first two years of the Trump presidency can best be described as an experience of a new transatlantic unpredictability. If we look beyond the issue of the new president's style and foreign policy preferences, one of the Europeans' biggest fears was that he would pull out of key international treaties and gradually reduce the US's commitment to multilateral international institutions. While some concerns relating to the transatlantic security partnership turned out to be, if not unfounded, then at least exaggerated (such as fears of a US deal with Russia over Ukraine and the consequent weakening of the Minsk negotiating format), other worries have been confirmed:

The relativisation of international institutions and agreements, and Trump's unpredictability at various summits (such as the G7) have been viewed with concern in Brussels and most EU capitals. A functioning multilateral order is vital for maintaining security and prosperity in Europe. Accordingly, it is not only the termination of international treaties (such as the climate agreement and the Iran nuclear deal) and the threat posed by tariffs on steel and aluminium that are a cause for concern, but above all the very fundamental doubts about what the EU considers to be vital pillars of the multilateral world order, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The USA's attitude, which is perceived as confrontational, uncooperative and unpredictable, led to a sense of disillusionment that has

even permeated the most convinced supporters of trans-Atlanticism. Symbolic of this were the bitter words expressed by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, at a press conference on the fringes of a special European Council summit in Sofia in May 2018. He stated that “Looking at the latest decisions of Donald Trump, someone could even think: With friends like that, who needs enemies?” and “Thanks to him, we have got rid of all illusions. He has made us realise that if you need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of your arm.”<sup>2</sup> These comments did not just express his own personal opinion. At the subsequent Council summit, the vast majority of leaders privately welcomed Tusk’s unvarnished statements.

The often perceived as erratic style of the new American administration and especially the new US president has also caused considerable consternation. Several of the EU member states have coalition governments in party systems, which, despite all the changes, are still based more on compromise than conflict. Trump’s discourse, which is focused on polarisation, deals, and confrontation, resembles the anti-system discourse propagated by right-wing populist parties within their countries. The EU machinery was accustomed to weighing up different interests, but now it has had to switch to a negotiating partner who works on the basis of zero-sum games and deals.

### **The EU’s Response**

The EU has responded in a number of ways, including strengthening its own capabilities, searching for alternative partners, attempting to engage, and dissociating itself.

#### *1. Increased European Cooperation and Coordination on Security Policy*

Trump’s erratic foreign policy decisions and conditional support for European security structures have given renewed impetus to ongoing considerations about strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy:<sup>3</sup> The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was

established in December 2017. This enables a group of particularly qualified member states to work together more closely on defence policy (interoperability, armaments, research). In addition, the European Defence Fund was set up, with the aim of supporting defence research and the development of capabilities. From 2021, each year, 500 million euros will flow into a defence research programme. In tandem, up



to one billion euros a year are to be mobilised in the long term to promote the joint development of capabilities. The objective is to avoid a widening of the already considerable gap with the United States in both these areas. What is more, the new European Peace Facility is to finance CSDP missions and support operations in third countries. In light of these dynamics, both representatives of the EU and member

states alike stress that more has happened in the CSDP in the last 15 months than in the last 15 years. Nevertheless, the EU remains light years away from the goal of “strategic autonomy” as formulated in the Global Strategy adopted in 2016. In the medium to long term, the steps adopted are likely to lead to an increase in Europe’s effectiveness in terms of security policy. In the short term, there is a question mark



Future and Past? When old alliances crumble, Europe must strive more to form new ones. Source: © Dan Kitwood, Reuters.

over its willingness to carry out high-intensity military operations in its own neighbourhood if it became necessary. However, the steps taken at least have the potential to make European countries better partners within the transatlantic alliance: a stronger CSDP will meaningfully complement the transatlantic security partnership, but it is not in a position to replace it in the foreseeable future. For the Baltic countries in particular, but also for Poland, NATO security guarantees remain a more important guarantee for their integrity than the still unclearly defined solidarity clause in the Lisbon Treaty. It is worth noting how a number of Central European countries responded to the US president's demand for an increase in defence spending with assurances that they would actually increase it to two per cent from 2018. In addition, opinions still differ on the purpose and direction of the CSDP. A strategic debate on how the EU plans to position itself in the emerging strategic competition and the future global situation is just beginning to take shape. There is no doubt that Trump's policy has led to increased momentum in European security and defence cooperation, but the numerous obstacles that have prevented cooperation in this sensitive policy area over recent decades still remain.

**In the area of trade policy, agreements have been successfully concluded with other countries, thus compensating for the withdrawal of the USA.**

*2. Closer Collaboration with Like-Minded People at a Global Level*

In light of the United States' withdrawal from a number of multilateral formats and forums, there have been repeated attempts to build a "coalition of the willing" based on particular issues, i.e. closer cooperation with countries that regard the importance of multilateral institutions and

treaties as similarly important and that also share the European value system where possible.

In the area of trade policy, efforts to politically and economically compensate for the currently stalled TTIP, have been relatively successful: a free trade agreement has been signed with Japan, which, according to the parties involved, even the White House considers to be a notable success for Europe. Since April, there has also been an agreement in principle on a free trade agreement with Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Talks on free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand have been underway since May 2018. Negotiations with Mercosur have been tough but are now well advanced. In addition to these partners, negotiations on free trade agreements with Singapore and Vietnam have been finalised, too. The advantage here (especially when compared to security policy), is that trade policy is a common EU policy and the EU can negotiate as the single representative of a 500-million-strong bloc. Overall, the EU has demonstrated unity in its trade policy.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to climate policy, there has been a closing of ranks after the withdrawal of the US, at least based on the lowest common denominator. In response to the American president's announcement that he was pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement, European heads of state and government reaffirmed their joint commitment to the Agreement.<sup>6</sup> In parallel, the EU came together with other key partners such as China, Japan, and Canada to reaffirm its commitment to upholding the terms of the Agreement and taking ambitious action to implement it. As things stand, the aim of maintaining a global consensus on the Agreement has been achieved despite the US withdrawal.<sup>7</sup>

*3. Europe Closes Ranks Towards the US*

The EU member states have maintained a remarkable degree of unity on some key issues: Attempts by the US to drive a wedge between Europeans on trade issues continue to be fruitless. Last May, there was a certain amount of disagreement about what price they were prepared to pay to avoid a possible trade war. The



European Commission, Germany, and the previous Italian government were particularly keen to explore the widest possible range of options for dialogue, while France and Spain were more intransigent. Ultimately, however, they succeeded in presenting a united front in this respect. Discussions followed a similar trajectory in other formats, such as at the G7. At the same time, the unpredictability of the Trump administration's policies has unintentionally led to a large question mark hanging over a key argument put forward by Brexit supporters. Under the slogan "Global Britain", many Brexiteers believed they would at least be able to compensate for the economic damage caused by leaving the EU. One of the main building blocks of this concept was forging closer ties with the United States. Hopes were also fuelled by the fact that the US president seemed to take a pro-Brexit stance. Yet, these hopes have now been severely dampened by his unpredictable and rather less sentimental "America First" policy.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Trump's election has weakened rather than strengthened centrifugal forces within the EU.

## Alternatives to the transatlantic partnership are thin on the ground.

### 4. *(Temporary) Lack of Alternatives to the USA as the Key Global Partner?*

This awakening from the transatlantic dream world is even more rude due to the sobering realisation that alternatives to the transatlantic partnership are thin on the ground.

This means that terminating the transatlantic alliance is not an option. Despite the many uncertainties in the transatlantic relationship, past calls from various quarters for a policy of equidistance between the US and Russia have tended to be faint and voiced on the political margins. Its role in the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts means that Russia has lost all credibility as an alternative partner in the eyes of many EU

politicians. Furthermore, despite a brief honeymoon period, which can probably be explained by China's adherence to the Climate Agreement, the majority of member states only have limited levels of trust in China. Their interests in other policy areas (such as trade and industry) are simply too different. However, it is possible that this could change over time: China is trying to gain a foothold in Europe by ramping up investment, particularly in Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe, for example through the 16+1 initiative. Some EU member states are already considered particularly susceptible to Chinese influence.

### 5. *The Attempt to Integrate*

As things stand, in many areas there is no alternative to a close transatlantic partnership. The EU has thus been making every effort to reopen discussions on a number of issues, particularly in relation to global trade. It is keen to ensure the United States get involved in reforming the WTO in order to make this organisation remain fit for purpose. The same applies to ongoing efforts to at least hold talks about trade agreements, even if it is not possible to revive the frozen Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement.

The member states have adopted a variety of approaches towards the US administration in general and the president in particular. Several heads of government have made a conscious effort to build a personal relationship with the American president, often through gestures, such as the ceremonial reception afforded to Donald Trump in Paris by French President Emmanuel Macron. However, it is still generally difficult to assess the practical value of such gestures for actual policy. Some voices, including those around Commission President Juncker, point out that tough negotiations on this issue have paid off – more so than seeking to compromise at any price.

### 6. *Resonance in the Political Landscape*

The effect of the new US administration on Europe's political landscape needs to be considered in a nuanced way, and it is not yet possible to draw any final conclusions. It is certainly



worth noting how the political discourse in Europe has begun using concepts and symbols from the last American election campaign. For example, (new) populist figures in various member states are now often compared to the US president (“Czech Trump”, “Latvian Trump”, “Flemish Trump”). Many right-wing populist and conservative nationalist parties felt that Trump’s victory gave them a boost, while also giving greater encouragement to break taboos in their national political discourse. However, the picture is less clear (yet) when it comes to actual collaboration between political parties. Immediately after the election, the leaders of several right-wing populist movements in the EU claimed that Trump’s victory marked the start of right-wing populism’s triumph over the mainstream. UKIP leader Nigel Farage was one of the first to congratulate the American president on his election victory. Marine Le Pen was also quick off the mark, but went on to suffer a resounding defeat in the second round of the French presidential elections. In the Netherlands and France, centrists ultimately won the elections. It also quickly became clear that associating too closely with Trump was not necessarily popular with voters. The US ambassador to Germany attracted strong criticism when stating that one of his aims was to strengthen right-wing movements<sup>9</sup> in Europe. However, overly ostentatious displays of closeness are rather few and far between – the appearance of the *Front National*’s young star Marion Maréchal le Pen at a Republican party congress in February 2018 was the exception rather than the rule. The success of Stephen Bannon’s initiative *The Movement* has been rather modest thus far. At a press conference, launching their alliance for the upcoming European elections in October 2018, the leader of the Italian *Lega Nord*, Matteo Salvini, and Marine Le Pen both distanced

themselves from this movement. They were quoted as saying that Bannon was not a European and their own alliance would decide with whom they wanted to work.<sup>10</sup> So far, Bannon’s main ally is Mickael Modrikamen, leader of the Belgian French-speaking PP, which plays a very marginal role in Walloon politics and has little hope of gaining a seat in the European Parliament. Bannon’s visits to other politicians, including Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, caused a stir, but it remains to be seen whether the resulting cooperation will actually have much of an impact. Overall, it remains to be seen to what extent Bannon’s efforts will have an impact on the campaign, the outcome and the aftermath of the EP elections.<sup>11</sup>

The traditionally pro-transatlantic parties that belong to the European People’s Party (EPP) face a challenge with the current administration. On the one hand, they are committed to the transatlantic alliance, not only for economic and security policy reasons, but also based on shared values. They also have ties to the Republicans, which have been strengthened through their affiliation with the IDU (International Democratic Union) and many decades of interaction. On the other hand, there is now a president whose view of politics was ostentatiously denounced by quite a few EPP politicians shortly before the election; a president who called the EU an enemy and whose rhetoric is reminiscent of that of the *Front National*, UKIP or the Dutch PVV. In view of this dilemma, the EPP is trying out a more differentiated strategy:

1. Allow no doubts about the fundamental importance and priority of the transatlantic partnership to rise.
2. Establish and maintain contacts with like-minded voices outside the White House, especially in Congress and civil society.<sup>12</sup>
3. Treat the demands of the USA on a case-by-case basis: signal concessions in areas where criticism is perceived as justified (such as demands for a stronger commitment to security policy).

← Friend, partner, enemy: Calls for a policy of equidistance between the US and Russia have tended to be faint despite transatlantic unpredictability. Source: © Benoit Tessier, Reuters.

4. Object vigorously in word and deed whenever the EU or the idea of European integration is fundamentally attacked.

Nevertheless, the ideologically broad EPP family includes members with a wide range of attitudes towards the Trump administration. The parties with a Christian Democratic leaning or the keen advocates of multilateral institutions view Trump's policies, and above all his words and stance towards the EU, very critically. In addition, the EPP's leader Manfred Weber criticised Trump's decision to pull the US out of the Iran nuclear deal (calling it "a strategic mistake"), a view echoed by David McAllister, Chair of the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the right wing of the EPP faction has more sympathy with Trump. Overall, there is a party-wide consensus that the close transatlantic relationship should not be fundamentally called into question, even despite Trump.

### Differences between Member States

There are many differences of opinion among the EU member states, and not everyone is concerned about the changes. Poland's PiS government, which was accused of having rather cool relations with President Obama, is very reliant on the US military presence. In September 2018, the Polish president declared that he wanted "Fort Trump" – in other words, a permanent US military base in Poland.

### Not all EU member states are disillusioned by the current changes.

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This is also reflected in the EU member states' public opinion of Donald Trump and his administration: Although mistrust of the American president is very pronounced across most of the EU (in a Gallup poll, the US president's approval rating fell from 44 per cent to 25 per cent between 2016 and 2017, whilst disapproval

ratings skyrocketed from 36 per cent to 56 per cent), there are also some pronounced differences. For instance, the president's approval rating declined particularly strongly in Western Europe, the Scandinavian countries and the Iberian Peninsula. In Sweden, Portugal, the Benelux countries, Denmark, Spain, France, Austria, and Germany, around two-thirds or more of respondents rated the American leadership negatively. Only four EU countries gave mainly positive ratings: Poland, Italy, Hungary, and Romania. In Poland (56 per cent approval), the president is more popular than his predecessor, unlike in the traditionally US-friendly Baltic states, for example.<sup>14</sup>

### Is this Disenchantment Long Overdue?

Many changes are closely linked to the current administration, such as fundamental doubts about the value of the transatlantic partnership and international institutions, but also questions about trade policy. However, some changes are of a structural nature and have been underway for many years. They have simply been highlighted by the current situation. This is the case when it comes to calls for Europe to play a more active role in foreign, security, and defence policy, and for increased partisanship (from the point of view of the United States) in relations with China and Iran. In many respects, the state of transatlantic relations is forcing the EU and its member states to engage in a strategic debate for which the EU has previously been inadequately prepared. The current situation is making this much clearer. While the USA are already developing strategies in anticipation of increased strategic competition with China, the EU is still a long way from developing a common strategy on China. The EU, its member states, but also its media audiences still live in a very Eurocentric world. In some cases, White House decisions on global politics are perceived as being anti-Europe, when in fact they are aimed at China or other major players. As far as Washington is concerned, the consequences for Europe are accepted side effects rather than the intended aim. Europe is only slowly beginning to define its interests and strategies for its

own neighbourhood and to furnish the necessary diplomatic and military means. The longer it takes to mobilise the tangible and intangible resources that are necessary to play an active regional and global role, the more Europe is in danger of getting left behind by the key global players, the USA and China, and becoming a pawn in their hands.

Thus, it was probably inevitable that the EU would have to wake up from its transatlantic dream, but the current US administration has made this awakening rather more abrupt than the EU would have liked. The main challenge for the EU is to make it clear, even to a more difficult transatlantic partner, that – moving beyond short-term deals – functioning international institutions and close transatlantic cooperation can be vital factors in strategic global competition and are, therefore, also in the interests of the USA.

*–translated from German–*

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Source: © Marcos Brindicci, Reuters.

[Looking West](#)

# Talking Much, Changing Little

Relations with Russia in the Wake of Trump

[Claudia Crawford/Philipp Dienstbier](#)

The inauguration of Trump has not led to a radical shift in the way the United States and its European partners conduct policy in the post-Soviet space. It is true that Trump's rhetoric expresses a sense of rapprochement that at times borders on admiration for Moscow. Yet, driven by Congress and large parts of the cabinet, the US has a second policy towards Russia that continues to pursue the fundamental elements of its traditional foreign policy. Despite a few differences, continuity prevails.

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Politicians in Germany and across Europe were shocked when Donald Trump was elected US president. He led a strident election campaign that seemed to question the cast-iron principles at the heart of transatlantic relations. A striking element of this campaign was Trump's apparent admiration for the Russian president Vladimir Putin and his policies. The future US president also acted more like a businessman than a politician during the campaign – for example, when he threatened to demand more money from NATO allies and the EU, and his desire to reduce US spending on other countries' security.

Hence, President Trump sparked concerns that the US would gradually renege on its security commitments in Europe and elsewhere and focus more strongly on domestic interests. At first there was uncertainty about whether or to what extent the US would continue working to uphold the post-Cold-War order in Europe and support the stability and development of the other post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. However, halfway through President Trump's current term in office, it seems that the most existential concerns have in fact been unfounded.

On the one hand, US policy vis-à-vis Russia and the states of the former Soviet Union, especially Ukraine, has focused far more on continuity than was initially expected. There has been no real strategic change in the interplay of US,

German and European policies in the former Soviet space. The differences between the goals and interests of the United States and Germany are no different to those that previously existed; President Trump simply enunciates them more bluntly than was the case for his predecessors in the White House.

Concerns that President Trump was pushing for a US policy of entente towards Russia have also proved to be only partially justified. When he first took office, there were fears that Trump's attempts to move closer to Moscow could drive a wedge into the Western alliance and undermine German and European interests and goals in Eastern Europe and Russia. However, so far, this has been mainly talk and no action.

Indeed, significant differences have emerged between the president and many members of his administration in terms of their attitude towards Russia. This has been the case even more for Congress. No practical steps have been taken to bring the US closer to Russia at the expense of other allies. Congress and members of his cabinet who continue to be critical of Russia have instead thwarted Trump's verbal liaison with "strongman" Putin. Also, there have been no real changes to the US's solidarity with its traditional allies in Western and Eastern Europe. Despite differences on certain issues, the US, Germany and Europe have largely acted in concert when it comes to the post-Soviet space.

## German and US Goals and Interests before Trump

How should we deal with Russia? Any assessment of the interests and objectives of the Western partners with regard to Russia reveals different answers to this question within and between Germany, its European partners and the USA. In turn, this has an impact on relations with the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.<sup>1</sup>

The main difference has always been that, due to the history of bilateral German-Russian relations, its economic interdependencies and the German geostrategic position in Europe, Germany has tended to be more inclined to seek common ground and areas for cooperation than the United States. This also applies to certain EU members in Central and Eastern Europe, whose prevailing view of Russia is as a strategic rival and threat to their security. This has only ever been a question of degree, however. Germany has no doubts about the paramount importance of the transatlantic alliance and prioritises it over cordial relations with Russia. Fundamental policy approaches such as NATO's eastward enlargement therefore remained unaffected by this at times divergent view of Russia.

### Since the annexation of Crimea, Germany has moved away from its generally cooperative attitude towards Russia.

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Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict that began in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, have also led to a convergence of German, European, and American goals and interests in the post-Soviet space. Increased unity in the face of Russia's confrontational, divisive policies towards the EU and NATO tipped the scales in favour of a more hard-line approach supported by Germany and its transatlantic partners.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, Germany, Europe, and the US have a complex mix of objectives. It is possible to identify four main strands that run through their common policy on Russia and Eastern Europe and where their interests virtually overlap; though they differ greatly in the detail. These strategic goals include maintaining the rules and principles that underpin peace in Europe; creating a stable, democratic and prosperous European neighbourhood; deterring Russia and defending themselves against hybrid warfare; and, finally, economic cooperation and establishing energy security. These various objectives are all intertwined, and some of them can be viewed as complementary. Furthermore, prioritisation between these objectives is partly different on both sides of the Atlantic.

Germany, the EU and the United States agree that Russia has massively violated the rules and principles of the European security order, and that these must be defended. The main focus is on the right to sovereignty, the renunciation of violence and the immutability of existing borders in Europe according to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the 1990 Charter of Paris. The White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr and the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, both dating from 2016, explicitly refer to the main goal of defending the European security order in their dealings with Russia and the latter's interventionist stance towards its European neighbours.<sup>3</sup>

Comparable US documents also emphasise the primacy of international obligations and principles but expand on this under the premise of a general call on Russia to be a more responsible global actor.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Germany, the EU and the US all stress that compliance with arms control treaties is an integral part of the post-Cold War order.<sup>5</sup>

The interest in having a stable, democratic and prosperous neighbourhood to the east of the European Union is particularly reflected in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative under the umbrella of the EU's European Neighbourhood





Russian navy in Sevastopol: Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict that began in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, have led to a convergence of German, European, and American goals and interests. Source: © Pavel Rebrov, Reuters.

Policy (ENP). The EU is looking to use the opportunity that has arisen from the changes in the former Soviet Union to contribute to the positive development of its Eastern European neighbours – largely out of self-interest. This goal includes Russia,<sup>6</sup> which was offered an opportunity to join the ENP. However, Russia rejected this in 2003 and since then has been trying to form its own alliances to compete with the EaP.<sup>7</sup> The US is pursuing the goal of promoting the development of the EU's eastern neighbours, too, albeit at bilateral level. The stabilisation and development strategy also involves extending NATO and EU membership to include the states of the former Soviet Union. Nevertheless, there is agreement on both sides of the Atlantic that it is not currently feasible

for Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO because of the “frozen” conflicts on their territory, and admission to the EU is also currently off the agenda.

Germany and the US also agree on the importance of curbing Russia's hostile activities, particularly in the area of hybrid warfare. Germany's White Paper and the latest Worldwide Threat Assessment by US intelligence agencies cite cyber threats and influence and disinformation campaigns on the part of Russia as the greatest global threats. It names the containment of Russian influence on elections and of its support for populist parties in Europe as key objectives. To that effect, there is agreement on both sides of the Atlantic that defence must

involve building resilience and security cooperation, particularly through the military assurance of NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe vis-à-vis Russia. In pursuit of their interests, German, European and US policies are focused on de-escalation and the inclusion of Russia in the Normandy format while simultaneously implementing a coordinated sanctions regime and deterrence within the framework of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. This approach is formalised through NATO's dual strategy as a balance between deterrence, dialogue and détente.<sup>8</sup>

### **Détente with Moscow? Policy towards Russia since the Election of Donald Trump**

The election of Donald Trump to the presidency and his inauguration in 2017 posed an important question – would there be fundamental changes to the aforementioned pillars of US policy on Russia and consequently to the common foreign and security policy objectives of Germany, the EU, and US allies? During the election campaign, in addition to countless other populist manoeuvres, the new president drew attention to himself with his conciliatory attitude towards Russia. For example, he proposed a wide-ranging collaboration with Russia in the “War on Terror”, reaffirming it with the words: “If we could actually be friendly with Russia – wouldn't that be a good thing?”<sup>9</sup>

### **His positive statements about Putin and lack of criticism of his policies leave Trump looking biased.**

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There is nothing novel about a US president striving to make a positive, fresh start in the country's relations with Russia. Since Bill Clinton, every American president has started his term with lofty ambitions of making a fresh start. However, Trump's much touted policy of détente

towards Russia is different because it is heightened by concerns about a fundamental paradigm shift in US-Russia relations. This is based on signs of a possible link between Trump's campaign team and representatives of the Russian government, along with well-founded allegations that Russia interfered in the US elections. The latter is evidenced by a report published in January 2017 by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the results of which were subsequently confirmed by the relevant US Senate Committee.<sup>10</sup> In the report, the US intelligence services confidently assert that President Putin interfered in the US presidential elections, with the aim of undermining public confidence in the US democratic process, defaming presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and favouring Trump.<sup>11</sup> As a result, special investigator Robert Mueller III indicted members of the Russian Military Intelligence Service (GRU) and employees of the Russian Internet Research Agency. What is more, the American press repeatedly presented evidence of meetings between individuals who belonged to or were close to the Trump campaign team and direct or indirect representatives of the Russian government. However, no evidence of this has been made public, yet.<sup>12</sup>

Against this background, suspicions of Trump being biased persist due to his worrying proximity to Russia, as evidenced not least by the meeting of the two presidents in Helsinki in July 2018. During their joint press conference, Trump refused to acknowledge Russian intervention in the US election campaign.<sup>13</sup> The bilateral meeting also suggested that there was symbolic parity between the two countries and that a wide variety of political issues such as cyber-attacks and the Ukraine crisis were negotiated with Moscow as an equal partner and above the heads of affected states. The fact that the US's traditional partners were relegated to the role of bystanders also gave the impression that the United States was turning its back on its allies. Trump's accommodating rhetoric during the meeting, exemplified by his failure to denounce Russian interference in the US election or to condemn the annexation of the Crimea, also created the impression of an insufficiently critical stance.<sup>14</sup>

Based on this, it seems that Trump's policy involves a clear shift of US goals and interests vis-à-vis Russia and an abrupt decoupling of positions previously shared with Germany and Europe. The US position no longer appears to focus on defending the European security order, providing a joint deterrent to Russia with its NATO partners, nor any kind of defence against hybrid warfare.

President Trump is certainly trying to push ahead with this new strategic orientation, but at present it is little more than rhetoric. Nevertheless, political discourse always has real-life consequences, as reflected by the growing sympathy towards President Putin amongst Republican voters, who have traditionally tended to adopt an anti-Russia stance. It should, therefore, not be underestimated. Having said that, the president's changed rhetoric has not yet manifested itself in concrete policy, because it has garnered little political support – particularly outside the White House.

As a result, the US currently has a second Russia policy. This was and remains decisively influenced by former Defence Minister Jim Mattis, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and former National Security Advisor Herbert Raymond McMaster. Trump's current National Security Advisor John Bolton takes a generally sceptical line on Russia, too.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the 115th US Congress has held more than 20 hearings on Russia-related issues, including interference in US elections and similar campaigns, which also demonstrates a critical stance in parliament.<sup>16</sup> The goals and interests supported by these representatives of the executive and legislative branches are much more closely aligned with the aforementioned traditional pillars of transatlantic cooperation in the post-Soviet space and in relations with Russia. Among other things, this is demonstrated by the newly adopted sanctions and handling of Russian hybrid warfare.

A cornerstone of transatlantic cooperation on the Russian issue was the coordination of sanctions with the aim of punishing and thus

containing Russia's confrontational actions. Irrespective of the President's rhetoric, the aforementioned actors have continued to drive forward with this during Trump's term. Since Trump's inauguration, the US has imposed sanctions against more than 200 Russian targets, including close associates of Putin.<sup>17</sup> In response to Russian retaliation against these American sanctions, the US government has again responded with tougher countermeasures, including the closure of the Russian consulate in San Francisco and other Russian diplomatic institutions in the US. In 2017, the US Congress also adopted the existing sanctions relating to Ukraine and cyber-attacks as a codified law, which extended these measures and established a review by Congress of any attempts by the president to limit or abolish sanctions.<sup>18</sup>

The US government's argument for maintaining sanctions is consistent with that of its German and European allies. For example, Germany has repeatedly emphasised that lifting or terminating the sanctions regime is only possible if the reasons for the sanctions – Russia's behaviour – change; while former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson also repeatedly affirmed that the Ukraine sanctions would not be lifted “until Moscow reverses the actions that triggered them”.<sup>19</sup> Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley also argued that “Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control over the peninsula to Ukraine.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, the US's objectives and rhetorical legitimisation with regard to the containment of Russian interventionism in the post-Soviet space still coincide with the agenda and arguments put forward by Germany and its European allies, even during Trump's term of office.

In other areas, too, there is evidence of close coordination of sanctions and retaliatory measures against Russian hybrid warfare. For example, in the wake of the poisoning of Julia and Sergei Skripal, which has been attributed to Russia, the US showed solidarity with the UK by expelling 60 Russian diplomats and closing the consulate in Seattle.<sup>21</sup> Alongside a number of other NATO and EU members, Germany also



Targeted: Investigations have shown that there are signs of a possible link between Trump's campaign team and representatives of the Russian government. Source: © Jonathan Ernst, Reuters.

deported four Russian diplomats. The Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act passed by the US Congress provides 350 million US dollars in aid to (future) NATO and EU members between 2017 and 2019 to build resilience against and counter Russian disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks.<sup>22</sup> This shows that, notwithstanding President Trump's appeasement, the US government outside the White House still seeks to work with Germany and its allies to counter Russia's destabilising actions.

### **Trump's Transactional Politics: Abandoned Partners in the East?**

In addition to Trump's supposedly Putin-friendly attitude, his transactional approach to foreign policy and international alliances has also stoked concerns that he will break away from

the interests previously shared by the US and the EU in the post-Soviet space. The "America First" mantra of the election campaign and the associated transactional view of international policy espoused by former businessman Trump aims to maximise benefits for the United States while minimising the provision of costly security concessions or other support without getting something in return. This is seen as a threat to the common policy on Russia.

This concern is symbolised by Trump's repeated statements during his campaign and particularly when he first took office, in which he declared NATO obsolete, as well as the refusal at his first summit in May 2017 to explicitly affirm the duty of collective defence as set out in NATO Article 5.<sup>23</sup> This general dispute on security policy between the United States and

its allies has a particular impact on the transatlantic alliance in dealings with Russia and its neighbours. Trump's altered rhetoric calls all the aforementioned pillars of transatlantic cooperation into question. For instance, an "America First" policy casts reasonable doubt on the extent to which the US is prepared to continue upholding the European peace order and international law; whether it is committed to creating a stable, democratic and prosperous European neighbourhood; and whether it is prepared to provide a deterrent to Russia through the collective security and military reassurance of NATO members. Moreover, it is questionable to what extent a strictly self-interested US policy would tolerate the aforementioned autonomous paths taken by Germany and Europe with regard to economic cooperation with Russia and energy security.

However, transatlantic cooperation has continued in two respects on these issues since Donald Trump's inauguration. Although the US administration has discussed putting more pressure on NATO allies to pay for their own collective security, this was already the case for the Obama administration, under which the widely debated two-per cent target was negotiated. More importantly, the US continues to cooperate in the context of NATO despite the initial verbal irritations. US troops continue to participate in all NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe and in neighbouring Russian states, as well as in naval manoeuvres in the Black Sea, and US forces are still involved in joint NATO exercises with Ukrainian troops; something that is considered a key element for deterring hostile action on the part of Russia.<sup>24</sup> Continuity is also reflected in the USA's support for further NATO enlargement with Montenegro's accession to the alliance, and the invitation to North Macedonia to begin accession negotiations – despite criticism from Russia.

The example of Ukraine also shows an ongoing commitment to the stability and development of the Soviet successor states, which are not formal allies themselves. In September 2017, both chambers of the US Congress approved a

350 million US dollar aid package to enhance Ukraine's defence capabilities. Former Defence Minister Mattis recently announced that the US is helping to train Ukrainian forces in Western Ukraine. What is more, Washington has agreed to two arms sales totalling some 90 million US dollars. The most recent of these – Javelin anti-tank missiles – involved lethal defensive weapons for the first time, a step that even goes beyond the military assistance the Obama administration was willing to provide to Ukraine. Far from neglecting the EU's Eastern European neighbourhood in line with the principle of "America First", the US is thus committed to continued support of the reform processes and expanding Ukraine's military capabilities. Even though this objective already goes beyond German measures with regard to arms supplies, it bears testimony to an ongoing coherence between German, European and American positions on Ukraine.<sup>25</sup>

### **Trump is particularly bothered by the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany.**

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The most obvious manifestation that the US administration is adopting the feared transactionalist approach under Donald Trump is the arms control that is so important to relations with Russia. The treaties on limiting nuclear weapons, in particular the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the New START Treaty on strategic nuclear weapons, form a central building block of the European peace order by inhibiting a nuclear arms race in Europe. At beginning of 2019, Trump and National Security Advisor Bolton have initiated a unilateral withdrawal from the INF Treaty. In addition, a non-renewal of the New START Treaty 2021 is looming. On the one hand, this is based on accusations that Russia, with its land-based SSC-8 cruise missile, has had a weapons system since 2016 that experts believe undermines the INF Treaty. The US is also unhappy that the Treaty does not include China, on the

other. However, at least in the discussion about the extension of the START Treaty, the strategic consideration is that the US is currently in a better economic and financial position to modernise its nuclear arsenal than Russia.<sup>26</sup> Exploiting this strategic advantage – Trump has already announced a nuclear modernisation – would cause considerable damage to arms control and the European peace order, and would also effectively enable Russia to build up its stocks of medium-range nuclear missiles. Termination of these arms treaties is not exactly in the interests of Germany and the EU, and therefore nuclear arms control is an area in which the interests of the USA vis-à-vis Russia are most likely to differ from those of Germany. Here too, however, it should be noted that Trump has not brought about a radical policy shift. The previous Obama administration also repeatedly criticised Russia for breaching the INF Treaty and questioned its effectiveness.<sup>27</sup> The George W. Bush administration even unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty in order to establish a ballistic missile defence system in Europe.

The greatest divergence of German and American goals and interests in Eastern Europe and Russia are apparent in the area of economic cooperation and energy security. Traditionally, Russia has invariably been a more important economic partner for Germany than it could ever be for the US. Despite a decline in trade after 2015, Germany remains the second largest exporter to Russia after China. The percentage of Russian imports by its three main EU trading partners – Germany, France and Italy – (together around 20.5 per cent in 2016) is almost four times the size of that of the USA (approx. 5.5 per cent).<sup>28</sup> In addition, Germany, like other EU members, is dependent on stable energy supplies, especially Russian gas. Consequently, the US is more willing to put these economic interests on the line than Germany, and this is where Trump's policy of self-interest becomes particularly clear. One example of this conflict is Nord Stream 2, the gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, against which Trump has levelled strong criticism. His comments on the sidelines of the Helsinki Summit were a stark illustration

of the business logic behind his assessment of the Nord Stream 2 project: the US has an interest in selling American LPG to Europe as an alternative to Russian supplies. Nevertheless, here too Trump, the “dealmaker”, did not cause a sudden split in relations between Germany and the US. On the contrary, Nord Stream 2 had already revealed clear differences of interest in the transatlantic alliance before, with both President Bush and President Obama voicing sharp criticism of the geostrategic implications of the project.

### **Outlook: Common Russia Policy in the Second Half of Trump's Term**

All in all, Trump has not caused a radical break between the policies on Eastern Europe and Russia espoused by the US on one hand and Germany and the EU on the other. It is more a case of the US pursuing two policies on Russia. There is the rhetoric that focuses on rapprochement and even appeasement towards Moscow, driven by President Trump. Then there is the second policy that is actually implemented, in which Congress and the majority of the cabinet press ahead with the fundamental principles of transatlantic cooperation that were adopted before Trump came to power. Both sides of the Atlantic are still effectively pursuing the common goals of defending the European peace order, deterring Russian aggression and supporting Europe's eastern neighbours. There are certainly differences on individual issues and topics, but they stem less from a break in the formulation of American interests due to Trump's “America First” mantra than from traditionally divergent views that already existed under previous presidents.

Nonetheless, Trump's erratic behaviour and rhetoric still present a risk. Despite this being balanced out by other actors, and the checks and balances that are inherent to the US's political system, the president still has considerable power and the potential scope to wreak damage. One example of this is media reports about Trump passing on top secret information to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at a meeting

in the spring of 2018. Donald Trump's willingness to dismiss members of his administration who disagree with him also harbours the risk that those officials who are committed to continuity in relations with Russia will be fired, too.

However, in the medium term it seems more likely that there will be continued stability with regard to transatlantic cooperation in the post-Soviet space and on Russia. After the mid-term elections, Trump's influence has further dwindled after losing the House of Representatives to the Democrats. This could lead to non-White House government institutions exerting greater influence over foreign policy issues.

*-translated from German-*

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[Looking West](#)

# Less Trump, More Europe!

America's Tilt Away from the Middle East  
Requires Stronger European Commitment

[Edmund Ratka / Marc Frings](#)

US President Trump is continuing his country's withdrawal from the entanglements of the Arab world, a withdrawal that was already initiated under Obama. In political arenas such as the Saudi-Iranian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, the Trump administration has gambled away its ability to serve as a mediator by virtue of its unilateral measures. Germany and Europe will therefore face more responsibility.

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Even though the “Arab Spring” protest movement largely failed, the region is still in a deep and protracted phase of upheaval, which affects both the domestic policy structures of the Arab states and the regional order. Under President Donald Trump, the United States largely intends to remain aloof from the inner workings of the Arab states. George W. Bush's attempt to “proactively” initiate a democratic revolution in the region is history, just as are Barack Obama's attempts to integrate Iran into the regional security architecture. Instead, Trump is taking a hard line against the Islamic Republic, and is relying on traditional US allies in the region. These include a number of pro-Western Sunni states – most important amongst them Saudi Arabia and Egypt – as well as Israel. In the Middle East conflict, the US under Trump has more clearly than ever supported the Netanyahu government, and has so far unilaterally increased pressure on the Palestinians.

Whether Trump's policy, which in this way differs from that of his two predecessors, will be successful, is more than uncertain. Simple arrangements with Arab autocrats will not lead to long-term stability and sustainable development in the region, nor will a “deal” between Israelis and Palestinians that does not take the legitimate interests of both sides into account. It is now up to Europe to compensate for Trump's withdrawal from the Middle East – if at all possible, without widening the rift with the US. If Europe – be it in the EU format, as part of ad-hoc coalitions of European states, or in the form of greater German-French cooperation – capitalises on this opportunity to enhance its capacity

for action in the region, it will also be taken more seriously in Washington as a potential partner. The US and Europe must endeavour to bring their political approaches closer together again, or to engage in complementary action as part of a transatlantic division of tasks, in view of newly strengthened regional actors, such as Russia.

#### **Common Interest in Stability – But at What Price?**

“We are not here to lecture – we are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship.”<sup>1</sup> Trump's address to the Arab Islamic American Summit in Riyadh in May 2017 made Washington's *realpolitik* course correction obvious. It was not democratic revolution that was to be supported, but the preservation of the status quo – especially in a fragile region like the Middle East. Autocrats, from Egyptian President el-Sisi, to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, will apparently once again be tolerated in the White House. Trump's penchant for strongly personalised foreign policy with “strong men” may well be reflected in this. However, the new US president is only consistently pursuing the course already set out by his predecessor: withdrawing the US from its entanglements in the Arab world. Obama was already distancing the country from the transformative Freedom Agenda for the region to which the US had committed itself under the neoconservatives during the George W. Bush presidency.

The disastrous consequences of the 2003 Iraq war were high among the factors that largely

discredited Bush's Freedom Agenda. In his celebrated 2009 Cairo speech, Obama promised "A New Beginning" in US relations with the Islamic world, marked by mutual respect. While Obama promoted human and civil rights, he made it clear that "No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other."<sup>2</sup> After the failure of the experiment in external democratisation in Iraq, came the hopes for democratic revolution via domestic protest movements, raised during the "Arab Spring" of 2011. These have in the meantime also largely been shattered. With the subsequent assassination of the US ambassador in Libya, the strengthening of political Islam in democratic elections, the military coup in Egypt, and Syria's descent into civil war, it became clear as early as 2012/2013 that the lofty expectations of democratisation in the Arab world would not be fulfilled so soon. The rise of Islamic State (IS), a terrorist group that was able to take advantage of the power vacuum in the region and carried out a series of attacks, some of them in the West, along with the migratory movements toward Europe in the years that followed did the rest: Stability – or more precisely, even short term – once again became the supreme maxim of Middle East policy.<sup>3</sup>

In Europe, discourse has also gone full circle. "The path to stability is through democracy,"<sup>4</sup> said Germany's Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, a formulation that appeared to be the lesson from the fall of Ben Ali in Tunis and Mubarak in Cairo. During the peak of the "Arab Spring", this readjustment of both German and European perspectives on the region was accompanied by self-criticism for the previous Middle East policy, which had above all focussed on cooperation with autocratic governments, and underestimated the internal development dynamics of Arab countries. But in the face of the disintegration of state and regional order in its neighbourhood, which had immediate effects on Europe, there was a quick about-face here as well. "Resilience" is the new name of what is essentially an old theme; the concept is now prominent in many places, including the June 2016 European Union Global Strategy, which the EU intends to

promote in its eastern and southern neighbourhood: "A resilient country is a safe country, and safety is the key to prosperity and democracy."<sup>5</sup> In other words, on both sides of the Atlantic, a paradigm of stability and security dominates policy; this certainly provides prospects for joint action. This is most evident in the fight against terrorism. For instance, within the framework of the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014, a US-led military alliance was forged to combat IS. The founding members include key European states such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Since then, around 80 countries and international organisations have joined. The fact that IS's territorial bases in Iraq and Syria were smashed is in no small part due to this international – and transatlantic – cooperation.

### **Geopolitical rivalries and traditional societal and ruling systems are responsible for the constant unrest in the Arab region.**

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Trump has continued this effort, which was begun under Obama, but at the same time has repeatedly emphasised that the allies must contribute more and relieve the load on the US. As early as April 2018, Trump announced that the US goal of destroying IS has almost been reached and that US' troops could soon be withdrawn: "Let other people take care of it now."<sup>6</sup> When Trump actually announced the withdrawal of the remaining 2,000 US troops from Syria in December of 2018, the move was met with dismay not only among Western and regional allies, such as the Kurds, but also in Washington itself. The fear is that the move will cost the West even more influence. Following the announcement, US Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, and US envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Brett McGurk, both resigned. The Trump administration then emphasised that the withdrawal would be orderly, carried

out over several months, with a small contingent of US troops finally remaining in the field.<sup>7</sup>

As problematic as the US withdrawal may be in individual cases for the situation on the ground, the fact that regional players should assume more responsibility for the security, stability, and development of their own region is a concern that Trump shares with the Europeans. This is illustrated by the German federal government's 2016 "enable and enhance initiative", which also includes three Arab priority countries, Tunisia, Jordan, and Iraq, which are receiving security policy support and training. There is little doubt that such measures could be leveraged if Europeans and Americans were to succeed in better meshing their approaches.

Beyond the specific situation in Syria - where the continued existence of the Assad regime, and the pronounced Iranian and Russian presence pose special challenges for Americans and Europeans - both sides of the Atlantic share a fundamental interest in restoring the integrity and ability to act as functioning states to sources of conflict such as Libya, Iraq, and Yemen. Nevertheless, neither Washington nor European capitals should forget that, in addition to geopolitical rivalries, it is ultimately structural problems in the traditional societal, economic, and ruling systems in Arab countries that keep the region in a constant state of unrest.<sup>8</sup> Merely relying on potentates to hold their countries together with strong-arm tactics, thus allegedly keeping refugees and terrorists out of the West, is not sufficient. Without reforms that are as inclusive as possible and broaden at least the socio-economic and, ideally, the political basis of participation, countries in the Middle East and North Africa will not enjoy sustainable stability. In addition to this *realpolitik* argument, there is also a normative one. If the West wishes to continue to be a community of values, it cannot remain indifferent to gross violations of human and civil rights elsewhere. In view of the extreme focus on a state-centred status quo in US Middle East policy under Trump, it is all the more incumbent on Europeans to engage the ruling elite in Arab countries in a critical dialogue surrounding these

# Iran



issues, and to involve and strengthen the forces of reform within civil society, wherever possible. Obama's long-standing foreign policy advisor, Ben Rhodes, recently encouraged Europe to take a "clear stance" in human rights questions: "Now that the American voice on democracy and human rights has gone silent, it is important for Europe to take this step and become the global spokesman."<sup>9</sup>

## **Geopolitics in the Gulf: With Riyadh Against Tehran?**

The common interest of Europeans and Americans in stability is especially great in the Gulf region. The Sunni ruling houses in the six Gulf monarchies (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman), which have joined together to form the Gulf Cooperation Council, are traditional allies of the West. As early as 1942, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the founder of Saudi Arabia, Abdelaziz bin Saud, concluded an alliance



Bogeyman Iran: Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement counteracts previous efforts aimed at mediation and de-escalation in the region. Source: © Amir Cohen, Reuters.

between their countries, which was essentially an American guarantee of security in exchange for access to Arab oil.

Even though Europe, and to a greater extent the US – thanks to its shale gas extraction – have become less dependent on oil imports in recent years, the stability and security of the region that has the largest oil reserves and is the biggest oil producer remains of vital economic interest to industrialised countries due to its influence on global market prices. This is especially true in view of Trump's reinstated sanctions regime against Iran. More than that, the Gulf States are important trading partners for Europe and the US. In 2017, the EU countries alone exported goods worth 100 billion euros to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The EU is the Gulf Cooperation Council's most important trading partner.<sup>10</sup> The economic reforms initiated in Saudi Arabia under "Vision 2030" are expanding the demand for consumer goods and include large infrastructure projects. They thus

offer new opportunities for Western companies. Finally, the US has had military bases in the region for decades (in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman), as has France, since 2009 (in the UAE), and the United Kingdom, since 2018 (in Bahrain). This makes these states pillars of military power projection, especially for the United States, whether to operate against IS in Syria, al-Qaida in Yemen, or to secure trade routes.

Moreover, in view of state disintegration in the region, Saudi Arabia is now also considered by many to be the "only remaining Arab stabilising power".<sup>11</sup> As protector of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, the kingdom exerts influence throughout the entire Islamic world. Riyadh would thus also play a significant role in any peace agreement between Israel and Arab-Muslim countries, and any resolution to the Middle East conflict. Against this background, the stability paradigm remained valid even during the Arab Spring. When the protests in Bahrain were violently suppressed with support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Western criticism was much more muted than it was for similar actions elsewhere, and no action was taken at all.

Although this status quo-oriented basic view has remained a constant for years on both sides of the Atlantic and will continue to exist, Donald Trump's election as US President heralded a course change that ultimately tore apart the joint transatlantic approach to the Gulf. It is worth noting that the new president's first trip abroad was to Saudi Arabia in May 2017. Security for the region and job security for the US was the *leitmotif* of Trump's visit. Saudi investments in the US worth more than 400 billion USD were agreed upon, and contracts for arms purchases worth about 110 billion USD were concluded. The second great focus of Trump's visit, and the

real break with the Obama administration's policy, was Iran. During his visit to Riyadh, Trump used his keynote address to representatives of more than fifty Muslim countries to accuse the Iranian government of providing terrorists with "safe harbour, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment". He said that Iran had "fuelled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror" for decades.<sup>12</sup> Trump held to this line of argument in his justification for US termination of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran in May 2018. The "deal" did not ensure peace, he said, since it failed to limit Iran's destabilising activities in the region.<sup>13</sup>

The Trump administration's Gulf policy is thus to maintain stability and security by strengthening Saudi Arabia, and containing Iran. In contrast, the strategy pursued by the Obama administration and Europe (in this case, with the EU and Germany, France, and the United Kingdom as negotiating partners) focussed on limiting Iran's nuclear capabilities and the associated risk of war, while incrementally integrating Iran via the nuclear deal into a regional security architecture and ultimately encouraging more cooperative behaviour in other areas of conflict in the Middle East as well. Two years after the deal was signed in 2015, Europe should have been more open to the indeed justified criticism from Washington – shared beyond Trump's decision-making circle, especially from the Republican Party – that Iran had not stopped its expansionary regional policy, but had instead invested the dividends gained from the lifting of sanctions in that very policy.

### **Divergent US and European approaches complicate relationships to important partners in the Persian Gulf.**

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But that must not obscure the fact that Europe was and remains prepared to take action to counter threats issued by the Islamic Republic. It continues to demand a real political process

that would ideally end the Assad regime, which is allied with Tehran. However, this outcome does not currently appear likely. In Yemen, the EU supports the internationally recognised, albeit domestically disputed government that is also an ally of the Saudis. Along with the US, the United Kingdom and France also supply weapons to Saudi Arabia. These weapons are used in the Yemen war against the Houthis, who are loosely allied with Iran. The nuclear deal, which Europe supports, forbids Iran from developing ballistic missiles that are capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

A common transatlantic position in dealing with Iran, with a corresponding shift in emphasis, would have been conceivable after the Obama administration. But Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, and his apparently unconditional support for Saudi Arabia, constitute an extreme position that counteracts previous Western efforts aimed at mediation and de-escalation in the region.

It is unlikely that the US president will change this position. Even after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist living in the US, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, in October 2018, triggered a wave of criticism of Saudi Arabia, especially in Washington, Trump has remained steadfast. The US did quickly impose entry bans against the Saudi suspects (as did Germany, the United Kingdom, and France shortly afterwards) and admonished the Saudi royal family to clarify what had happened. But Trump also emphasised that Saudi Arabia had been a "a great ally in our very important fight against Iran. The United States intends to remain a steadfast partner of Saudi Arabia to ensure the interests of our country, Israel, and all other partners in the region."<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Saudi policy has received more critical attention since Khashoggi's murder, not only in European, but also in American public discourse and politics. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham called for harsh sanctions against Saudi Arabia, and his fellow Republican Robert Corker accused the White House of "moonlight[ing] as a public relations firm for the Crown Prince of Saudi

Arabia”.<sup>15</sup> The US Senate passed a resolution (which is not legally binding) calling for an end to American support for Saudi Arabia in the Yemen conflict. Another resolution expressed the belief that “Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi”. The European Parliament also passed a resolution calling for an EU-wide halt to weapons exports to Saudi Arabia and taking Crown Prince bin Salman personally to task for his country’s human rights record.<sup>16</sup> While the German federal government, in view of the Khashoggi case, had already decided to cancel even approved weapons exports to Saudi Arabia, France and other EU member states were not prepared to take similar steps.

Ultimately, the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia, remain important but difficult partners. As welcome as the rapid socioeconomic opening of the country may be, the centralisation of political power, the restrictive approach to opposition, and the Kingdom’s aggressive foreign policy give rise to criticism. The conduct of the war in Yemen, the blockade of Qatar, and the temporary forced resignation of the Lebanese prime minister during his visit to Riyadh all rather detract from stability in the region. However, if Europe wishes to persuade Saudi Arabia and its Gulf State allies to adopt a more constructive regional policy, it should also emphasise that it takes their security concerns seriously. An important part of this is recognising Iran’s hegemonic ambitions and expansionary policies as a problem and striving to contain them. A combination of American pressure and conditional European incentives for Tehran could be productive here – if the will to pursue a joint or at least coordinated strategy re-emerges on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **The Middle East Problem: Is Trump Squandering a Chance at a Two-State Solution?**

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both Americans and Europeans, especially Germany, share an interest in Israel’s security. At the same time, the Palestinians right to self-determination

and – after negotiating a solution with Israel – to their own state has, so far, been part of the transatlantic consensus on the Middle East. The US is Israel’s closest ally, and in international fora, such as the United Nations, traditionally defends it more steadfastly than many European countries do. However, since Ronald Reagan’s recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1988, all subsequent US presidents have pursued a strategy that essentially aims at striking a balance between Palestinians and Israelis based on the land-for-peace formula, which guarantees the security and recognition of Israel in return for a Palestinian state. Although the peace process, launched at the Oslo negotiations in the early 1990s, has been idle for years, and the Obama administration failed to achieve a breakthrough, that administration emphatically supported a two-state solution and attempted to at least limit the building of new Israeli settlements.<sup>17</sup> Trump appears to be breaking with this foreign policy tradition. He is abandoning the primacy of negotiation, pursuing a unilateral approach, and no longer unconditionally supports a two-state solution.

**Trump has so far been unable to resolve the Middle East conflict and has primarily acted according to Israeli interests.**

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Trump announced a “deal of the century” to end the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but has not yet formulated a strategy. His position, therefore, cannot yet be conclusively assessed. But in the first two years of his presidency, he has recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and moved the US embassy there; cancelled 360 million USD in aid funds to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which supplies over five million Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories and neighbouring countries; reduced bilateral aid for the



Unveiling: With the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the transfer of the US embassy there, Trump has created facts. Source: © Ronen Zvulun, Reuters.

Palestinian Authority and economic projects on the West Bank and in Gaza by 200 million USD; closed the PLO office in Washington, which had previously functioned as a representation for Palestinians in the US; and closed the US Consulate in Jerusalem, which was dedicated to the Palestinian Territories, and is instead to be integrated into the US embassy in Jerusalem.

Trump and his Middle East team (led by Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt, his son-in-law and advisor Jared Kushner, and United States Ambassador to Israel David Friedmann) intend to reduce or pre-empt the so-called final-status issues, i.e. core areas of the conflict still to be negotiated, such as the status of Jerusalem, the treatment





of Palestinian refugees and their demands of return. It is true that Trump's Jerusalem decision left the recognition of borders to the parties involved in the conflict, and thus did not rule out a later consensual solution. Nevertheless, the US considers the question of the capital city to have been settled. Additionally, US treatment of UNRWA, the UN refugee aid agency, also gives

the impression that the refugee problem is considered purely a matter of finances and administration. This led Washington to call on Jordan to integrate the Palestinian refugees living there and remove their refugee status. This indicates that the US has no interest in true political negotiations with and between the two sides, but instead intends to dictate one roadmap and a possible agreement. Judging by Trump's steps so far, such an agreement would be strongly oriented on the views of the Israeli government. Meanwhile, the position of those on the Palestinian side who are willing to negotiate, is of frustration, as they feel excluded by US strategists; those in Israel who favour building settlements, rejoice.

Europe, on the other hand, continues to support a two-state solution and direct negotiations between the two sides. It is telling that 22 of the 28 EU members voted in the United Nations General Assembly in December 2017 to condemn the shifting of the US embassy to Jerusalem, among them Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> So far, no EU country has followed the American lead and moved its embassy to Jerusalem. The EU and its member states are thus sticking to the international consensus that the capital city question can only be finally resolved in the course of a peace agreement, and that the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem is not to be recognised.

Even though it is difficult to achieve unity among all EU countries, Europe can work in flexible formats to exert a moderating influence on the Israeli government. In the summer of 2018, for instance, the threat of the imminent demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, near Jerusalem on the West Bank, was put on the international agenda. This occurred after the Israeli supreme court declared the government's project of removing the shacks, which had been erected without official approval, to be legal. While Washington remained silent on the issue, international pressure generated by petitions from Europe have so far prevented the Israeli government from demolishing the village and forcibly resettling the Bedouins. It remains

unclear, however, whether and how Germany and other European countries might translate such efforts into a coherent, active role for Europe in resolving the Middle East conflict.

Differences in methodological approach and in the assessment of legal implications impede cooperation between Europe and the incumbent US administration. While the EU favours negotiations between two players who are on an equal footing, the US government marginalises the Palestinian perspective. As a normative, rule-based player in international relations, the EU will also find it difficult to work with Washington on the Middle East peace process if the Trump administration fails to accept the primacy of agreements under international law. One indication of this is the obvious assumption on the part of the US that attacking UNRWA can resolve the refugee question. In reality, however, even dissolving UNRWA would not change the status of Palestinian refugees, regardless of which generation they belong to. The EU has meanwhile helped temporarily resolve the financial crisis at UNRWA.<sup>19</sup>

### **In communication with Palestinians, Europe must express both support for a two-state solution and criticism of political injustices.**

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Given the lack of communication between Palestinian leadership and the US government, and the dismantling of diplomatic representation on each side, Washington is finding it increasingly difficult to gauge the mood of Palestinians. This means that it is already incumbent upon Europe to intensify its exchanges with Palestinian leadership and civil society. The viability of the Palestinian National Authority (PA) should be given special focus. This also means addressing the increasingly autocratic tendencies within the PA more clearly and openly than has as yet

been done. It additionally means, if necessary, making aid conditional upon a reduction of corruption and of the harassment of critical parts of civil society. The leadership under President Abbas must be made to understand clearly that European support of the Palestinian right to a state is not a blank cheque for poor governance.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that if the PA were to collapse, there would be immediate consequences for Palestinian resilience and Israel's security. Nor would it be clear that the political leadership would continue to pursue negotiations. Internationalisation strategies, such as the recognition of Palestine, its improved standing in international organisations, and boycott campaigns against Israel clearly show that the Palestinian government could count on the mobilising power of global civil society in circumventing state and diplomatic structures. Already today, many Palestinians assume that they can strengthen international opinion in their favour in a coalition of civil rights movements and lobby groups. This thesis is supported by the fact that American Jews, who tend to be more liberal, are increasingly distancing themselves from the policies of the Israeli government. According to a June 2018 survey, the majority of Israeli Jews (77 per cent) support Trump's handling of American-Israeli relations, while a majority of American Jews (57 per cent) oppose it.<sup>20</sup>

While Palestinians have lost faith in the US as a mediator, and the two-state solution becomes increasingly improbable, it is up to the European Union to develop at least an interim strategy so as not to completely erode the hope of a two-state solution ever coming about. Because the Oslo model, i.e. bilateral negotiations under the aegis of a mediator, has not been successful for the past 25 years, Europe must consider an alternative conflict-settlement mechanism. Empirical studies show that the EU does not need to reinvent the wheel: Israeli and Palestinian majorities for a two-state solution would be more likely if a multilateral forum were to promote the Arab Peace Initiative.<sup>21</sup> One possibility is a coalition of the members of the Quartet on the Middle East (the EU, the United Nations, the US, and

Russia) in conjunction with the central players in the region – Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The conclusion of the Iran nuclear treaty was impressive proof that coalitions formed for individual cases can also act effectively. The treaty came about at the prompting of Europeans; the US became involved only after the negotiation process was underway. The United States will ultimately have to be involved in any solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including a two-state solution. But as long as Trump is in charge of US Middle East policy, the two-state solution would be served by shifting the US's role from sole negotiator to negotiation participant.

When Trump speaks of an “ultimate deal”, he means one that encompasses the entire Middle Eastern region. Israel is currently trying to use small steps to expand its bilateral relations to the Arab Gulf States. It is using the common threat from Iran and benefitting from the current waning of importance of the Palestinian question on the regional and international agenda. However, the deepening of the Israeli-Arab rapprochement has so far taken place primarily at the government level. In recent years, Arab rulers have not prepared their populations to accept a new Israel policy, so scepticism continues to dominate among them. This is true even of states that have peace treaties with Israel. In the shadows and excluded from relevant societal forces, normalisation will reach its domestic policy limits. This became very clear in Jordan when anti-Trump protests broke out there in the aftermath of the Jerusalem decision. While Trump is taking a great risk here with his personalised leadership style, such as in his connections to the Saudi royal family, Europe could assume a sustainable mediating role between Israel and the Arab world precisely through its work in and with Arab civil society.

## Conclusion

The Trump administration has made a course change in Iran policy and the question of the Middle East conflict. It has continued to distance the country from a transformative agenda, fundamentally reducing American involvement

in the region – a process which started under Obama. Nevertheless, the US remains a critical player in the region. Both its military and trade policy clout allows the US to exert more influence than Europe, which often struggles for unity. It is for this reason that if Europe wants to stabilise the region, it must increase its involvement and balance out US withdrawal. This will require more flexible formats. If it proves impossible to achieve unity among all member states, ad-hoc coalitions of member states (including a potential non-member state, the United Kingdom) can secure European ability to act in the Middle East. At the same time, pains should be taken to establish transatlantic cooperation wherever possible and, if necessary, on a selective basis. The negotiation of the Iran nuclear treaty and the successful fight against IS have shown how useful European leverage can be.

But ultimately, the future of the Middle East will be decided in the Middle East. The region is experiencing upheaval, states are disintegrating, and polarised societies are searching for identity and new models of coexistence. These far-reaching processes can be accompanied but not controlled linearly from outside. Even though these limitations on influence apply to both the US and Europe, much more is at stake for Europe, which borders on the Middle East geographically and whose culture is interwoven with it. Creating spaces for reforming voices to resonate, seeking a constructive, critical dialogue with elites, serving as a reliable partner and impartial mediator – it is time for Europe to assume more responsibility in its turbulent neighbourhood.

*–translated from German–*

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[Looking West](#)

# Much Ado About Nothing

Trump's Africa Policy and Its Consequences for Europe

Christoph Plate

Donald Trump's Africa policy is dominated by the "War on Terror". This was also the case under Barack Obama. The essential difference lies in the rhetoric of the current incumbent, which is marked by ignorance and derogatory attitudes vis-à-vis the African continent.

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Donald Trump is unpopular in Africa. US presidents are traditionally held in high esteem across the African continent. In the case of Trump, however, rejection prevails, as he is perceived as hostile and racist. In Senegal, trust in the office of the US president has decreased by 51 percentage points, in South Africa it has dropped by 34 percentage points since January 2017. Crucially, when interpreting the results of a Pew opinion poll<sup>1</sup> a distinction must be made between Trump the individual, and the US as a country.

On the African continent, the United States remains emblematic of the dream that everyone stands a chance. The US continues to be the destination of choice for many of those looking to emigrate. A scholarship in the US is valued more highly than one at a university in Beijing. In the same way, American rap music and apparel communicate a certain attitude towards life for which Chinese karaoke is no match. Measured against these, not unimportant, outward appearances, Trump is inexistent: When Obama acceded to the presidency, his portrait was printed on t-shirts across the continent, and irrational "Obamania" was commonplace. Obama disappointed many of the high hopes invested in him. Yet, he gave the continent a voice; he imparted the feeling that he understood. This generated much affinity towards him and the US, despite the fact that it was not translated into increased levels of support or improved trading conditions. In fact, Obama merely continued initiatives introduced by his predecessors, and launched hardly any programmes of his own. He did, however, cushion this status quo with silver-toned speeches. Trump does not share these sensibilities, yet further pursues, in many instances, a number of Obama's approaches.

Trump's withdrawal from UN organisations and reduction in US contributions have, however, had an impact on Africa, since the United Nations fulfil regulatory functions in many parts of the continent.

Remarks – hitherto unconfirmed – made by the 45<sup>th</sup> US president referring to some African states as "shithole countries" in January 2018 led to protests and diplomatic enquiries. However, many commentators in Nigeria, Senegal, and Zimbabwe have drawn a line between this US president – who seems to be somewhat bewildered by the geography of the continent, speaking of "Nambia" rather than Namibia – and American administrative bodies, which endeavour to honour agreements, such as the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), an economic agreement initiated by Bill Clinton. Clinton launched the AGOA in 2000. Its goal is to provide preferential access to the US market for some products from African states. This is the very opposite of what "America First" stands for. The AGOA was extended to 2025 under Obama.

Trump's rhetoric is what determines his relationship with Africa, and the way he is perceived. In the same way that his inclination to provoke and his aversion to diplomatic etiquette and political courtesy have perplexed the German Chancellery and the Élysée, he has also alienated politicians in Africa. In the aftermath of the US immigration ban on citizens from a range of African countries, the then-chair of the African Union Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma of South Africa, declared that the very country that once took Africans as slaves was now shutting the door in the faces of people from these very countries.

Trump is perceived as a man not even attempting to counter allegations of racism, and who, in the eyes of many observers, chiefly represents the rule of the white man. Ultimately, American Africa policy lacks “an overarching strategic vision for the region,” as authors from the German Institute of Global and Area Studies deplore.<sup>2</sup> They posit that restrictions on immigration within Trump’s “America First” policy will drive Africa further towards China and Europe.

In mid-December 2018, John Bolton, Trump’s Security Advisor, presented the Africa strategy of the Trump administration. The strategy can be broken down into three aspects: First, economic success for all involved, also to defy the Chinese. The Chinese and Russia are framed as “predators” attempting to create African dependency. Second, Trump further intends to fight Islamist terrorism and to have every single US dollar spent to serve American interests.<sup>3</sup> Bolton made abundantly clear that this was essentially a race against Beijing, declaring, “China uses bribes, opaque agreements, and the strategic use of debt to hold states in Africa captive to Beijing’s wishes and demands.”<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, Bolton announced the “Prosper Africa” initiative, which primarily aims to promote economic involvement of US companies on the African continent. The rather reserved commentaries on the new strategy by the New York Times or the Brookings Institution emphasised the salience of having a strategy in the first place, but critiqued it as overly vague and, as compared to German or European initiatives, rather limited in scope.

The inertia the US administration has displayed towards the 54 African states, bestows upon Chinese endeavours the advantage that Beijing would not even have to act in the first place for now. “It is fair to say that the United States does not currently have much of a grand strategy in Africa. Instead, it has a mishmash of African policies, some of which work well, some of which work poorly, and few of which work in concert with each other,” as an analysis in the US

political journal *The American Interest* claims, referring, however, to the Obama era as well.<sup>5</sup>

In point of fact, Obama also had dealings with politicians who did not live up to his lofty standards. Jon Temin, Africa director at Freedom House, called for a clear overhaul of US Africa policy: Less proximity of the State Department to the actors involved, and a rethink of prior partnerships if – as has been the case in South Sudan – there is an increasing amount of evidence pointing to gross violations of human rights. Temin points out that Obama, conversely, invited South Sudan’s president Salva Kiir to a meeting of African heads of state in 2014, despite not granting other potentates in Africa the same honour.<sup>6</sup>

Will the new administration do any better? In November 2018, Trump reportedly considered striking Sudan off the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Khartoum had harboured both Osama bin Laden prior to his relocating to Afghanistan, as well as “Carlos the Jackal”, the Venezuelan terrorist. The International Criminal Court has even issued an arrest warrant against Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Sudan’s long-term ruler. Trump’s rationale for such deliberations remains obscure.

Soon after Donald Trump’s inauguration in January 2017, the New York Times published a paper outlining questions the Trump Administration had put to the Pentagon and the State Department in order to understand contemporary Africa policies. The paper implies a simultaneous drive to challenge everything, on the one hand, and gross ignorance on the other. Is the US losing to China in Africa? Why should the US be spending nine billion US Dollars on development aid for Africa annually, and are those funds not mostly misappropriated?<sup>7</sup> Detractors had, however, lamented the “low level of coherence in security, economic and development policies” even prior to Trump’s taking office.<sup>8</sup>

Reuben Brigety, Obama’s US ambassador to the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, has strongly

criticised Trump's Africa policy. To him, the fact that it took one and a half years to appoint a Secretary of State for Africa speaks of ignorance vis-à-vis Africa. He has also criticised "diplomatic blunders", such as when the Rwandan president Paul Kagame was not given an appointment with the US administration during his visit to Washington in March 2017; apparently, in the general confusion, nobody felt responsible for Africa.<sup>9</sup>

Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, on the other hand, identified advantages for Africa in Trump's National Security Strategy in early 2017: reforms were to be encouraged and cooperation with "promising nations" was to be fostered.<sup>10</sup> German academia was astonished as authors wrote in a study by the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) declare that Africa not being a matter Washington concerns itself with yet is a blessing, since policy shifts would impact upon the lives of over a billion of Africans.<sup>11</sup> However, the challenges pertaining to matters of migration, population growth and counter-terrorism in Africa are so grave that they cannot possibly be tackled by the Europeans and Chinese alone; the US do play a key role.

US government inactivity has even been criticised by those schools of thought which can be regarded as well-disposed towards Republican government. The director of the CSIS's Africa programme has criticised the US for being disheartened vis-à-vis Africa. He outlines that since 2010, more than 150 new embassies have been opened in Sub-Saharan Africa by Arab and Asian states hoping to do business with Africa.<sup>12</sup> Africa experts, such as those from the Brookings Institution, are alarmed at "summit diplomacy" with Africa pursued in particular by the EU, and here especially by Angela Merkel's government in Germany, as well as by the Chinese.<sup>13</sup>

### Shifting Rhetoric

Hardly any country in the Western hemisphere has historically had such strained relations with

Africa as the United States. Even the former colonial powers – the UK, France, and Belgium – do not appear to be as affected by the legacy of the slave trade. This might be grounded in the





fact that all recognised freedoms and opportunities in the US notwithstanding, the aftermath of racism remains evident in the US, in contrast to the European colonial powers. Since

the 1990s, virtually all US presidents have been highly sensitive to this issue. In Ghana and Senegal today, one would not be unlikely to encounter groups of African American tourists



Place of longing: On the African continent, the United States remains emblematic of the dream that everyone stands a chance. Source: © Carlo Allegri, Reuters.

tracing the tracks of their ancestors in West Africa. In the past decades, every US president has had their photo taken on the slave island of Gorée, just off the coast of Senegal's capital Dakar, at the stone gate through which hundreds of thousands of African slaves were hustled onto America-bound ships. In the 1990s, American ambassadors in Africa, such as Smith Hempstone, the legendary conservative diplomat and journalist in Nairobi, claimed that the US, following the end of the Cold War, would want to see the blessings of democracy and the separation of powers implemented across Africa.

This has changed. Trump's statements on black athletes protesting against racial discrimination during the playing of the anthem, defaming them as "sons of bitches", are met with incomprehension in Nairobi's sports bars.

### **Trump's ambivalent stance on democracy might also be read as tolerating local undemocratic governments.**

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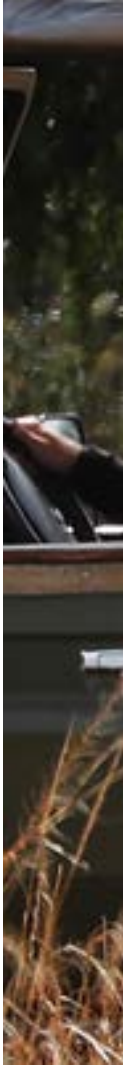
The South African comedian Trevor Noah has labelled Donald Trump the "perfect African president", simply happening to be in office on the wrong continent. Noah identified commonalities between Trump and African dictators, portraying Trump as badly prepared and attempting to bend the law. Policies less concerned with democratic values than interests might please many an African potentate, but even they cannot disregard Trump's rhetoric aiming to sideline Africa. Paul Kagame, the Rwandan president, did not shy away from conflict with the Trump administration by banning the import of American second-hand clothing to his country – with the understandable argument that this would hamper the development of Rwanda's nascent textile industry. In return, tariff-free access of Rwandan products to the US market was suspended.

And what are the implications of Trump's disdain for the press and the separation of powers for those who campaign for democratisation and strong civil societies in Africa? The Trump presidency "might dishearten Africa's democrats and boost the continent's autocrats", as John Stremlau of Wits University Johannesburg writes. He points to the danger arising from Trump's use of fake news and the manner in which he twists the truth, quoting the Ugandan journalist, Charles Onyango-Obbo, who writes critically and ironically, "Trump's genius lies in him grasping what guerrilla leaders internalised years ago: do exactly what your opponent deems impossible or inconceivable so that he will have no plan to defend himself."<sup>14</sup>

The disappointed champions of democracy and the separation of powers in Africa at the best of times joke about a man whose indifference to the continent appears to manifest itself in the fact that it took one and a half years and two US Secretaries of State to even decide to appoint a director for the Africa Desk with the State Department in the first place. It was only in July 2018 that diplomat Tibor Nagy was appointed Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Nagy is the erstwhile ambassador to Guinea and Ethiopia and is now tasked with shaping American policy towards the African continent.

Trump himself has denied the reported "shithole" statement in January 2018. Crucially, though, all observers consider such statements possible. The tremendous number of rhetorical tweets and demands for clarification included those put forward by South Africa's head of government, Cyril Ramaphosa, the Senegalese head of state, Macky Sall, and the Foreign Office of Botswana.

Trump sends his own people to Africa, such as the then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, whom he fired while Tillerson was on a trip to Africa in March 2018. Later that year, he then sent his wife Melania who expressed her doubts as to her husband ever having referred to African countries as "shitholes". As her husband's envoy, Melania Trump visited Ghana, Malawi, Kenya,





Pith helmet: It is not only Donald Trump himself who has offended many people in Africa over the last two years.  
Source: © Carlo Allegri, Reuters.

and Egypt in October 2018. The media particularly remarked on her sartorial choices reminiscent of the tropical clothing of the colonial era. Melania Trump emphasised that the people in Africa had warmly welcomed her on this trip. “We both love Africa. Africa is so beautiful.”<sup>15</sup>

Germany’s *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper quoted John Stremmlau of Johannesburg’s Wits University as saying that conflicts of interests, such as those Trump is experiencing from his own business interest and the national interest are well-known in Africa. Contempt for institutions, the subordinate role of women, as well as disdain for freedom of expression, also find their counterparts in African potentates.<sup>16</sup>

### **Military Interests**

The US would have preferred to stay out of Africa militarily after the Cold War. However, a vacuum was created after the end of the East-West conflict, which had been fought with great vigour on the continent. The first failing state was Somalia; all the attacks and terrorist threats that were to follow were entirely unforeseeable in the early 1990s.

In 1992 in Somalia, then-president George H. W. Bush wanted to defeat hunger and bring peace, even though the strategic importance of the country on the Horn of Africa had considerably decreased owing to the collapse of the

Soviet Union, and the end of the East-West conflict. Bill Clinton inherited the Somalia engagement. When, in 1993, 13 US soldiers were killed in Mogadishu, the doctrine emerged that never again should an American soldier die on African soil. Bringing this trauma into office with him, Clinton refused to use military means to counter the Rwandan genocide, which started on 6 April 1994. Clinton would later apologise to the Rwandan people for this; in hindsight, his decision to stand idly by and watch the murder of one million people within 100 days appears lowly and motivated by domestic politics.

After Black Hawk Down, the shooting down of an American helicopter in Mogadishu, claiming 13 lives, the Americans would once again be traumatised when, on 7 August 1998, terrorists affiliated with the al-Qaeda network attacked US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, killing a large number of Americans and locals. In retrospect, these attacks are seen as precursors and exercises for the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001.

### **In Africa, the US army is operating mostly autonomously and is mostly tasked with countering terrorism.**

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The growing threat of terrorism from Islamist groups such as al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, Mali, and Niger led to the creation of AFRICOM under US president Barack Obama in February 2007. Mission control for military interventions in Africa is headquartered at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. Numerous drone attacks are, apparently, also controlled from there. In September 2008, Air Forces Africa and the Seventeenth Air Force, serving as AFRICOM's air force, were set up in Ramstein.<sup>17</sup>

The core of American Africa policy is the drone, political scientist Richard Joseph (Northwestern University, Evanston) sarcastically noted.<sup>18</sup> The drones programme, in operation since 2014, reportedly uses bases in Ethiopia, Niger, Kenya, and Djibouti.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, attacking al-Shabaab targets in Somalia appears to be one of the central aims of US military policy in Africa. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the devastating September 2013 attack on the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi, as well as for the attack on the DusitD2 hotel in Kenya's capital in January 2019. In 2018 alone, over 30 US airstrikes on al-Shabaab targets were executed in Somalia.<sup>20</sup>

Military cooperation with German and other European armies appears to be virtually non-existent. At a hearing at the US House of Representatives in March 2018, the AFRICOM commander, Thomas Waldhauser, declared that he finds that there is only very marginal cooperation in Africa, if at all.<sup>21</sup>

In the ten years since AFRICOM was established, US commandos have been active in Africa, including in Kenya, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Mauritania, and Niger. However, the general public in the US only became aware of this in October 2017, when four American soldiers were ambushed and killed in the village of Tongo-Tongo in Niger. In the US, the debate was soon dominated by a discussion surrounding the president's poorly-worded expressions of sympathy for one of the young widows. Trump reportedly told her that her fallen husband must have known what he signed up for when he had enlisted with special forces. Officially, the soldiers had only been deployed to the Sahel country for training purposes. Germany, too, maintains close ties with this country. Notwithstanding, they were obviously killed in combat, which they – to make matters worse – were allegedly insufficiently equipped for.

Covertly, several hundred Green Berets, Navy SEALs, and Marine Raiders appear to have stayed in Niger. The country serves as a transit

destination for Europe-bound refugees, but is also increasingly exposed to Islamist terrorism, with terrorists benefitting from the fact that borders with Mali and Libya are hard to monitor. As the magazine Politico has established, the boundaries of operations in these countries are fluid between training and counter-terrorism.<sup>22</sup> In mid-November 2018, the Pentagon declared that about ten per cent of the 7,200 soldiers of the Africa Command would be withdrawn over “the next several years”.<sup>23</sup> According to unconfirmed reports, this is scheduled for the next three years. Observers suggest that this withdrawal is also a reaction to the death of the four US soldiers in Niger in 2017.

### Racing the Chinese

Military contacts between American and Chinese soldiers can only occur in Djibouti, where the People’s Republic of China has opened its first naval base beyond its own borders. Reportedly, US pilots were blinded by the Chinese using lasers in May 2018. The head of AFRICOM, General Waldhauser, has however assessed China’s involvement in Africa in a positive light. About 2,600 Chinese blue helmets serve on UN missions, for instance in Mali, South Sudan, and Côte d’Ivoire. The US, on the other hand, has officially only dispatched 68 blue helmets to the continent.<sup>24</sup>

Economic competition is less about sales markets which might be lost to the Chinese, but rather about access to African raw materials. US dependency on imports, such as platinum, manganese and chromium (the largest reserves of which can be found in South Africa) or coltan (80 per cent of reserves located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) is dramatic. The US imports more crude oil from Africa than from the Middle East.<sup>25</sup> The Americans will find it difficult to win the economic race against the Chinese if the considerable US direct investment and military cooperation are not complemented by relevant political measures – agreements, conferences, declarations, and visits. In 2017, US trade volume with Africa totalled 39 billion US dollars; yet, at 170 billion

US dollars, China’s was more than four times as big.<sup>26</sup> The US is only Africa’s third most important trading partner, after China and Europe.

The entirely underdeveloped intra-African market is overly dependent upon exports, including to the US. Less than 20 per cent of African trade is between African states.<sup>27</sup> For this very reason, and unlike Europe, Africa has difficulty in speaking with one united voice at negotiations.

### Moving Forward

Africa is three and a half times the size of the United States. In a speech in January 2017, Chris Coons, a Democratic US Senator, pointed Trump to the challenges and opportunities Africa provides: the continent offers great economic potential; its population is set to double within the next 30 years; Africa’s role within the global economy will increase; and the continent must take action to counter terrorism and jihadi threats.<sup>28</sup> Trump’s half-knowledge on Africa can be dangerous, for instance when he speaks of “mass killings” of white farmers in South Africa (as he did in August 2018) – this patchy understanding is grounded not in intelligence service reports, but on the reporting of Fox News.

### **Current US policies vis-à-vis Africa imply that Europe and Germany will have to take on more responsibility promoting democracy in Africa.**

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The fact that Trump attacks the press and attempts to influence the judiciary through his tweets has, if not an imitation effect, then a suggestive one – that some cherished principles do not have to be honoured. Said values, however, are frequently precisely those which institutions such as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation hope to promote in African civil societies.

So, what do these US policies towards Africa imply for Europe and for Germany? Obama was similarly indifferent to Europe's struggles with African migration. What will have a greater impact is that the promotion of democracy in Africa – a task hitherto shouldered by the US and Europe together – might increasingly become a European matter. Europe, and Germany in particular, has been much more proactive than the US, through a range of measures to strengthen small and medium-sized businesses, the Marshall Plan with Africa, the Compacts with Africa, and reform partnerships with selected states. Simultaneously, the rhetoric employed has been stripped of much ideology, increasingly referring to German and European economic interests.

Europe must act in greater unison given both American indifference and Chinese expansionist aspirations – this point cannot be emphasised enough.

Africa and Europe will both probably come to terms with this US president and his Africa policy. Ideally, Europe will succeed in furthering its Africa policy with recourse to smaller means than the Americans or Chinese. Besides, Trump's Africa policies cannot last longer than eight years. That is a manageable time-scale, especially in Africa.

*–translated from German–*

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[Looking West](#)

# Trump, China, and Europe

What Remains of the “Pivot to Asia”

[Rabea Brauer / Alexander Badenheim](#)



Donald Trump's presidency has brought numerous global changes, not least for the Indo-Pacific region. In addition to the confrontational trade policy that primarily affects China, other countries in the region have also faced numerous challenges in the past two years.

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### **Trump's Withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership**

The US's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that Trump initiated was a blow to many US partners in the region. Especially countries like Japan, which hoped to stimulate its stagnating economy with export growth, had invested a great deal of effort and hope in the trade agreement. Suddenly they were faced not only with a failed economic project that they had seen as a central concern, but also with accusations of unfair trade practices and of failing to do anything to reduce the bilateral trade deficit. The result was a tarnished US reputation as a reliable partner amongst its allies in the region. This affected not only economic, but also security policy interests. Under Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, TPP was seen as a counterweight to China's growing influence in Asia. Beijing's self-confident and strategic approach has, for some time now, challenged the US in its role as a stabilising power in the Pacific region. Scarcely anyone has emphasised this more than Donald Trump. Accordingly, the geopolitical considerations behind TPP would have very much overlapped with Trump's ideas. From his point of view – which was shared even by his presidential rival, Hillary Clinton – the expected trade disadvantages of the treaty outweighed any benefits. In April 2018, however, Trump announced that the US might return to the Trans-Pacific free trade agreement on the condition that it be renegotiated.<sup>1</sup> The US's absence from the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was finally signed by the remaining eleven countries in March 2018, does not mean, however, that Trump intends to give China a free hand in the region – quite the contrary.

Barack Obama attempted to shift the geopolitical focus from the Near and Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region with his “pivot to Asia”. However, he lacked both the time and a comprehensive strategy for establishing the US as the most important trading partner and security guarantor in Asia. Since Trump took office, the pillars of the US's Asia strategy have been the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Alongside India, Japan, Australia, and other partners, the US is de facto striving to counterbalance China's growing influence in the region. The Indo-Pacific concept was originally developed and pitched by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, when he originated the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as an informal strategic dialogue format between the US, Japan, Australia, and India.<sup>2</sup> However, due to the disagreement among these countries about how to deal with China, the initiative has not yet produced any concrete results. This can be seen in the example of India, which has steadfastly refused to participate in any alliance formed to oppose China.<sup>3</sup> At the November 2017 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in the Philippines, the heads of state of the four “Quad States”, also present, still agreed to revive the initiative.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific should not be discussed without the countries of Southeast Asia, who not only see themselves as the geographical heart of the Indo-Pacific, but also claim a shaping role in the strategy. The fact that this is also creating a difficult situation for ASEAN states is illustrated by the example of Vietnam, whose foreign policy goal is to maintain a balanced relationship with both the US and China. Like most other Southeast Asian countries, it is closely economically intertwined with China in terms of trade

deficits, and is not interested in jeopardising loans, investments, or moderate political dealings. Nevertheless, there have been repeated territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, which means that strengthening the principle of freedom of navigation and increasing US presence in the region are very much in Vietnam's security interests. Moreover, since there is a lobby for free, safe shipping routes because of trade policy reasons, Vietnam is very receptive to the American initiative for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Further north, South Korea finds itself in a similar situation. The country has enjoyed US military protection for decades and has close economic ties to the US. In addition to this, it has a tense relationship with China for historical reasons. Despite all of this, South Korea is unable to position itself clearly in opposition to the People's Republic. A quarter of South Korean exports go to China, and the majority of tourists in South Korea come from China.<sup>5</sup> Trump's attempt to convince President Moon to join the Indo-Pacific initiative during a personal meeting in November 2017 ultimately failed. South Korea does not intend to take a clear position between China and the US. In addition to close economic integration, the process of rapprochement between the two Koreas is an important consideration in this approach. Seoul knows that China, North Korea's neighbour and most important ally, plays an important role in ensuring peace on the peninsula. Trump, who put China under greater pressure to enforce UN sanctions more stringently against Pyongyang, is also aware of this. In addition, there have been several rounds of talks between American and Chinese leaders, but they have recently been overshadowed by the contentious trade policy, which could also be an obstacle to negotiations aimed at the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

### **Free Trade without America?**

Because of the geographical distance, EU countries sometimes pursue their interests in the Asia-Pacific region by means which differ from

those of the US. The countries of the EU – not least among them export nation Germany – also have a great interest in ensuring that maritime trade routes in East and Southeast Asia are not shut down by military confrontations. Nevertheless, the US is the only Western country whose geostrategic interests are such that it feels forced to assert its claim to leadership in the Pacific region with regular fleet manoeuvres, thereby also countering Chinese ambitions by military means. Germany's efforts in the region focus primarily on asserting value-based development policy interests, such as: ensuring peace, protecting human rights, strengthening civil society, and creating economic and social prospects for young people in order to deprive terror and extremism of a breeding ground; as well as economic and global interests, such as protecting resources and climate. Germany chooses to pursue many of these goals within the framework of the EU, as opposed to bilaterally.

### **Since Trump's inauguration, European and Asian players have had to assume more responsibility and cooperate more closely.**

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The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), in October 2018, demonstrated once again how closely EU countries cooperate with Asian states. While, in the past, most European actors and a large number of Asian countries sought close coordination with the US, they have had to take on more responsibility themselves since Donald Trump took office and withdrew from global treaties and multilateral institutions. The Iran deal, the Paris Agreement, free trade agreements, and the long-overdue reforms of the WTO are only a few examples of central EU concerns whose implementation will require more dedication of EU member states and, perhaps, other partners besides the US. In terms of free trade, the EU and Asia have already achieved some successes, which have sent a clear signal against

protectionist trade practices and in favour of multilateral cooperation. For example, the EU has successfully concluded free trade agreements with Japan, Vietnam, and Singapore respectively.

However, the EU also sees new challenges emerging in Asia. For instance, China's intensive activities within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative are being observed by the EU with a critical eye. The EU Commission introduced a plan in September 2018 that is intended to provide billions of euros in European funds for traffic, energy, and digital infrastructure projects both in and with Asia.<sup>6</sup> The focus is on sustainable projects in which labour rights and environmental standards are upheld, and political and economic dependencies are avoided. This so-called Connectivity Strategy is a first important step towards enhancing the infrastructure connection between Europe and Asia, but the concept paper remains very vague in many instances, and describes approaches to matters such as financing connectivity projects in insufficient detail. At the moment, the plan can be seen as an important signal to the Asian states, but it remains very difficult to assess whether or not the planned measures will constitute an attractive alternative to Chinese connectivity initiatives in the region. Although the plan is not officially directed against China, it is a clear response to the Belt and Road Initiative which is often criticised by Brussels for promoting less sustainable and loan-dependent projects which create dependencies in impecunious third-party countries. Europeans also share many of the US's criticisms of China on trade policy issues. However, the approach taken by Germany and the EU to resolve these disagreements differs greatly from the US's China policy.

### **Trump's Tough Line on China**

Scarcely any topic has dominated China-related media coverage in recent months as much as the trade war between the People's Republic and the US. Even during his presidential campaign, President Trump accused China of unfair trade practices, currency manipulation, and illegal

activities, such as theft of intellectual property. In July 2018, the US government finally began to act on these accusations by imposing its initial punitive tariffs on Chinese imports. Since then, the two countries have been imposing higher and higher tariffs on more and more of each other's products. While the US ostensibly focuses on the enormous trade deficit of 335 billion US-Dollar, the American punitive tariffs on goods, now worth 250 billion US-Dollar, are actually retribution for Trump's long-expressed points of criticism, for which Beijing is now being made to pay.

The unfair trade practices of which Trump accuses China mainly relate to government subsidies, and the resulting market distortions, such as the "flooding" of the American and global markets with cheap steel and aluminium exports. A further thorn in Trump's side are one-sided transfers of technology and know-how which are a result of the joint venture pressure that remains widespread in many industries in China. The lack of reciprocity in matters of investment – open markets in the US and Europe, as opposed to the heavily regulated Chinese market – was the reason Western governments had already begun taking a closer look at Chinese investments even before Donald Trump took office. But the idea here is not to block all investment from China, but to meticulously examine foreign investment in critical infrastructures and key technologies, and to investigate their sources more carefully. With regard to investments by state-owned companies in particular, such as those that often come from the People's Republic, Western governments want more transparency with respect to ownership and financing.

During the last few months of the Obama administration, US security agencies warned the German federal government against selling Aixtron, a German chip plant manufacturer, to Chinese investors. The successful takeover of the Augsburg robot manufacturer Kuka by the Chinese Midea Group had already aroused criticism, so the sale of Aixtron was able to be avoided. Both the American and German



In cold print: In July 2018, the US government began to impose its initial punitive tariffs on Chinese imports.  
Source: © Jonathan Ernst, Reuters.

governments analyse Chinese investment in their own countries and increasingly criticise investment conditions in China. Yet, the eagerness on the part of German and American companies to enter the Chinese market continues unabated for the time being, despite growing dissatisfaction with regulations and restrictions. But it is just this eagerness that Trump intends to massively reduce. He regularly exhorts US companies not to have their goods produced in China or other low-wage countries, but in the US. With this policy, he not only wishes to secure or create jobs in the US, but also to stem the flow of technology and knowledge to China. This is ultimately where the punitive tariffs against China come into play. A large part of the Chinese products to which tariffs were applied in July come from industries promoted by China's "Made in China 2025" industrial strategy. The US government is not only concerned with trade issues, but also with curbing China's ambitious

development programme that is intended to make the People's Republic the world's leading industrial nation by 2025.

These industrial and trade policy measures are components of the current US policy on China, which views the latter's economic rise as a strategic problem. The US National Security Strategy, published at the end of 2017, like the National Defence Strategy, published shortly thereafter, identifies China as one of the three greatest challenges facing the US and says that it, like Russia, challenges American "power, influence, and interests" and attempts to erode "security and prosperity" in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Many of Trump's criticisms of China coincide with those levelled by the Obama administration. Obama put pressure on the People's Republic especially with regard to state-sponsored overproduction. The biggest difference may well be that Obama's administration used

WTO channels to engage in an open discussion about the disagreements, while Trump now publicly condemns China and intentionally circumvents the WTO system. This openly confrontational attitude towards China thus differs from the German and European approach.

### **Beijing is Not the New Washington!**

Germany's policy towards China has long been shaped by the close economic ties between the two countries. While China became Germany's most important trading partner two years ago, the Federal Republic is China's biggest economic partner in Europe by far. Since Donald Trump took office, however, Germany's federal government has found itself in an unprecedented situation with regard to its China policy.

### **Both Germany and China are affected by protectionist US trade policy.**

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As early as one month before the first tariffs were imposed on Chinese products, punitive tariffs were also placed on European steel and aluminium exports. This means that both Germany and China are affected by the US's protectionist trade policy, albeit to varying degrees. Both countries also criticised Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, and the multilateral world trade order based on regulatory rules. For the People's Republic, these changes in the US policy offered a welcome opportunity to present themselves as the putatively more reasonable partner on the world stage. The thought of an alliance with Germany and the rest of Europe against the US may well please the Chinese government. However, during the fifth German-Chinese Intergovernmental Consultations, which took place on 9 July 2018, only a few days after the first American-Chinese punitive tariffs came into force, it became clear that Chancellor Merkel wished to avoid precisely this impression of an alliance with China directed against the US.

Although there has been incremental rapprochement with Beijing via the intensive exchange of goods, systemic and ideological differences remain. The US, on the other hand, is a traditional ally who will remain a strategic partner for Germany in the long term despite current differences.

Moreover, the German federal government can clearly identify with some of Trump's criticisms of China. For instance, the loss of intellectual property, market restrictions in China, and, as has been described, concerns about state-controlled strategic investments in key domestic technologies are all big problems from a German perspective. China's "Made in China 2025" strategy – which, incidentally, was modelled on Germany's "Industry 4.0" – targets such industries as automobile, aircraft, mechanical engineering, and plant construction, in which Germany plays an important global role. The successful implementation of China's development strategy would thus entail a loss of relative importance for German companies in this area. At present, concerns about growing competition outweigh prospects of new cooperation and supply opportunities. Nevertheless, China's sheer size and growing middle class ensure that the country will scarcely lose its attractiveness as the most important market for many German companies in the foreseeable future. However, German companies should not allow themselves to become too dependent on China, as the Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (Federation of German Industries) recently warned.<sup>8</sup> At the moment, it remains unclear what scope the trade war between the US and China may take on, and whether Washington will put pressure on Germany to take a clearer position, as it did with the Iran deal. This could create a difficult situation for the German government.

In general, the trade war between the US and China could even be advantageous to the EU. At the moment, the American "punitive tariff" policy seems to be focused more on the People's Republic than on European countries. In addition, Trump is looking for allies in the trade war with China, meaning that he might be quicker



to compromise in points of conflict with European partners, or with Canada or Mexico, in order to then present a united front with these countries. Several EU trade representatives have also indicated that the momentum that Trump has generated with the punitive tariffs against China could be harnessed to persuade Beijing to implement WTO rules more strictly with regard

to state subsidies. An initial – and significantly less confrontational – step in the right direction would certainly be the Investment Protection Agreement currently being negotiated between the EU and China. If it were to be successfully implemented in the near future, the chances that a European-Chinese free trade agreement would be considered would rise significantly.



Outdated industrial policy: With his protectionist measures towards China, Trump wants, among other things, to retrieve American jobs.

Source: © Joshua Roberts, Reuters.

conditions that would make it more difficult for European countries to reach a similar agreement with China. In the newly negotiated free trade agreement between the US, Mexico, and Canada, there is already a clause enabling signatory countries to withdraw from the agreement if one of the others enters negotiations on a free trade agreement with non-market economies such as China.<sup>10</sup> If the US places similar conditions on the agreement with the EU and countries such as Japan, Trump would be one step closer to his goal of isolating China in the global trading system. However, in order to achieve fair trade, as the EU and the US have been demanding, Brussels and Washington should refrain from imposing punitive tariffs on each other. Germany's free trade agreements in Asia and the progress of the US relating to the free trade agreement with Mexico and Canada illustrate that solutions can be found that benefit both sides and that free trade is not a zero-sum game. Only together can the EU and the United States ultimately adjust the existing system in such a way as to ensure that countries that have previously benefited disproportionately from the current trading system play by the same rules as they do. What is certain, is that existing institutions can only be reformed to create fair conditions for all sides with the help of China, which has, after all, declared support for multilateral institutions such as the WTO and free trade.

*-translated from German-*

To reach such a point, however, numerous rounds of talks and, most importantly, the opening of Chinese markets would be necessary. Recently, EU Commission President Juncker ruled out negotiations for a free trade agreement with China, at least in the short term.<sup>9</sup> In addition, it would be possible for the US government to link a free trade agreement with the EU to

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[Looking West](#)

# More than Walls

Latin America's Role in the Triangle with the US and Europe

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If Germany and Europe turned their attention to Latin America, they could extend the transatlantic partnership by adding new partners and focussing on new issues without breaking ties with Washington. However, the countries of the region have differing views of Europe. Mexico is a special case in Latin America because of its close ties with the US, and the economic, political, and strategic interests that it shares with Europe. There is a need for Europe and the US to work together more closely in order to counterbalance China's growing influence.

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Transatlantic relations have entered a phase of disruption and estrangement since Donald Trump took office. Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke about this difficult period in transatlantic relations in her speech to the German diplomatic corps on 6 July 2018. She called for Germany and the United States to work more closely together: "We benefit from each other's strengths. That is why we need the transatlantic partnership."<sup>1</sup> Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, had already stated, on 20 March 2018, that transatlantic relations were a cornerstone of the security and prosperity of both the United States and the European Union.<sup>2</sup> He also stressed the need for the EU to move closer to the US in order to strengthen this relationship.

The statements by Merkel and Tusk make it clear that relations with the United States have slipped into a spiral of unrest and uncertainty as a result of the policies pursued by the Trump administration. Many observers believe this is a unique and unprecedented period of estrangement. It is hardly surprising that this is causing so much concern, as the United States has been of fundamental importance to Europe since the end of the Second World War. It is, therefore, appropriate to rethink the transatlantic partnership.

If Germany and Europe were to turn their attention to Latin America, they could enhance the transatlantic partnership by adding new partners and focussing on new issues, without

cutting their ties with Washington. It could be an "extended transatlantic partnership". When looking for new partners, Latin America would seem to be the obvious choice. However, it is important to take a differentiated approach, as the countries of the region hold very different views of Europe. Mexico is a special case in Latin America because of its close ties with the US, and the economic, political, and strategic interests that it shares with Europe. Moreover, China's strong trading presence in the region would make such an expansion of partnership difficult.

### **Trump and Latin America**

The at times harsh tone and strategic disorientation emanating from the White House is a major impediment to the US's relations with Latin America. Nevertheless, their shared democratic values, and joint economic, strategic, and regional interests have not been impacted by this shift in style and substance.

Conservative, market-oriented governments, such as those in Chile and Argentina, as well as left-wingers, such as the Mexican president, both continue to strive for closer cooperation with the United States. And, despite political feathers being ruffled on both sides, the US remains strongly committed to political, strategic, and economic cooperation in the region. These structures are robust because they are supported on both sides by countless stakeholders in the fields of politics, business, and civil society. The narrowing of media coverage to the

person of President Trump – which also occurs in Latin America – all too often ignores the intensity of this hemispheric interdependence.

Both sides still face pressing and important structural challenges, made all the more explosive by the fact that they have far-reaching regional implications.

- Latin America, especially Mexico and Central America, forms part of a regional migration system with the US. Hundreds of thousands of people migrate from the economically weaker, physically more dangerous or politically more unstable states to the wealthier, safer, and more stable countries of the region: to Argentina, Chile, Panama, Mexico and, of course, the US. Before the Bolivarian Revolution, Venezuela also formed part of this list. Emigration to the US is also culturally anchored, as the United States is still regarded as a country of opportunity. These “aspirational” migratory flows to and from Latin America, in which people seek a better future for themselves and their families, will not be slowed down by a shift in presidential rhetoric, no matter how pronounced. The migrant caravan that headed for the US in the summer of 2018 bore eloquent testimony to this.
- The spread of organised crime, in particular the drug trade, has so far not been controlled. These transnationally networked and extremely well-funded crime syndicates set up their operations in the region’s fragile states, and at the geographic and social peripheries of emerging nations: in urban slums, economically dependent provinces, and dense rainforests with no government presence. It has, to date, been difficult to prevent these violent criminals from infiltrating into the region’s more developed nations, not least because state agencies throughout the region (not only in the fragile states) are in the pocket of the drug cartels. Organised (drug) crime has become an endemic, i.e. systemic problem, especially in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, as well as in Central

American countries such as Honduras, where more people are dying today than did during the civil wars of the 1980s. This highlights the complexity of the problem – and also the fact that it will remain on the agenda of both Latin America and the US.

- The continuation of the Colombian peace process remains in the interests of both the region and the US. The structural ties between the United States and Colombia are mainly expressed through their close security cooperation, but also extend to business, science, and technology. Such cooperation structures are long-lasting and outlive political cycles.
- A final example is the humanitarian catastrophe in Venezuela, caused by the Maduro regime. It has become a major regional problem, with the economic and social implosion triggered by a politically authoritarian regime causing one of the worst refugee crises in the history of Latin America. The dictatorial leadership of Nicolás Maduro was challenged on 24 January 2019 by Juan Guaidó, President of the National Assembly, who declared himself the country’s new president. Although the Venezuelan army proclaimed its loyalty to Maduro, the US and most Latin American states – with the exception of Mexico, Cuba, Bolivia, and Uruguay – immediately recognised Guaidó as Venezuela’s legitimate interim president. This is a sign that, even under Trump, the United States is still an important ally for the opposition in Venezuela.

Irrespective of their sub-region, stage of economic development or political orientation, over the coming years the countries of Latin America will be primarily concerned with attracting Trump’s attention and (re)awakening the US’s interest in the region. This illustrates how, long before Trump, the White House already had a pronounced lack of interest in the region – and explains, at least in part, why Latin American disquiet about the Trump phenomenon is, beyond Mexico and Cuba, relatively low.

## Opportunities for Europe

Germany and Europe are also responding to the aforementioned challenges in the region. For example, the EU is involved in many areas of the Colombian peace process, including Germany's efforts to strengthen local administrative structures. In Venezuela, the EU has followed the example of the US by pledging its support to Guaidó. This shows that Europe and the United States are largely in agreement when it comes to fundamental issues of cooperation in Latin America. Common values and shared interests still provide a foundation that is largely untouched by day-to-day politicking, despite the fact that both sides of the Atlantic regularly conjure up the spectre of a crisis in transatlantic relations.<sup>3</sup>

So far, Trump's new political style seems to have had little concrete impact on European projects, such as in the area of development cooperation. It is not America's president, but the respective domestic political context of the various countries that has the greatest influence on the transatlantic partners' relations with Latin America. This can also shift in the direction of protectionism and illiberal democracy, as is happening in Bolsonaro's Brazil, making value-based international cooperation more difficult.

In light of the recent estrangement between Washington and Berlin, and Trump's lack of interest in Latin America, Germany and Europe also see a need and opportunity to redefine their own international role, and deepen old and new partnerships in order to supplement the transatlantic partnership with new players in their mutual interest.

A number of Latin American countries constitute potential partners. This is because the region shares fundamental values and structural principles with the West, such as liberal democracy, states governed by constitutions and the rule of law, a free market economy, and a commitment to effective multilateralism. Moreover, the US and Europe still share important goals

and interests in the region, such as maintaining its democratic and constitutional order, and further stabilising and developing the region by combating organised crime and state fragility.

## The Other Transatlantic Relationship

Latin America only came onto Europe's radar in the 1980s. The involvement of the Iberian countries – Spain and Portugal – in the resolution of



the conflicts in Central America at the end of that decade gave new momentum to these relations. In the following decade, Europe sought greater rapprochement with Latin America, which experienced a wave of unprecedented democratisation and economic liberalisation. But European foreign policy in the region experienced so many setbacks that relations began to cool in the mid-2000s. The Latin American region showed signs of accelerating economic

development (in the wake of the commodity boom), leading to the formation of left-wing populist governments that turned away from the liberalism of the Washington consensus.

How does Latin America assess its relations with Europe? It is not easy to identify a common Latin American position on Europe. Andrés Malamud mentions how Henry Kissinger's famous question about Europe is fully applicable to



Drug incineration: The fight against organised crime is one of the most urgent challenges of the coming years.  
Source: © Carlos Jasso, Reuters.

Latin America: “What number do I dial if I want to call Latin America?”<sup>4</sup> This is largely because the level of integration and associated structures in Latin America is completely different from Europe. Latin America has very different views on and approaches to regional integration, which makes it difficult to adopt coherent positions in the region.

## Europe’s unified attitude towards Latin America stands in stark contrast to Latin America’s widely differing views of the EU.

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By contrast, the EU has developed its own integration profile and a specific role as an actor in international relations, focussing on regional integration and multilateral (liberal) cooperation. The creation of the position of High Representative of the EU, along with the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010, under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty, have both served to consolidate the EU’s position as a global player. This has improved the coherence and visibility of the EU and made it easier to define a European stance on Latin America. The Latin American Integration Associations have, thus far, failed to achieve this kind of coherence. It is, therefore, all the more important to distinguish between Latin America’s different perceptions of Europe in order to find common ground and pinpoint potential opportunities for intensifying these relations.

### Potential Partners in Latin America

An examination of the negotiations on Association Agreements (AA) initiated by the EU with a number of Latin American countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s aids to highlight these differences. In general, three groups with different views on Europe can be distinguished:

Firstly, the members of the *Alianza Bolivariana de las Américas* (ALBA), an organisation founded by Hugo Chávez in 2004 that is now in economic and political decline. Members are: Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, and (with some limitations) Nicaragua. Transatlantic cooperation with these countries is neither politically opportune nor – with the exception of selected projects – economically interesting. Relations with these countries have been difficult in recent decades, especially with Venezuela since Chávez. Their low affinity with Europe hampers future rapprochement. The pronounced anti-Americanism of this alliance of socialist governments places a further burden on relations with Europe. As long as the “imperialism of the hegemon” is invoked for the ritualised legitimation of their claim to power, Europe cannot foresee any lasting partnerships with these states.

The second group comprises those countries that are much more open to international free trade and cooperation with Europe. They do not yet have bilateral trade agreements with Europe, but are working collectively (via Mercosur) or individually to achieve this: Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and especially Brazil. Negotiations with this bloc of countries have so far been protracted and produced no results. The lack of consensus within Mercosur, and the protectionist tendencies on both sides, have prevented a successful outcome. The centre-right governments in this group view the United States as a role model and leading power, while the left-wing governments acknowledge the role of the US but take a more critical view. However, the US’s attitude towards these countries is essentially driven by its own interests, and thus correspondingly pragmatic.

Brazil has a special position in the region due to its economic and political importance. Although it does not have a free trade agreement with Brazil, the country is the EU’s main trading partner in the region, and the eleventh most important in the world. In 2017, trade with Brazil accounted for 1.7 per cent of total EU trade. The EU is the biggest foreign investor in Brazil. In 2015, the country accounted for 48.5 per cent

of the EU's total investment in Latin America.<sup>5</sup> By signing a Strategic Association Agreement in 2007, the EU recognised Brazil as one of its strategic partners in the region. The agreement has also helped to promote political cooperation in certain areas, but it does not have the scope of the Association Agreement that is sought by Europe.

Because of its political turbulence, Brazil is a prime example of how hopes of closer ties with Latin America have been dashed. The recent election of Jair Bolsonaro – a result of the domestic political crisis and the loss of credibility of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT, Workers' Party) – has further weakened Brazil's position in the region, and once again fuelled scepticism about the extent to which Brazil can and will actually assume the role of the EU's key partner in the region. At present, it is impossible to predict what the election of Bolsonaro means for the relationship between Brasília and Washington in the medium and long term – even though Bolsonaro has allowed himself to be called the “Trump of the Tropics” during the election campaign and aggressively courted the attention of the White House.

### **The countries of the Pacific Alliance that are interested in free trade constitute suitable partners for the EU.**

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The third and most interesting group, from a transatlantic perspective, are the members of the Pacific Alliance: Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and soon perhaps Ecuador. These countries are clearly committed to multilateralism and global free trade. They have signed an agreement with the EU, and strengthened their links with European countries. From the perspective of these countries, relations with Europe not only mean economic benefits, but also the continuation of political dialogue with a region that shares its values and visions for the future. This fundamentally outward-looking

attitude is one of the main reasons why these countries also maintain a pragmatic and often friendly relationship with the US.

Europe can find some key partners within this group of countries. In 2011, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru joined forces to form the Pacific Alliance (*Alianza del Pacífico*, AP), a regional integration initiative. Its objectives include greater economic integration, and the free movement of goods, services, and people. The initiative's liberal approach has awakened economic interests in Europe. Currently, 55 countries have observer status in the Pacific Alliance, of which 28 (almost 51 per cent) are European countries.<sup>6</sup> On 17 July 2018, the High Representative of the EU, Federica Mogherini, met with representatives of the four countries of the Pacific Alliance, and the foreign ministers of the 28 EU countries. The meeting highlighted the similarities between the Pacific Alliance and the EU, and the importance of promoting a rules-based multilateral system.<sup>7</sup>

### **China in Latin America**

Because the countries of Latin America have actively and systematically opened themselves up to China, Europe needs to take the initiative, and identify the potential advantages and gains for all parties inherent in an “extended transatlantic partnership”. As its name suggests, the focus of the Pacific Alliance is not upon the Atlantic, but on the Pacific. Indeed, its focus is particularly aimed at the larger Asian markets, such as China, Japan, and South Korea.

The Pacific Alliance countries' interest in Asia is shared by other Latin American countries. This is due to two factors: Asia's booming economies, and the massive expansion of China's influence in Latin America. China gained access to the Latin American market when it became a member of the WTO in 2001. Now that the US has withdrawn from its position at the forefront of globalisation – initially as a result of the 2008 economic crisis, and now due to the Trump administration – China has become a leading

player in the global economy. In Latin America, China is now the biggest trading partner for Brazil, Chile, and Peru. Chinese investment in the region has also soared over recent years. Since

2005, the Development Bank of China and the Chinese bank Exim have invested more than 150 billion US dollars in Latin American and Caribbean countries. The main recipients of these



No cause for celebration: The election of Jair Bolsonaro has further weakened Brazil's position in the region.  
Source: © Adriano Machado, Reuters.



investments were Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, and Ecuador.<sup>8</sup> Overall, China's engagement in Latin America can be described as economically, not ideologically motivated.



China's influence in the region could hinder a renewed European rapprochement with Latin America. Chinese banks offer financing to a number of countries that do not have easy access to credit in other global capital markets, such as Ecuador, Venezuela, and Argentina. These banks also impose no political conditions on the governments that acquire these loans. However, they generally require the purchase of equipment or commercial contracts for the sale of petroleum. Although Chinese financiers operate on the basis of certain environmental standards, these are not as stringent as those of their Western counterparts.<sup>9</sup> In large swathes of Latin America, this has led to the perception that China offers more favourable terms for signing international agreements than the West. A fresh European approach to the region should, therefore, bear in mind the fact that other actors are already heavily involved. Latin American countries will not give up their economic interests that are supported by China.

### **Mexico's Special Role**

Mexico plays a key role in these considerations because of its geographical proximity to the US and the numerous economic, cultural, and social links between the two countries. Mexico is the region's second-largest economy, and the EU is its third-largest trading partner after the US and China. Germany also has an ambitious development agenda with Mexico at the global level, as well as with third countries, particularly in Latin America.

Since the first comprehensive agreement came into force in 2000, trade between Mexico and the EU has increased by 330 per cent from 18.7 billion US dollars in 1999 to 61.8 billion US dollars in 2016.<sup>10</sup> In 2017, the EU accounted for 5.7 per cent of Mexico's exports, and 11.6 per cent of its imports.<sup>11</sup> The political dialogue between Mexico and the EU included seven head-of-state level summits and 23 joint parliamentary committees.<sup>12</sup> Mexico and the EU agreed to

start the process of updating the agreement in 2017. This renegotiation had been planned for some time, but Trump's inauguration spurred on both parties to speed up the process. An ambitious free trade agreement was concluded in April 2018. The speed and efficiency with which the negotiations were conducted speak for themselves: Mexico is an important and – in this new context – even a priority partner for Europe.

### **Mexico has a special role in Latin America, partly because of its close ties with the US.**

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Mexico's importance for Europe lies not only in its economic and political weight, but also in its special relationship with the United States. No other country in Latin America has such access to the US market, and influence over its political system. The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 strengthened relations between Mexico and the United States, as well as with Canada. In 2016, trade with Mexico accounted for 13.66 per cent of total US trade, while Europe made up 22.32 per cent.<sup>13</sup> In the same year, US imports from Mexico amounted to 290 billion US dollars, compared to imports from the entire European continent of 452 billion US dollars. This means that the United States' imports from Mexico in 2016 amounted to 64.15 per cent of the total import volume from the whole of Europe.

Yet, after taking office, Trump reopened talks on NAFTA. The negotiations proved difficult for both Mexico and Canada, but the three parties reached a new agreement known as the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). Its most important aspect is that it maintains its trilateral character. This had been questioned several times by Canada because it was unwilling to accept the conditions imposed by the United States. Despite the heated rhetoric, the

renegotiated North American Free Trade Agreement has, thus, not caused any lasting damage to Mexico's role as the "extended workbench of the USA".

Mexico's relations with the United States are more than purely economic, largely because of the Mexican community living in the United States. Around twelve million Mexicans are currently living in the US, and some 26 million were born on US territory.<sup>14</sup> Mexico's network of 50 consulates in the US is the largest in the world.<sup>15</sup> The importance of these relations has meant that Mexico has regularly succeeded in exerting its influence on the US political system in order to advance its goals vis-à-vis its northern neighbour. Political lobbying during the NAFTA negotiations in the early 1990s, and the renegotiation of NAFTA are examples of Mexico's influence on US policy. However, Mexico has been a particular target of President Trump's verbal attacks. He is doing everything in his power to keep his campaign promise of building a wall on the border with Mexico, and has shown no qualms about spouting insulting generalisations about Mexicans. This has further intensified the tension between closeness and rejection that characterises US-Mexico relations, and has encouraged Mexico to look for alternatives.

This is why Mexico can and should be seen as an interesting and important partner for bringing a Latin American element into transatlantic relations. Mexico and Europe share not only economic and political but also strategic interests, as greater rapprochement could also provide a more effective counterweight to the dependence of both sides on the United States. But Mexico is not the only country that has a special relationship with the United States. For Canada, too, relations with its southern neighbour are of crucial importance. However, here too, Trump has created a growing sense of disillusionment. If Canada were to be included in a Mexico-EU-Canada triangle, this could create ties between stakeholders of the liberal world order, which could be interesting for Europe over the coming years.

Germany and Europe, therefore, have here an extraordinary opportunity to open up a new communication channel to the Trump administration via Mexico. How this will be affected by the recent change of government in Mexico will largely depend on the personal chemistry between Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Donald Trump – and also on the extent to which both presidents allow the much-invoked wall between the two countries to define bilateral relations. On both sides of the Rio Grande, it has become a core element of their identity policy.

### Opportunities for Future Cooperation

As Europe moves closer to Latin America, it shall encounter both opportunities and obstacles. Dialogue is hampered by the fact that Latin America is divided into at least three different groups. In the 2000s, disappointment and distancing ensued when EU negotiations foundered with one of Latin America's key players, Brazil. The EU has chosen to give priority to countries like Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, where more open doors have been found, and where talks on Association Agreements have been successful. Integration projects, such as the Pacific Alliance, are currently underway, justifying Europe's renewed interest in the region. However, China's growing influence has led Latin America to turn increasingly to Asia, and tempered its interest in seeking Western partners.

This means two things for future relations, and for how Germany and Europe handle American positions in Latin America:

Firstly, major regional challenges, such as the crisis in Venezuela or the Colombian peace process will remain on the common agenda of the expanded transatlantic partnership, and – despite occasional disagreements – will continue to be addressed jointly because of their urgency and importance.

Secondly, the US's lack of strategic interest in Latin America opens up great potential for Germany and Europe to work with old but “new”

partners. Areas of cooperation are opening up for the expanded transatlantic partnership with Mexican and Colombian stakeholders that have good ties to Washington, and also with the political pragmatists of the Pacific Alliance, and Argentina's President Macri. These include policy areas that are of interest to Germany, such as cooperation on science and technology, energy system transformation, sustainability policy, and economic integration.

Among the group of countries that is closest to the EU, Mexico stands out because of its economic and political importance in the region, as well as its special relationship with the United States. In this respect, Mexico and Europe share economic, political, and strategic interests that could serve as a basis for building a stronger partnership. However, the limited significance apparently attributed to foreign policy by the new Mexican government, the related decreasing international commitment, and the manifesting nationalist tendencies raise the question as to what extent these expectations of a stronger cohesion are being met. Similarly, Europe could use Canada's relations with the United States and, more recently, with Mexico to form a triangle that would counterbalance the US's policy under Trump of rejecting multilateralism in these areas.

*–translated from German–*

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[Looking West](#)

# “America First”

Transatlantic Relations in the Trump Era

[Benjamin Fricke / Nils Wörmer](#)

Contrary to all the isolationist noise Trump made during the campaign, America's foreign policy continues to be one that is more focused on global involvement and is strongly unilateral in nature. Whereas the political culture and style as well as the forms of international relations, even with allies, have radically changed, the essential elements of Trump's foreign and security policy tend to be in line with those of the two previous US presidents.

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The primary features of US foreign and security policy in President Trump's first two years were a combination of essential elements from his predecessors, Obama and Bush, but in exaggerated form. Not only have we witnessed the adoption of the Bush administration's strongly unilateral orientation, it was also pursued further, such that the US has left existing central multilateral formats, announced that it would leave others, and been vocal in its criticism of multilateralism in some areas. The Bush administration often acted unilaterally, but not like Trump, who attempts a radical break with all that came before him. A partial withdrawal from the Middle East and Europe was a key concern of Obama's policy; he announced that he would pursue "Nation-Building at Home". Trump's overstated motto, "America first", links seamlessly to Obama's sentiments. What the two presidents have in common is that they were forced to abandon their military and political withdrawals from Europe and the Middle East, and even reverse them, for reasons of Realpolitik.

President Trump's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty on 4 December 2018, and the US government agenda for the next two years as laid out by Secretary of State Pompeo in a speech later the same day, indicate that the US foreign and security policy faces a fundamental paradigm change. While, in theory, Trump is still giving the Russian government a chance to salvage the INF Treaty in a 60-day ultimatum, his Secretary of State has announced nothing less than the radical withdrawal from

the global security architecture whose basic principles have developed since 1945 and 1990. A little later, on 19 December,<sup>1</sup> Trump announced via Twitter that all US forces would be withdrawn from Syria and about half from Afghanistan. It was a complete surprise to European allies and even to his own cabinet. Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, and the US envoy to the global coalition fighting the Islamic State, Brett McGurk, both considered staunch supporters of transatlantic relations, resigned from their offices as a result.

### **The European Security Situation at the Beginning of the Trump Era**

Three events had already shaken the European security architecture and fundamentally changed the determinants of foreign policy action on the part of European states prior to the inauguration of Donald Trump as 45th President of the United States on 20 January 2017. These were as follows:

1. The Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula on 21 March 2014 in violation of international law not only heightened the looming Ukraine crisis, but also dispelled Europeans' illusions that, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe, borders could no longer be changed through violence. The relationship between the NATO member states and Russia has since been characterised by a new symmetrical trial of strength in Central Eastern Europe – the sanction policy against Moscow and Russian hybrid warfare.

2. The rise of IS, which conquered large parts of Iraq and Syria that same year (2014), equally threatened the existence of the Middle East system of states and European countries' internal security. The refugee and migration crisis of 2015 and 2016, greatly exacerbated by the chaos in Iraq and Syria, once again revealed that the EU has very limited foreign and security policy capabilities. Even more serious than this were the cracks appearing in the EU community of values as it was forced to receive, distribute, and deal with the hundreds of thousands of refugees that reached Europe at this stage.
3. That the majority of British citizens voted against remaining in the EU during the Brexit referendum on 23 June 2016, not only plunged the EU into political chaos, it also seriously weakens Europe as a security policy player over the long-term. While it is often postulated that the European process of reaching a joint foreign and security policy would be quicker without the British, who resist integration, it is clear that the EU is a defence policy lightweight without the United Kingdom. This verdict has been underscored by the fact that in the two and a half years since the referendum, it has become clear that France will be unable and Germany unwilling to compensate for the loss of the United Kingdom's contribution to security and defence policy.

Against this background, many European politicians quickly perceived the results of the US presidential election on 8 November 2016 as a kind of turning point in transatlantic relations. In its security policy core, the relationship between the US and Europe has for decades been characterised by the assurance that European NATO members could seek protection from their transatlantic ally if a threat arose or an adversary was attacked. Even when dealing with security policy challenges in their immediate vicinity, such as the Balkan conflicts of the early 1990s and, for decades, problems in North Africa and the Middle East, Europeans have almost always surrendered the initiative to the

US and been content to play a subordinate role to Washington. These framework conditions no longer seem certain since Donald Trump's election – at the very time when Europe is facing more security policy challenges than has been the case since 1989.

### **NATO and the Protection of Europe**

During the 2016 US presidential election campaign, candidate Donald Trump called NATO “obsolete” and fundamentally questioned justification for the organisation's existence. In light of the more recent Russian foreign policy, which most European NATO members perceive as a threat, and numerous global crises, this led to unprecedented levels of irritation and insecurity on this side of the Atlantic. Despite the European Reassurance Initiative introduced by President Obama, it was unclear in 2016 how Trump would behave. Candidate Trump's open expressions of admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin and hints at rapprochement in Russian-American relations exacerbated the loss of confidence in his transatlantic focus.

However, after his inauguration, it quickly became clear that the president's rhetoric often diverges greatly from his actual behaviour. While maintaining his vehement criticism of an unequal burden sharing within the alliance, in a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in April 2017, Trump emphasised that the alliance was not obsolete and enjoyed the full support of the US.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the US president even expanded his country's commitment to Europe by upgrading the European Reassurance Initiative to the European Deterrence Initiative through signing the National Defense Authorization Act of 2017. This Act was an implicit recognition by the US administration of the threats perceived by its European allies with respect to Russia. It completed a shift from mere reassurance to deterrence measures. The focus of the recent US activities in Europe is on

- increased troop presence,
- joint training and exercises,
- infrastructure improvement,
- pre-positioned weapons and equipment, and
- expansion of partner capacities.<sup>3</sup>

The National Defense Authorization Act of June 2017 also calls for expanded US military presence and greater assistance to Ukraine.

### **Trump complains of an unfair burden sharing within NATO while emphasising that the alliance has the full support of the US.**

With a total of 716 billion US dollars, the US defence budget earmarks 82 billion US dollars more than the 2017 budget.<sup>4</sup> The US president considers a large proportion of these expenses to be a significant contribution towards transatlantic cooperation and support for Europe, whose security the US guarantees with its enormous military might. Trump repeatedly insisted that this service must be paid for and primarily alluded to Germany when demanding, “that these very rich countries either pay the United States for its great military protection, or protect themselves”.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, he perpetuated a debate that his predecessors George W. Bush and Barack Obama had engaged in with Europe before him, albeit in a more radical manner.<sup>6</sup> Media reports from January 2019<sup>7</sup> alleging that Trump had seriously considered withdrawing the US from NATO during his first two years, and could only be prevented from doing so by his closest security policy advisors, indicate that this issue is likely to remain a sword of Damocles hanging over transatlantic security cooperation for the remainder of the term.

### **Abandoning Multilateralism: Climate Agreement, Nuclear Deal, and INF Treaty**

Besides the verbal attacks on NATO, the EU, and the United Nations, the actual and threatened termination of international agreements represents a sticking point with a security policy dimension in the transatlantic relationship. With media-savvy staging and a mixture of domestic policy calculation and foreign policy intimidation scenarios, the US president emphasised his dislike for multilateral formats when he announced that his country would withdraw from the Paris Agreement on 1 June 2017, the nuclear agreement with Iran on 8 May 2018, and, conditionally, the INF Treaty on 4 December 2018.

The termination of the climate agreement, reached only one and a half years before, resulted in fierce reactions from states and civil society in Europe and even in the US, including calls for Trump not to completely shut the door on climate protection. Ultimately, the US president has remained true to his hard line so far, justifying his actions by referring to the ineffectiveness of the climate agreement<sup>8</sup> and his duty to protect and strengthen the American economy and finally arguing that the Paris agreements were a vehicle for Chinese economic interests. The result is that Europe feels betrayed by the US withdrawal, while the latter accuses the agreement’s supporters of hypocrisy. Climate policy has thus become a great strain on transatlantic trust and in turn to security policy as well.

The US withdrawal on 8 May 2018 from the nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA), which was reached after a negotiation marathon between Iran and five permanent UN Security Council members as well as Germany, constitutes a further serious strain on the current transatlantic relationship.<sup>9</sup> To date, the American allies Israel and Saudi Arabia, including the US itself, have failed to provide proof that Iran is violating the agreement.<sup>10</sup> Trump’s argument that the deal was not working, therefore refers to the hope, as also







Going astray: The possible withdrawal of the US from NATO is likely to remain a sword of Damocles hanging over transatlantic security cooperation in the coming two years. Source: © Reinhard Krause, Reuters.

cherished by Europeans, that the agreement could be used by the international community as a starting point to cooperate with Iran in other areas of conflict. Especially Tehran's expanded missile programme, which is not covered in the JCPOA, and the expansionary policy pursued by Iran in the Middle East since 2015 with the help of non-state agents of violence<sup>11</sup>, make it clear that no such development has taken place. This made the Iran agreement a "bad deal" according to the US president, and withdrawal therefore only logical. The European approach of adhering to the JCPOA even though it is not perfect, because it represents a hard-fought partial diplomatic success, is diametrically opposed to this line of thinking.

While the European parties to the agreement, including Russia, attempt to salvage the deal

and proceed without the US, Washington has already switched to a hard line towards Tehran, applying political, economic, and military pressure. As a marginal note from a European point of view, it is important to highlight that Trump's approach also fulfilled a central campaign promise, and the president was willing to maintain his Iran policy even against resistance within his own cabinet. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, two supporters of the deal, ultimately found themselves replaced by two outspoken opponents of it in Mike Pompeo and John Bolton.

A further international bombshell was the termination of the 1987 bilateral treaty (the Washington Treaty) on intermediate-range nuclear systems. This treaty bans all land-based

short- and intermediate-range missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. The Obama administration became aware of Russian violations of the treaty as early as 2014. The Putin government is evidently building intermediate-range missiles in contravention of the INF Treaty. These missiles are tracked under the NATO code name SSC-8,<sup>12</sup> and the US government tried in vain to persuade Russia to comply with the treaty. Another factor leading to the treaty's termination is its non-binding nature with respect to China. For some time, the People's Republic has built and placed ballistic DF-26 missiles, also called "Guam killers".<sup>13</sup> These missiles can target Guam, one of the most important US bases in the Pacific, and US aircraft carriers. The INF Treaty prevents the US from developing land-based short- and intermediate-range missiles. Its only remaining option is the Tomahawk cruise missiles, which are both costly and complex.<sup>14</sup> Terminating the INF Treaty is therefore, from the point of view of the US government, the natural consequence of ongoing treaty violations on the part of Russia, of new geopolitical realities in the Pacific region, and of increased Chinese weapon system capabilities. The current US administration's fundamental strategic defence and arms policy agenda was illustrated by the US president's announcement on 18 June 2018 on the formation of the US Space Force as a separate branch of the US military, joining the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard on equal footing, and, on 17 January 2019, of the introduction of an initiative for constructing a missile defence system, some of which will be space-based, indicates the current US administration's fundamental strategic defence and arms policy agenda.

### **Trump's Relationship with Russia**

Probably the most difficult and complex bilateral relationships for the Trump administration are those with Russia and Vladimir Putin, and this is partly due to the domestic policy dimension of this relationship. The accusations of Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential election severely strains the Russian-American

relationship, and the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into potential collusion by the US president has cast a shadow over his term of office. Moreover, Russia's policy in almost all areas of conflict in Europe and the Middle East has long been opposed to US interests. In Syria, Moscow used military means to secure the survival of its traditional Middle East ally, Assad, who the US had been working to topple since 2011. In the conflicts with Ukraine and Georgia, Russia and the US have fundamentally divergent ideas, as testified by Washington's financial and military commitments in the Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Poland.<sup>15</sup>

These regional conflicts strain the important renegotiation of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II (START II), which expires in 2021 and limits the number of nuclear warheads to 1,550 and delivery systems to 700 on each side.<sup>16</sup> There is a danger that START II will be terminated similar to the INF Treaty. A further difficulty in Russian-American relations is hybrid warfare and attempts at covert influence by Russian agencies in Europe. For instance, the US government clearly took the British side in the case of a nerve gas attack on former Russian agent Skripal in Salisbury, England. In sum, despite Trump's verbal overtures at the beginning of his presidency, Trump's term of office marks the lowest point for Russian-American relations since the end of the Cold War.<sup>17</sup>

### **Trump's Middle East and Syria Policy**

The Jerusalem Embassy Act, passed by both houses of Congress back in 1995,<sup>18</sup> prepared the ground for relocating the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The move never took place because President Clinton signed a waiver preventing the implementation, and American Presidents continued to do so for the next 23 years.<sup>19</sup> Despite massive protests, it was President Trump who finally ordered the move<sup>20</sup> on 6 December 2017.<sup>21</sup> A further source of conflict was the closing of the US Consulate General for Palestinian affairs in East Jerusalem and its merging with the new US embassy in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> The decision to move the embassy from

Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognising the latter as Israel's capital, was criticised and rejected by many European countries, including Germany. While the Israeli government welcomed this step as recognition on the part of the US of the right of Israel and the Jewish people to exist that could only be expressed in this form, President Trump's announcement around one year later, on 19 December 2018, that US troops would be withdrawn from neighbouring Syria, sent shock waves through Israel.

### **Trump's announcement that the US would withdraw from Syria sent a shock wave through Israel.**

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In Syria, Trump was at first committed to abandoning the policy of his predecessor, who had initially decided to intervene in the conflict in 2013 by declaring the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime a "red line" for the US government. Only much later did Trump begin to criticise Obama's inconsistency on the "red line" Obama had himself drawn; Trump has gone as far as repeatedly reiterating the ultimatum, most recently in early 2019<sup>23</sup> via his National Security Advisor, John Bolton. In light of the different rhetoric during the election campaign, the first of two big military actions by the Trump administration came as a complete surprise to many observers. On 7 April 2017, US forces carried out a unilateral cruise missile attack on the Syrian air base in Shayrat in the western part of the country, following alleged use of poison gas by the regime. One year later, on 14 April 2018, in reaction to another obvious use of chemical weapons by the regime, there was a more comprehensive attack, in which France and the United Kingdom participated, against Syrian chemical weapons programme facilities. In retrospect, both attacks were punishment for Assad's use of chemical weapons and not intended to fundamentally alter the balance of power in the Syrian conflict.

Regardless of these two military actions, it is important to examine the use of American Special Forces in eastern Syria. These forces were once again expanded under Trump to 3,000, deployed largely in Syria's northeast and along the Iraq border. In terms of deconflicting alone, the presence of these forces on Syrian soil led to ongoing dialogue between Washington and Moscow about the two countries' military activities in Syria; whereby it was possible to counterbalance Russian dominance to some extent. What is more, the presence of US forces in Syria's northeast and east also held Turkish and Iranian interventions in the country in check. The withdrawal of these forces, as initiated in early 2019, means that the US is not only losing central access to information resulting from having troops on the ground, but also one of the few trump cards they have to play in discussions over Syria's future. This explains much of the discontent and perplexity on the part of many European politicians regarding the de facto withdrawal of the US from the Syrian conflict. Scarcely any European government would deny having fundamental interests in Syria: regional stability, the stemming of refugee flows, and the continued containment of terrorist groups. The US withdrawal from Syria gives the European allies a foretaste of what it means to be abandoned in the face of conflicts and adversaries that pose a greater threat to Europe than to the US.

### **Afghanistan and the "War on Terror"**

What is likely one of the most difficult tasks of US foreign policy is successfully ending the Afghanistan mission, which has been ongoing since 2001. As presidential candidate, Trump promised voters a quick withdrawal of troops from the Hindu Kush. He repeatedly demonised the policy of his predecessor, saying that it was a waste of money and resources. Nevertheless, as president, in August 2017 he announced a new strategy for Afghanistan that called for a slight rise in the number of troops there. This strategy essentially intended to greatly strengthen Afghan Special Forces and advance the development of Afghan air power, especially air transport and close air support.

The Afghan Special Forces are to assume the primary burden of combat in the future, supported from the air. Regular army units are to function as security forces and consolidate the success of the Special Forces, while the Afghan police are to return to their actual task of fighting crime. Given the strategic deadlock between the government and the Taliban, the Pentagon linked this approach to the expectation of a positive trend in the course of 2018 and the recovery of five to ten per cent of the territory controlled or contested by the Taliban. This was to revive the peace process and allow negotiations with the Taliban to proceed from a position of strength. In November 2018, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General, Joseph Dunford, admitted that the strategy had not been as successful as hoped.

Trump's announcement on 19 December 2018, that the number of US troops in Afghanistan would be halved within the near future, was met with surprise and concern both among allies and in US security circles alike; despite the fact that no specific order to draw down troops has been issued, as it has in Syria. From a German point of view, the continued civil-military effort focused on Afghanistan's northern provinces is greatly dependent on the American contribution elsewhere in the country. Moreover, the Afghanistan policy is also one of the few security policy areas in which Berlin and Washington have had virtually no differences over the last few years. The continuation of US forces' anti-terror mission, in which there is no German involvement and is separate from NATO's Resolute Support mission, is obviously unquestioned. The future of the stabilising mission in Afghanistan, on the other hand, seems less clear than ever in view of the fact that the US is considering withdrawal. There are many reasons why a European initiative is unlikely without the US.

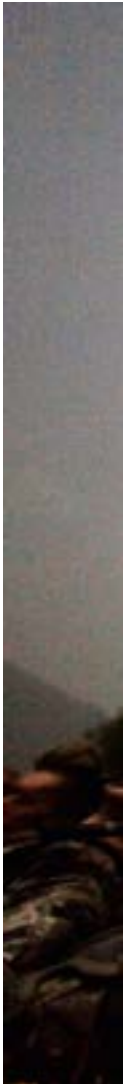
## Conclusion

Trump's rhetorical excesses and escapades while investigations are conducted into his affairs and those of his closest advisors, are a part of the new American reality. Contrary to

all the isolationist noises Trump made during the campaign, America's foreign policy continues to be one that is more focused on global involvement than on isolationist policies, and is strongly unilateral in nature. Whereas the political culture and style as well as the forms of international relations, even with allies, have radically changed, the essential elements of Trump's foreign and security policy tend to be in line with those of the two previous US presidents. The extent to which this might change following the mid-term elections and in view of a possible total US withdrawal from the INF Treaty, as announced by Secretary of State Pompeo, remains to be seen.

The clear positioning of the US Congress and the political actions of the president since early 2017 have greatly contributed to dispelling European concerns about Trump's susceptibility to Russian influence and manipulation. Moreover, the US President has declared himself willing to answer all of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's questions through his attorney, Rudolph Giuliani. How the investigation pans out and which domestic policy consequences result from this, also remain to be seen. Trump continues to maintain that Russia had no influence on the result of the 2016 US presidential election, but admits that Russia did attempt to manipulate that election.<sup>24</sup>

The US withdrawal from the climate agreement, which, at its core, requires signatories to put the interests of the international community before their own, is a first-class reflection of Trump's "America first" attitude. The US government's behaviour with respect to the Iran nuclear agreement and the INF Treaty with Russia follows an entirely different logic. The concern here is America's own perception of threats in connection with the conviction that the country's own strength is all that is needed to bring about acceptable treaty results and ultimately peaceful solutions. The doctrine of "peace through strength" introduced by Trump's first National Security Advisor, Flynn, on 10 January 2017, implied the (conditional) threat or use of military force towards adversaries. In the



case of Russia, this means that the US will meet attempts to change the balance of ballistic missiles and undermine American deterrence by upgrading the American arsenal.

While the overlap in identical political goals, joint solution approaches to international challenges, and uniform strategies in conflict management has definitely shrunk, NATO remains by far the most important common project for transatlantic relations. This is not only because the alliance appears to be the only international

organisation that President Trump considers relatively useful for his country. Germany and the European NATO members have begun to recognise that this US administration takes the issue of even distribution of costs very seriously, and it will not be fobbed off when it comes to contractually agreed alliance obligations.

While European experts squabble about whether a European army and “strategic autonomy” from the US are merely visions and illusions,



Retreat? Trump’s announcement, that the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan would be halved within the near future, was met with worldwide surprise and concern. Source: © Carlos Barria, Reuters.

one fact is clear: At present – and foreseeably for years to come – the United States will remain the only nation capable of and, under certain conditions, willing to effectively protect Germany and its European allies against all conceivable threats. This includes symmetrical, asymmetrical, and hybrid threats in all five warfare dimensions (land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace) in equal measure. The EU will remain unable to guarantee this degree of security for the foreseeable future and has a limited capability of defending Germany and its European allies on its own.

Developing an autonomous European defence capability will be a very long process, even assuming that the necessary political framework conditions can be put in place over the short-term. Currently this process is being hampered by the structural challenges and Europe’s technological deficits, especially in the areas of technical security agency intelligence work and defensive and offensive cyber warfare, and most notably by the attitudes of Germany and the United Kingdom. Brexit strips the EU of the most powerful and willing security policy player on the European continent. Germany has lost its status as the guarantor and backbone of Europe’s conventional defence and is a long way from regaining it. What is more, it must also compensate for the loss of the defence policy capabilities of the United Kingdom.

Germany and its allies should therefore make it clear that recent efforts to achieve “more Europe” in security and defence policy are not aimed against the US, but, on the contrary, seek to distribute the burden within NATO more evenly by strengthening the alliance’s European pillar.

*–translated from German–*

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- 23 Cf. Hewitt, Hugh 2019: The red line in Syria is still there. In fact, it's a darker red., The Denver Post, 6 Jan 2019, in: <https://dpo.st/2HoyJGj> [22 Jan 2019].
- 24 However, Trump's rhetorical excesses and the ongoing investigations against the president are only one part of the new American reality. Despite all Trump's isolationist rhetoric during the election campaign, the new American foreign policy style is more unilateral than isolationist.



[Looking West](#)

# A Transatlantic Relic?

The Future of the WTO and Its Role in the  
Transatlantic Economic Relations

David Gregosz/Stephen Woolcock



The WTO must adapt to the changes in global trade and investment flows – otherwise its role will be diminished in the future. Europe and the US must resolve their differences and put their weight behind urgently needed reform measures. Because the alternative to the WTO-based global trade order is global trade disorder – and that cannot be desirable on either side of the Atlantic.

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### **What Will Become of the Transatlantic Trade Partnership?**

This question, which is significant for both Europe and the US, is not easy to answer, and crystallises itself to a certain extent in an examination of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Decision-makers from politics, business, and society are confronted with a paradox situation: At the political level, the Trump administration's aggressive trade policy has triggered a certain amount of upheaval in the transatlantic trade partnership. Especially the relationship between the US and Germany has suffered greatly. At the economic level, on the other hand, an increase in reciprocal investment and trade flows have meshed Europe and the US to a greater extent than ever before. Europe and the US continue to maintain the most important economic relations in the world. Fundamentally, the two economic areas thus form the basis of a progressive integration of the entire global economy.

It remains unclear what consequences the political tensions will have on the bilateral relationships. Various scenarios are conceivable. At best, the existing disputes can be resolved. The two partners would thus once again find themselves in a close economic alliance, accompanied by a coordinated transatlantic trade policy. In the worst case scenario, the political conflicts could exacerbate existing economic differences to an extreme degree. Such a case could lead to trade sanctions and transatlantic economic boycotts. The geostrategic differences, and the corresponding intransigent economic disputes, might

lead to a *Wagenburg* mentality: “economic power US” against “economic power Europe”.

### **The WTO as a Crystallisation Point of Transatlantic Tensions**

The continuing conflicts concerning the World Trade Organisation indicate that the current state of the transatlantic trade partnership is not particularly good. What is more: The WTO has become a point of crystallisation for the different positions on the two sides of the Atlantic and will therefore be the focus of this article. The institution and the open trading system upon which it is based are experiencing a period of instability. This situation has recently been exacerbated by aggressive, unilateral measures implemented by the current US administration. In response, an alliance of industrialised OECD countries as well as emerging and developing countries met in Ottawa in October 2018 to discuss reforming the WTO, restoring a certain degree of stability, and jointly assuming a leadership role with respect to trade policy.<sup>1</sup>

Despite alarmist statements, it is unlikely that the WTO will “break up”, but if it cannot adapt to the changes in structure of global trade and investment flows, its role will be diminished. The reasons that the WTO is increasingly losing its function as a platform are profound, and stem from issues of WTO policy coordination and the policy challenges facing the governments of WTO countries. The coordination problem is how to deal with the economic shift to Asia and new economic powers. The implicit leadership of the US-OECD club, which has contributed



greatly to the establishment of the existing trade order, is largely outdated with respect to the new powers in the global economy. The challenge for countries' internal relationships consists in reconciling WTO rules – which form the framework for the globalisation of production and investment – with the concerns that exist in each country regarding the loss of control over national policy or regulatory frameworks.

Maintaining an open, rule-based trading system is in the vital interest of all countries. Achieving such a system requires collective leadership on the part of an alliance of industrial and emerging countries within the WTO. The US is currently not exercising a leadership role, and China has so far eschewed any multilateral integration that would limit its industrial and technology policy. Europe has thus assumed an important mediating role. On the



Dealmaker: Trump's strategy, which focusses greatly on his country's own advantage, undermines multi-lateral institutions. Source: © Shannon Stapleton, Reuters.

### How Bad Is It Really?

After years of scornful jokes about the WTO being neither alive nor dead, the Organisation presents a bleak picture today.<sup>2</sup> The immediate crisis was triggered by the US threatening and imposing tariffs in order to extract concessions from other WTO countries. The US administration is obviously following a pattern – it pursued a similar strategy towards its neighbours, Canada and Mexico, in achieving the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the successor to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Here, too, the focus was on questioning trade agreements and demanding a new contractual basis for treaties. This raises the question of whether US positions that are critical of free trade (with respect to the WTO and NAFTA) are really new. And, indeed, they are not. Even though the style and rhetoric of the incumbent US president are unique in their escalation, but criticism of the global trade regime can also be heard from Democratic quarters, which tend to be less supportive of free trade (see Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton), and from many Republicans, who originally argued strongly for liberalising global trade. Factors that led to this change of heart on free trade within the Republican Party certainly include the massive de-industrialisation of the US over the past 20 years, the feeling of belonging to a dysfunctional WTO, and China's skilful manoeuvres within the WTO regime, acting as a purported emerging economy.

one hand, it must influence the US in order to keep an important cornerstone of transatlantic trade policy functional. On the other, it must influence China in order to put an end to free-riding within the WTO regime. In the short term, there can be no doubt that it is necessary to meet the threats to the system with compromise, but a lasting solution requires genuine consensus at the national and international levels.

The example of China in particular shows that the WTO is having trouble keeping pace with new developments in realpolitik. This is illustrated by the fact that existing trade provisions date largely from 1995, if not from the time when the Uruguay Round of Negotiations was concluded and the WTO was established. This

was a time before globalisation had triggered apprehension; before the internet enabled the management of dispersed production plants; before global value chains offered huge competitive advantages; and before China emerged as an important fixed point in a multi-polar global trading system.<sup>3</sup> Of course, experts have long since identified the WTO's difficulties. But so far, no large WTO country has questioned whether the WTO should continue to exist, as the current US administration is doing.

### **What Is Driving the United States?**

The current crisis was triggered by the US imposing tariffs “for reasons of national security” on imports of steel and aluminium from a number of countries, and repeatedly threatening to impose tariffs on automotive imports, too.<sup>4</sup> The US government also imposed a wide range of import tariffs on Chinese products because Beijing is allegedly guilty of failing to protect property rights and engaging in unfair trade practices by subsidising state-owned enterprises. The reference to “national security” in US tariff policy can be considered a calculated affront to the WTO. Article XXI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in fact provides for an exception if national security is threatened; but so far, all WTO members – with the exception of the US in the case of the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 – have refrained from using it as a justification for imposing protective tariffs. If the WTO were to oppose such a measure, the argument could be made that trade provisions endanger national security. If a WTO committee were to express opposition to the US steel and aluminium tariffs, American support for multilateralism would be further weakened. If the WTO were to determine that these tariffs are compatible with GATT Article XXI, the principles and measures supporting the WTO's rule-based system would be fatally undermined.

The second element of the American challenge affects the core of the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism itself. The US has questioned the functionality of the dispute settlement system

and, in particular, blocked the appointment of Appellate Body (AB) members. At the time of writing, only three members of the AB remain, which is the minimum required to process an appeal against a Dispute Settlement Body decision. Two of them will leave the AB in December 2019, rendering it – and thus the WTO's dispute settlement system – no longer operational.

It remains unclear what the mid- to long-term goals of the US government are. If it intends to trigger a crisis in order to force WTO members to find solutions for several long-standing problems, the current destabilisation might be seen as useful.<sup>5</sup> But that is not how it looks at the moment. Rather, the current US administration is drastically accelerating a gradual trend away from multilateralism towards unilateral policy. Trump's strategy, which focusses greatly on his country's own advantage, has inevitably led to countermeasures in the affected countries. As a result, at the beginning of 2019, things seem to be developing a dangerous momentum of their own. This has led a group of WTO countries to seek to create a new form of collective leadership and to attempt to breathe new life into cooperation on trade policy, reacting to several of the points of criticism levelled against the WTO.<sup>6</sup>

### **Effectiveness and Legitimacy**

The WTO's work fundamentally rests on three pillars:

- first, the negotiation of new provisions,
- second, the resolution of conflicts, and
- third, the ongoing organisational work aimed at improving the practical exchange of goods.

For several years, the first pillar of regulation has not been functioning correctly. The Doha Development Agenda (DDA), a round of multilateral trade agreement negotiations initiated in 2001, was the first of these series of discussions to fail since the GATT was founded in 1948. This failure is viewed, especially in OECD countries, as one of the primary reasons that the WTO has been unable to keep pace with globalisation.

The second pillar, dispute settlement, was strengthened at the time of the WTO's founding and has largely proven its value in enforcing existing rules. The dispute settlement system consists of an arbitration process, committees for processing complaints, and the Appellate Body, which ensures that the decisions of the committee are in harmony with the agreements.<sup>7</sup> After the 2008 financial crisis, WTO provisions and their effective enforcement via the dispute settlement procedure were important in stemming protectionist tendencies. However, after 24 years, several aspects of the WTO dispute settlement procedure need revision. Such a revision was discussed back at the Doha Round, but not implemented. One reason for the effectiveness of the WTO dispute settlement procedure is that no member country is allowed to circumvent the committee's decisions. They can be appealed, but once the Appellate Body has spoken, law has fundamentally been given.

### **Emerging countries often perceive WTO provisions as attempts by industrialised countries to exert influence.**

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The ongoing work of the Organisation forms the third pillar of the WTO. It consists of monitoring the application of various treaties. Such monitoring is largely dependent on the goodwill of states and on national transparency. Implementation of and compliance with many WTO treaties requires constant effort. For example, for agreements on regulatory measures, such as those governing product, food, or consumer safety, new national regulations are constantly being introduced. In such cases, trade provisions govern the procedure by which WTO countries can minimise the competition-distorting effects of such new rules. There are reporting obligations for general trade policy developments as part of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) and for specific agreements and issues. These include regional or preferential trade agreements and national subsidies. However,

the effectiveness of this third pillar, especially that of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements, has been impaired by the reporting negligence of some WTO countries. The third pillar also provides for a permanent dialogue, and thus the capability of efficiently solving trade policy problems. Without active participation of the parties to the dispute, however, there can be no progress on cross-border trade disputes. The result is that an important multilateral forum is being undermined, resulting in a vacuum. While many experts see the WTO as an organisation that has fallen behind the requirements of a globalised world economy, others see it as one of the primary sources of unfettered globalisation and all problems it entails. The latter opinion is held by several civil society NGOs that consider WTO regulatory work to be detrimental to the political or regulatory framework. These civil society NGOs also question the legitimacy of the WTO, since they view its decision-making and negotiation processes as being neither democratically legitimised nor transparent. Emerging countries often view efforts to expand WTO provisions as a threat to their political latitude and thus their ability to catch up in the industrialisation process. And this does not even address the fact that they also perceive trade provisions as having been shaped by industrialised nations. This perception has so far been justified, even though the WTO, with its "one member, one vote" system, is more democratic than other international economic institutions. In the face of civil society resistance in individual countries, governments are thus hesitant to take on new obligations. This creates a tension between effectiveness and legitimacy.

### **What Should the Objectives of the WTO Be?**

One reason for the latent trade tensions was the absence of a consensus on the scope of WTO rules. This, too, is not a new debate.<sup>8</sup> As early as the Uruguay Round negotiations, some trade economists argued that it was wrong to overload the WTO with "new issues" such as services and intellectual property rights, not to mention labour and environmental standards. Others argued that trade provisions should reflect the

nature of trade, and that this would require greater coverage of “trade-related” issues. Today, the question is whether trade provisions should apply not only to services, but also to e-commerce, and, if so, what the relationship between regulatory competence at the national or EU level and greater liberalisation should look like. Should, for instance, WTO rules today regulate the role of state-owned enterprises, or should emerging markets be able to use these and other instruments of industrial policy to catch up with other countries? One should keep in mind that most European economies, in the period following 1945, had significant public sectors with large state-owned enterprises, which were then slowly reduced. Since public and private investment are of central importance to the prosperity of global value chains, should there not be a multilateral investment framework, and if so, how should it reconcile investment protection with the right to regulation? In many countries, and within the European Union, there is no broad domestic consensus on these questions. Without a debate on the role of a country’s trade and investment policy, it will remain difficult to achieve progress at the international level.

### **Why Has the WTO Not Kept Pace?**

Besides the lack of an internal consensus on the goals and scope of multilateral trade provisions, the biggest obstacle to WTO progress has probably been the difficulty in distinguishing member countries according to their level of development. One of the things that the US are complaining about is the possibility for countries of granting themselves developing country status within the WTO. Critics say that this allows countries such as China and India, as well as other emerging markets, to circumvent obligations. Those countries are obviously no longer willing to accept rules that have been shaped by OECD countries. The WTO Ministerial Conference of 2003 in Cancún can be considered a turning point in this respect; there, a G20 coalition of developing and emerging countries formed to oppose the joint leadership of the US and the EU. OECD countries, and especially the

US, are no longer willing to tolerate so-called free-riding, especially by system-relevant players such as China. This, along with fundamental differences of interest, has brought about a standstill in multilateral trade rounds.

### **The WTO’s decision-making process is impaired by the fact that veto-capable countries often obstruct negotiations.**

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A second obstacle was the WTO’s fundamentally consensus-oriented decision-making system based on the principle of “one member, one vote”. Although this leads to an integrative, democratic decision-making process, it also gives veto power to many players and, together with the “unity of action” concept, has made things very difficult. Unity of action is the standard according to which negotiations such as the Doha Round must be agreed by all WTO countries. The principle was introduced by developed economies in the Uruguay Round to ensure that less developed WTO members would sign treaties governing intellectual property and services as well as treaties that favoured developing countries. Today, it offers large emerging countries or coalitions the opportunity to obstruct negotiations.

Another reason for the failure of the Doha Round is the fact that preferential trade agreements (PTAs) offered a promising alternative. There is a clear link between the growing number of PTAs and the stagnation of multilateralism, but causality is more difficult to determine. Until the end of the 1990s, PTAs were the “building blocks” for a more comprehensive international treaty. But after about 2000, there was a growing tendency towards “competitive liberalisation” strategies that viewed PTAs as an alternative. PTAs have allowed trade provisions to expand to new areas outside WTO jurisdiction, thus updating trade and investment rules. They reflect the deepening of global value chains, since the treaties concluded by OECD countries

encompass provisions governing investment, e-commerce, more services, and often cumulation of rules of origin. What was good about the PTAs concluded in the 2000s and, to a certain extent, those concluded today is that there is a tendency to implement already existing international standards. These are standards developed in the OECD, specifically in the World Customs Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, or in multilateral environmental treaties governing such issues as procurement. Many of the provisions go beyond WTO standards in procedural terms. In other words, they incorporate existing WTO rules and provide procedures for their more effective implementation.

## A greater degree of member flexibility is central to a successful WTO reform.

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### Towards More Flexibility

The conclusion of the Doha Round probably came closest to implementation in 2008. Subsequently, efforts were made to implement various partial steps to support developing countries, but they also proved unfeasible. The discussion then turned to the introduction of more flexible approaches. The conclusion of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which came into force in 2017, shows that some progress can be made.<sup>9</sup> This multilateral treaty is remarkable in that it tackles the differentiation problem by making compliance with agreed-upon multilateral provisions conditional upon countries' ability to implement the customs procedures necessary to facilitate the flow of trade.<sup>10</sup> Developed WTO countries commit themselves to providing technical and financial support, as they do for other agreements. However, the TFA also provides for a more objective assessment of countries' ability to implement the provisions and could therefore be viewed as a model for dealing with the issue of differentiation. Poorly developed economies without implementation ability are given

more time and assistance; emerging countries or countries such as China that have sufficient capacity should be able to commit to compliance with and implementation of the provisions.

Another alternative approach was the return to plurilateralism. Specific proposals for plurilateral negotiations have been made, primarily by the US, to overcome the impasse of multilateral negotiations.<sup>11</sup> The argument now, as it was in the GATT system of the 1960s to the 1990s, is that like-minded countries can certainly make progress on particular issues. Once multilateral agreements are in place, other WTO members will join, following the "clubs within a club" principle. Further plurilateral initiatives include the negotiations on the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), which even gave rise to the question of exclusive membership. At the WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in November 2017, further plurilateral measures were initiated or relaunched: trade-related electronic transfer, national regulation of services, environmental goods, and investment facilitation measures. A key question for plurilateral initiatives is whether they should be expanded to include non-participating WTO countries as part of the most-favoured-nation (MFN) principle. The 1996 Information Technology Agreement included the MFN and was able to do so because it achieved a critical mass of members. It will certainly be more difficult today to conclude exclusive plurilateral agreements among like-minded countries, the provisions of which can then be subsequently expanded – especially since this can scarcely contribute to a sustainable rule-based order. It is in any case doubtful whether emerging economies will enter into agreements that have been negotiated by a group of industrialised countries without them. Such a buy-in is only likely in two cases: when the plurilateral trade volume is so large that it creates positive externalities for non-members, or when there is a broad consensus on the provisions. In the first case, without China and India, it will be difficult to achieve the required critical mass to generate positive externalities. In the second case, consensus on standards will be difficult to achieve if the development of said



More participation: Central to the reform of the WTO would be a broader distribution of leadership responsibility, with a greater role for emerging countries. [Source: © Edgar Su, Reuters.](#)

standards is tied to questions of market access. In other words, the question is whether plurilateral agreements serve the goal of strengthening the international trading system, or the market access interests of certain WTO countries. So far, the debate on plurilateral approaches appears to have been dominated by the latter consideration.

### **Rethinking Leadership**

Insufficient internal and external leadership is another reason given for the current WTO paralysis. When the WTO was founded, there was joint leadership by the US and the EU, supported by a number of other OECD countries. Fundamentally, the two transatlantic players had and have common interests in the area of trade policy: Firstly, a rule-based system of

trade that includes agreements on anti-dumping measures, investment and competition law, public procurement, and de-bureaucratization of customs procedures is in the economic and political interests of both the US and Europe. Secondly, both economic powers are interested in incrementally achieving free access to the Chinese market and in consistently sanctioning Beijing's rule infractions within the WTO regime (to prevent imitators and to rein in China). So far, Europeans have been too lenient on the issues of intellectual property theft, industrial subsidies, and technology transfer rules imposed by Beijing on its trading partners. Thirdly, it should be in the interest of both Americans and Europeans for the Western alliance to remain strong, since more is at stake than considerations of economic policy. However, recent US actions have done a disservice to joint leadership. Conflicts



of interest between Europe and the US on questions of trade policy are therefore on the agenda, and it is not surprising that the American withdrawal from multilateral trade policy will necessarily lead to new alliances for Europe. It must also be remembered that the EU is not a monolithic bloc. Unlike the US, it must not only reach a compromise with its respective trading partners, but also strike a balance among the interests of EU members, including individual countries which benefit greatly from exports. Intraregional trade also plays a very important role within the EU. It is also striking that Europe regularly links its trade policy measures to important socio-political goals, such as environmental, health, and consumer protection, while the US does not think much of such linkage.

Irrespective of the US-EU tandem, the large emerging countries are demanding more influence and participation in decision-making within the rule-based system, commensurate with their greater trade and economic power. It is clear that progress will require the cooperative efforts of both of these groups. One solution would be a broader distribution of leadership responsibility within the WTO, with a greater role for emerging countries. Potentially, this could be achieved by the creation of an informal or even formal governance body, composed of the G20 trading group and one representative from each of the negotiating alliances, such as the Africa Group. This body could act as an interface between members and the General Council, and would be responsible for promoting systemic goals and building consensus on negotiation points. The provision of greater funding for the WTO Secretariat to allow it a more active role – whether by promoting dialogue and consensus building, or proactively making proposals – would also help to make the work of the WTO more strategic and less dependent on member leadership.<sup>12</sup> This is already happening behind the scenes and would be especially important in a situation in which an alliance of WTO countries attempts to assume a leadership role. The disadvantage of establishing a form of joint leadership is that, by definition, it cannot involve everyone.

## Concluding Remarks

The US is a central political and economic partner for Germany – despite the political tensions of recent months. Berlin and Washington must remain in dialogue with one another. This applies not only to the relationship between the two countries, but also to cooperation within the WTO, and to their dealings with China. In the short term, it will certainly be necessary for calm heads to attempt to relax current tensions between the US and China, and to lift the blockade on the selection of members to the Appellate Body. This was the goal of the group of WTO countries that met in Ottawa in October 2018. The means of achieving such a goal is through continuing an inclusive dialogue on reforms. Finally, in the debate about the WTO, one should not lose sight of the fact that the greatest obstacles to trade policy progress lie at the national level. The WTO is and will remain a member-driven institution. And the US and Europe have its course and direction in their hands.

*–translated from German–*

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- 10 To emphasise the above point on the development of standards: The WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement is based to a great degree on codes and standards developed in the World Customs Organisation.
- 11 See Bacchus, James 2018: *Was Buenos Aires the Beginning of the End or the End of the Beginning? The Future of the World Trade Organization*, Cato Institute, Policy Analysis 841, 8 May 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2BwSgPJ> [15 Feb 2019]. This article shows that there is a view in the US that considers plurilateralism to have already been the path to take at the founding of the WTO.
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Source: © Cathal McNaughton, Reuters.

[Looking West](#)

# Between Innovation and Regulation

The Necessity of Transatlantic Cooperation  
in the Digital Sphere

Sebastian Weise

The digital revolution is already increasingly impacting business and our daily lives, and fuels an accelerating process of transformation in Western societies. Due to its power to drive innovation, many people believe that shaping this digital transformation is not only an urgent endeavour, but perhaps the endeavour of our time. The digital revolution is a global process that does not stop at national borders, so configuring its future requires cross-border responses. This article looks at the role that the transatlantic alliance can and should play in this endeavour.

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### **Ensuring the Economic Success of the Digital Revolution Requires Transatlantic Responses**

If we look at the figures on transatlantic trade, the digital economy, and data flows we see that the US and Europe are closely interwoven markets and data spheres that drive each other's economic growth. As the world's two largest economic areas, Europe and the US are each other's main trading partners and today the majority of global data flows between the two.<sup>1</sup> It is precisely this free flow of data that enables the current volume of transatlantic trade in goods and services as well as boosting economic growth in general.<sup>2</sup> Transatlantic trade is particularly strong in the digital economy, eclipsing trade relations with other continents.<sup>3</sup> This is important because the digital economy is a key element of economic growth and a driver of innovation, something that is vital for Europe's economic clout in the future.<sup>4</sup> The digital economy is also an area where the US has a trade surplus with Europe.<sup>5</sup> If we look at the key drivers of digital innovation in Europe, it is clear that US technology companies in particular have set the pace in recent years. Companies, such as Google (Alphabet), Apple, Facebook and Amazon (GAFA for short), have had a significant impact on Europe's digital revolution<sup>6</sup> and are set to continue playing this role.<sup>7</sup> The US is, therefore, a key point of reference for Europe, not just *per se*, but as an economic power and driver of digital innovation. As the home of the digital pioneers, the US is an important partner

and these tech companies have a special role to play in shaping the economy of tomorrow (the digital platform economy). For the US, these companies are of vital importance as drivers of innovation, while Europe is a priority as a market and data pool.

### **Why Transatlantic Responses Are Needed to Ensure the Digital Revolution Benefits Society**

While the end of the Cold War led some to claims that we had reached the end of history, today's Western model of liberal democracy finds itself under pressure once again. It is being challenged by a global tide of authoritarianism with China and Russia at its helm. In this clash of world orders, technology has a particularly important role to play. Authoritarian states seek to utilise digital advances to reflect their own values and worldview and to use these changing dynamics to build up their own power.

Looking back over the last twenty years, China has undergone a remarkable development to become an economic powerhouse.<sup>8</sup> It has recently overtaken Germany as the world's leading exporter and edged past the US in volume of world trade. Some estimates now suggest that China could become the world's largest economy in quantitative terms by the mid-2020s.<sup>9</sup> Going beyond that, China strives to catch up with the West in a number of key future technologies,<sup>10</sup> and its long-term aim is to be a global leader for innovation.<sup>11</sup> China is

not only investing huge sums in research and development but also using a number of illegitimate trade practices<sup>12</sup> in order to help it gain a global leadership role and continue its ascent as a major economic power.

In addition, authoritarian states, above all China and Russia, are harnessing digital advances to reflect their authoritarian values and worldview:<sup>13</sup> Internet shutdowns, massive censorship of websites, persecution/identification of political opponents via social media, the use of the latest technologies for state surveillance (face recognition), and the introduction of a social scoring system. All these are examples of how authoritarian states are using technological advances to the detriment of their citizens' civil liberties, thereby consolidating their authoritarian structures at a relatively low cost.<sup>14</sup>

### **Authoritarian regimes are using new digital technologies as part of their strategic efforts to undermine the security of Western states and their social cohesion.**

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China is not only using new technology for authoritarian purposes at home, but also exporting digital authoritarianism to other countries. This was clearly illustrated by the export of surveillance technologies to Ecuador and Venezuela via the One Road One Belt project.<sup>15</sup> In addition to exporting technology, Russia and China are pushing for the establishment of an alternative digital world order that will further strengthen its digital authoritarianism. Rather than the liberal idea of a free and open internet managed by a multi-stakeholder model, authoritarian states advocate that the internet should be governed by a state-centric approach. This would not only make governments the central actors but, in terms of information security, they would be in a position to censor the internet within their own national borders, monitor

users without judicial control, and promote the fragmentation of today's World Wide Web into national virtual spheres.<sup>16</sup> A plethora of cases of e-espionage, cyber-attacks, fake news campaigns and targeted attempts to influence elections via social media, coupled with the publication of compromising data, also demonstrate how authoritarian regimes are using new digital technologies as part of their strategic efforts to undermine the security of Western states and their social cohesion.

In order for liberal democracies to continue flourishing in the face of this challenge, Europe and the US need to shape digital progress within their borders to match their principles and demonstrate the superiority of the liberal world order in the competition between social systems to lead the world in innovation. At the global level, Europe and the US need to leverage technology to continue building a liberal, democratic framework for digital innovation, based on shared values and interests and with a view to curbing digital authoritarianism.

### **The Origins of the Idea of Europe's Technological / Digital Sovereignty**

In the past, Europe and the US had very similar interests and values with regard to digital policy. Supported by a generally optimistic "internet zeitgeist", Europe and the US worked within the framework of the Internet Freedom Agenda to seize new opportunities presented by the World Wide Web, both at home and abroad. They believed that a free and open internet would promote economic growth and innovation, improve the resilience of liberal societies and democracy itself, fuel global development, and advance the spread of human rights and democracy.<sup>17</sup> Many proponents of this optimistic perspective on technology viewed the Arab Spring as an important sign of the emancipatory and disruptive potential of new technology and the need to promote it based on liberal values. However, a turning point came in 2013 when Edward Snowden dropped his bombshell. This led the public to realise that technology also had its downside, and the "internet zeitgeist" lost

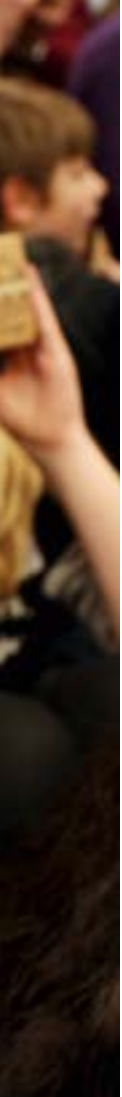


Restricted view: US companies such as Google have a significant impact on the digital space in Europe.  
Source: © Peter Power, Reuters.

something of its appeal. The revelations about the practices of the intelligence services also made it clear that there were serious differences between the transatlantic partners. On this side of the Atlantic, there were now increased calls for Europe to have greater digital sovereignty<sup>18</sup> and more autonomy in shaping technological progress.<sup>19</sup> This desire for greater digital sovereignty has become more entrenched over recent years and is now regarded to be imperative for Europe's actions.<sup>20</sup> Is Europe currently facing the dual challenge of defending its economic prosperity, its values, and hence its role as a major player in shaping the digital future against the dominance of the US and China?<sup>21</sup>

### What Are the Main Areas of Conflict Today?

When we look at the main areas of today's transatlantic conflict, we see that they have two main causes. Firstly, the different approaches to digital innovation in Europe and the US, and secondly a number of scandals surrounding globally operating US technology companies, which have served to increase political and public awareness of the pros and cons of digital progress. Moving on from Edward Snowden's revelations about the controversial practices of the US intelligence services, the focus has turned to data protection, liability issues related to content published on social media, taxation,



fake news campaigns and the influencing of elections. The reasons behind the USA's pronounced scepticism towards Europe's digital policy lay in the enactment of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the repeal of the Safe Harbour Agreement by the European Court of Justice, the Network Enforcement Act, the debate about a digital tax, proposals to dismantle digital platforms; the large fines imposed on US tech companies; and the involvement of China's Huawei company in the expansion of the 5G network in Germany.<sup>22</sup> A review of these differences shows that they occur in the following areas of digital policy:

- Safeguarding citizens' rights from state surveillance;
- Protecting the personal data of users of digital platforms;
- Taxation of new digital and above all data-based business models;
- Ensuring fair economic competition in the age of the platform economy.

There are some clear differences between European and US cyber security policies. However, they tend to be divergent approaches and differing priorities rather than extreme differences.<sup>23</sup>

## The differences in European and US cyber security policies mostly constitute divergent approaches and differing priorities.

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### How Extreme Are the Differences?

A Closer examination of the specific areas reveals that the current differences are not the result of fundamentally different worldviews and do not harbour any glaring conflicts of interest. The differences can be traced back to varying normative emphases, diverging regulatory approaches and different starting points for digital progress. Consequently, and in view of the

need for transatlantic cooperation, these are differences that can and should be addressed within the framework of existing discussion forums on digital policy. With its more explorative and technology-friendly attitude, the US focuses on economic growth and national security interests and, under Donald Trump, is pursuing a more free-market approach regarding forms of co- and self-regulation as preferred to government regulation. Since most of the world's tech giants are US corporations, it is natural that, in terms of the economy and innovation, the US has a greater interest in protecting their economic freedom and associated role as major drivers of new technology. This is offset by a European approach that is more focused on protecting privacy, citizens' rights and the future viability of the European economy. To do this, it relies more strongly on legislation to regulate businesses, including mechanisms for imposing financial sanctions. Nevertheless, we should not fall into the trap of seeing these two approaches as being diametrically opposed. Of course, Europe also regards economic growth and the entrepreneurial freedom, which is needed to achieve this, as vital for ensuring the continuation of the digital revolution in the right direction. However, the continent is also aware of the need to find a balance between regulation and openness to innovation.<sup>24</sup> The fact that German, European and US interests overlap, despite some discrepancies in the area of digital security, is illustrated by the cooperation between European security authorities and the US intelligence services. The increasingly intense discussion about the role of China's Huawei Group in the development of the 5G network in Germany also shows that similar security risks are being identified on both sides of the Atlantic and that there is a close exchange of views on shared security risks.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, a close examination of the Presidential Executive Order on Strengthening the Cybersecurity of Federal Networks and Critical Infrastructure of 2017 and the USA's latest National Cyber Strategy reveals that both these documents stress the importance of international cooperation in the field of cyber security and the need to continue working on an international normative framework.<sup>26</sup>

## **In This Context, What Do We Need to Consider in the Coming Months and Years?**

With particular reference to calls for Europe to have more digital sovereignty, it is important to bear in mind that, despite all the differences that exist, the US is still a necessary and important partner that shares a very similar foundation of values with Europe, as opposed to China's model of digital authoritarianism. This implies that Germany and Europe, together with the US, should aim to advance digital innovation particularly in those areas where the need for transatlantic cooperation converges with shared interests. In light of the challenge to the political order posed by this digital authoritarianism, it is important to jointly address those risks that threaten the freedom, economic prosperity and political stability of the West.<sup>27</sup> However, over the coming months and years it must be borne in mind that a particularly high risk of conflict is associated with European regulations on digital policy that specifically target US tech giants, and it may collide with the US government's legitimate interest in protecting these companies. This does not mean that Europe should abandon its standards, but recognising this potential for conflict should lead to greater awareness of the need for dialogue and transparency. This should be accompanied by calls for an intensive transatlantic debate on how to shape the digital future.

### **Where Is Rapprochement Already Occurring? Why Is Cooperation Not Just Necessary but Possible?**

A look into the recent past shows that, even in controversial areas, rapprochement is not just necessary, but possible. After the European Court of Justice's ruling on 6 November 2015 that the existing Safe Harbour Agreement was invalid, the US and EU managed to draft and ratify a new agreement in the space of just a few months. The new EU-US Privacy Shield Agreement came into force on 1 August 2016. This illustrates how it is possible to reconcile the different approaches to data protection in a relatively short period of time. A set of instruments was also created to

harmonise the different jurisdictions in favour of the free flow of data but without the need to bring them completely into line. Even though the US and EU had very different ideas about data protection, the economic interests involved provided a strong incentive to quickly come to an agreement. Turning to the present, there are







Ubiquitous: The digital pervasion of our daily lives will continue to increase in the future.

Source: © Kim Kyung-Hoon, Reuters.

more signs that change is possible, even in the area of data protection. For example, it should be noted that, despite all the criticism of the EU's GDPR, more and more major US companies are now adopting the regulations for the whole of their global operations (e.g. Microsoft and IBM) or have announced their intention to do so

(Facebook, Apple). At the state level, California has also enacted legislation similar to the GDPR. Of late, there have also been increasing signs that, as a result of several scandals surrounding Facebook and Europe's GDPR, the current US government is considering strengthening data protection at the national level.

It is also possible to perceive a shift in the West's relations with China regarding digital policy. This is because the US has been taking a much more confrontational line since Donald Trump took office, leading to fundamental changes to the Obama-era approach to US-China cyber diplomacy.<sup>28</sup> But Europe has also begun to take more decisive action against the outflow of strategically relevant key technologies and innovations, as well as against infringements of intellectual property rights.<sup>29</sup>

Internet governance is another field where cooperation is both possible and desirable. In this area, the US, Europe and other democratic partners have been resisting authoritarian efforts to create an alternative model for the virtual sphere for some years. The West and its partners uphold the liberal idea of a free and open internet in various formats.<sup>30</sup> While Europe currently aims at promoting the development of standards in cyber space,<sup>31</sup> the area of cyber diplomacy in general and internet governance in particular has been largely ignored in the US. Nevertheless, a closer look shows that the U.S. Department of State is still pursuing the Internet Freedom Agenda and the topic is also on the radar of the US Senate.<sup>32</sup> Major US companies have also become actively involved in this area over recent years because they see the dangers posed by increased fragmentation. Businesses could suffer if there is no harmonisation of standards in this respect.<sup>33</sup> A useful starting point in this area would be to continue pushing for closer ties between this issue and the area of cyber security, as there appears to be a window of opportunity for further developments under the current US administration.

### **A Final Word of Caution**

When we look at how digital innovation is being shaped, it is clear that working with the US may not always be easy, but it is an important partner for Germany and Europe after all. If there is to be talk of Europe increasingly asserting itself against the US, then it is important to bear in mind their shared values and interests in the face of the resolve displayed by their

authoritarian challengers. In Europe we should focus less on fixed regulatory boundaries with the US and look at more important issues, such as how the US was able to take on the role of digital pioneer, and what lessons Germany and Europe can and must draw from this in order to shape their own digital future.

*-translated from German-*

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- 4 Cf. Hamilton / Quinlan 2018, n.1, p. 24.
- 5 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 24 f.
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- 13 Cf. i. a. Burgers, Tobias / Robinson, David R. S. 2018: Networked Authoritarianism is on the Rise, in: *Sicherheit und Frieden* 34: 4, pp. 248–252; cf. Mitchell, Anna / Diamond, Larry 2018: China’s Surveillance State Should Scare Everyone, *The Atlantic*, 2 Feb 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2DZOhMy> [21 Jan 2019]; cf. *The Economist* 2018: China has turned Xinjiang into a police state like no other, *The Economist*, 31 May 2018, in: <https://econ.st/2JkTBy5> [21 Jan 2019].
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- 15 Cf. i. a. Weber, Valentin 2018: The Rise of China’s Security-Industrial Complex, Blog Post Digital and Cyberspace Policy Program of the Council on Foreign Relations, 17 July 2018, in: <https://on.cfr.org/2FF1Eo0> [21 Jan 2019]; cf. Romaniuk, Scott N. / Burgers, Tobias 2018: How China’s AI Technology Exports Are Seeding Surveillance Societies Globally, *The Diplomat*, 18 Oct 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2TYOLIJ> [14 Feb 2019].

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- 25 Cf. i. a. Heide, Dana/Scheuer, Stephan 2019: Sorge um Datensicherheit – Berlin erwägt, Huawei beim Netzausbau auszusperren, *Handelsblatt*, 17 Jan 2019, in: <https://bit.ly/2HhVc88> [21 Jan 2019]; cf. Böhm, Markus 2018: USA warnen vor Chinas Einfluss auf 5G-Netz, *Spiegel Online*, 29 Nov 2018, in: <http://spon.de/afmZV> [14 Feb 2019].
- 26 Cf. The White House 2017: Presidential Executive Order on Strengthening the Cybersecurity of Federal Networks and Critical Infrastructure, 11 May 2017, in: <https://bit.ly/2tg9vmu> [21 Jan 2019]; cf. The White House 2018: National Cybersecurity Strategy, p. 20.
- 27 A useful source of potential partners is the Freedom Online Coalition, an alliance of 30 governments that have come together to advocate for a free and open internet. See Freedom Online Coalition, in: <https://freedomonlinecoalition.com> [14 Feb 2019].
- 28 Cf. i. a. Miles, Tom 2018: U.S. and China clash over 'technology transfer' at WTO, *Reuters*, 28 May 2018, in: <https://reut.rs/2FG0kAZ> [21 Jan 2019]; cf. Fidler, David P. 2018: U.S. Cyber Diplomacy Requires More than an Office, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 26 Jul 2017, in: <https://on.cfr.org/2FG0SY1> [21 Jan 2019].
- 29 In 2018, for example, the EU, in agreement with the US, opened a case against China at the WTO for unfair practices in the outflow of technology; in 2018, as in the past, it made repeated and specific complaints about Chinese infringements of intellectual property rights; and at the end of 2018, on the initiative of France, Germany and Italy, it also drafted legislation on reviewing foreign direct investment, with a view to stemming the outflow of important digital key technologies and innovations to China.
- 30 For an initial overview of European and US commitments to the free and open internet and the central principles in various strategy documents see e.g. Morgus, Robert/Sherman, Justin 2018: The Idealized Internet vs. Internet Realities (Version 1.0), pp. 10–13.

- 31 In order to further develop the normative framework in cyberspace, Europe is actively engaging in this field, i. a. within the G7 / G8, in the context of the GGE (Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security), as well as in the “Paris Call for Trust and Stability”, which Emmanuel Macron presented on this year’s Internet Governance Forum, and with supporting the “Contract for the web” initiative.
- 32 Cf. Segal, Adam 2018: The Internet Freedom Agenda: Not Dead, but Not Exactly Thriving Either, Council on Foreign Relations Digital and Cyberspace Policy Program BlogPost, 21 May 2018, in: <https://on.cfr.org/2ISw7QR> [14 Feb 2019].
- 33 The fact that US companies are also active in this area can be seen in Microsoft’s initiatives in the area of cyber security and in the fact that US companies have signed the Paris Call for Trust and Stability.



[Looking West](#)

# America Alone

Transatlantic Challenges with Regard to  
Climate Change and Energy Policy

Céline-Agathe Caro

The Trump administration's announcement in June 2017 that it was pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement was one of its first specific decisions that dealt a blow to transatlantic relations. For Donald Trump, preventing climate change is often synonymous with job cuts and over-regulation. The US president's anti-environment policy has a negative impact upon transatlantic relations, in terms of foreign policy, and possibly also as regards economic matters. The good news is that despite the attitude of the US administration, there are still many stakeholders in the US who are committed to the goals of the Paris Agreement, so avenues remain open for international cooperation.

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### **Different Objectives**

Europe and America are currently drifting apart with regard to their climate and environmental policy goals. While European leaders agree with the scientific consensus that today's global warming is man-made and should be taken seriously, many members of the US administration – not least Donald Trump himself – are climate sceptics. In an interview in October 2018 with the US station CBS, the US president somewhat softened his climate denier rhetoric, declaring: "I don't think [climate change] is a hoax". During the broadcast, however, he once again expressed his doubts about whether climate change is man-made, saying that climate change "could very well go back". Accordingly, the current US administration takes the view that pursuing ambitious climate change goals is too expensive, puts jobs at risk and damages the US economy. It is in the process of diluting or reversing the Obama administration's efforts in this area.

### *Pittsburgh, Not Paris*

At the transatlantic level, the gap between the American and European perspectives became particularly clear on 1 June 2017, when the US president announced that he would keep his campaign promise and pull the US out of the Paris Agreement. Trump's comment, that he had been elected to represent the citizens of

Pittsburgh, not Paris, sparked outrage in Europe. This was particularly the case in France, especially since President Macron had made enormous diplomatic efforts in the run-up to the announcement to avoid such an outcome.

The US exit process will not be completed until 4 November 2020 at the earliest (one day after the next US presidential elections!) due to the long notice periods that are locked in to the treaty. However, on 1 June 2017 Donald Trump made it clear that the US government would immediately suspend all measures to implement the climate agreement, along with US contributions to the Green Climate Fund, the funding mechanism set up by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The fact, however, is that environmental concerns have been caught up in the partisan conflicts of America's increasingly polarised political climate. In 2016, for instance, many Republicans campaigned against the Democrats' environmental regulations and President Obama's strategy and objectives during negotiations on the Paris Climate Agreement. Donald Trump won the presidential election with an extremely critical position of the Obama administration's climate policy. Now that he is in the White House, he continues to ignore the alarming reports of scientists, even when they are produced by US federal authorities, such as the

National Climate Assessment (NCA, last issue November 2018). His strategy has the support of many voters, Republican politicians, conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, and parts of industry (particularly the oil and gas sector). It consists of playing down the scale of climate change and saving businesses and consumers from expensive environmental and climate policy commitments.

Unlike Europe, the current US administration does not see “green” growth as a serious strategy for creating new jobs, encouraging investment and strengthening US global competitiveness. Instead, the Trump administration sees the relationship between growth and environmental protection as a zero-sum game. According to such a strategy, environmental standards should be lowered in order to boost the US economy. Moreover, US contributions to international organisations such as the UN – which fund international projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the lives of local people – are seen as generous gifts. Washington desires to invest this money domestically, where, according to the Trump administration, it will really benefit Americans.

### *Strategic Risks*

It follows naturally from the above that Europe and the US hold widely differing views on the security policy dimension of climate change and environmental issues. The European Union (EU) perceives the consequences of global warming as an acute threat. The EU’s Global Strategy of June 2016 sets out a course for the Union’s foreign and security policy. Alongside terrorism, hybrid threats and energy insecurity, it identifies climate change as a current and future threat to the people of Europe.

But, on the other side of the Atlantic, climate change is no longer considered to be one of the top strategic risks for US interests. Indeed, the words “climate change” are not even mentioned in the latest National Security Strategy published by the Trump administration in December 2017. Climate policy is only referred to in

the context of energy issues: “Climate policies will continue to shape the global energy system. US leadership is indispensable to countering an anti-growth energy agenda that is detrimental to US economic and energy security interests. Given future global energy demand, much of the developing world will require fossil fuels, as well as other forms of energy, to power their economies and lift their people out of poverty”. The US Department of Defense is currently concerned about climate-related risks in the Arctic, but primarily from the perspective of US military interests, not due to their environmental consequences. The fact that the US administration approved initial offshore drilling off the coast of Alaska on 24 October 2018 also underlines how its priority in the Arctic is energy production rather than combatting climate change.

### *Industry-Friendly Agenda*

Against this backdrop, the Trump administration has taken a number of steps since January 2017 to “unleash” the US coal, oil, and gas industries, and roll back existing environment and climate change regulations. The extension of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, for instance, has been approved. Two national monuments in Utah (Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante) have been reduced in size in order to open them up to mining and fracking. A total of 27 national parks are to be reviewed. In April 2017, the president also signed an executive order approving offshore drilling for oil and gas in federal waters. The justification claimed that the strict safety requirements imposed by the Obama administration following the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 are an unnecessary burden for the industry. In addition, the US government terminated NASA’s Carbon Monitoring System in May 2018. This programme made it possible to monitor whether the signatory states to the Paris Agreement were meeting their commitments and reducing their carbon emissions.

The US government is also taking other steps that could have far-reaching consequences. On 2 August 2018, it presented a plan to weaken the





Trump digs coal: In the last two years, the Trump administration has taken a number of steps to “unleash” the US coal, oil, and gas industries. Source: © Leah Millis, Reuters.

Obama administration’s strict vehicle emission standards. States that impose higher standards, such as California, will no longer be allowed to set their own rules. The administration stresses that the aim is to make vehicles cheaper so that American families can once again afford to buy new, safe cars.

In addition, on 21 August 2018, the administration announced that it would be easing emissions rules for coal-fired power plants. The Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) Rule will replace the Clean Power Plan (CPP) of 2015. This is one of the key environmental achievements of the Obama era, and the cornerstone of the previous administration’s plans to meet the targets set by the Paris Agreement. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),

the new strategy aims to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants by up to 1.5 per cent by 2030 (compared to 2005). Obama’s CPP – which has not yet entered into force due to legal challenges – aimed to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 32 per cent over the same period. Donald Trump hopes that his initiative will end the “war on coal” in the US and save jobs in the coal industry.

### Challenges for Transatlantic Relations

The US administration’s denial of climate policy challenges or its fatalistic approach towards climate change is causing frustration in Europe. The Trump administration’s decisions in this area have a political impact on transatlantic relations and may lead to economic consequences.

The EU is extremely concerned that Donald Trump's announcement of the US's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement sends the wrong signal to the world and jeopardises the results of many years of hard diplomatic effort. In September 2018, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) concluded that these concerns are justified. Criticism of the Paris Agreement has been voiced by leading politicians as far afield as Ontario in Canada, Australia and Brazil over recent months, some of it directly inspired by the American example.

The difficult negotiations at the UN Climate Change Conference in Bangkok in September 2018 also revealed how solidarity among transatlantic partners is no longer a given. It was particularly problematic that the Americans refused to grant financial aid to developing countries to implement the climate agreement, despite the fact that this had been promised for a long time. This placed additional pressure on the other countries of the Global North, above all the EU.

**As far as climate change is concerned, the US no longer feels any sense of community with other nations.**

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In this respect, the US administration's gradual disengagement from climate policy at home and abroad confirms the fears voiced by US experts in the summer of 2017: As far as climate change is concerned, the US no longer feels any sense of community with other nations. In June 2017 Max Boot of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) wrote that Donald Trump was sending a provocative message of political unilateralism to Europeans with his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. Security experts at the RAND Corporation and the Atlantic Council have called the US withdrawal a strategic mistake that will

make it more difficult for the United States to work with its allies on many critical issues of foreign policy and national security.

What is certain, however, is that Washington's climate policy decisions represented the first concrete setback for transatlantic relations in the Trump era. These relations were then put under further strain by the transfer of the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, the review of the Iran deal (JCPOA), the North Korea crisis, punitive tariffs on steel and aluminium, and, last but not least, the issue of European defence spending. These are all specific issues that require specific responses from both sides of the Atlantic. However, the US's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement has by no means helped to strengthen confidence and willingness to cooperate between the US administration and European governments in all these areas of foreign and security policy.

*The Next Stage – Tariffs on Carbon Emissions?*

The US administration's current climate policy could also have a negative impact on future US-EU trade relations. American think tanks regularly moot the idea that foreign governments could react to the US administration's environmental policy with retaliatory measures. The aim of such a measure would be to prevent the United States from gaining a competitive advantage by ditching climate targets. Thus, the US's trading partners – not least the EU states – could introduce balancing mechanisms, possibly in the form of punitive tariffs. David Livingston of the Atlantic Council says there is a risk of "green protectionism". For CSIS experts, non-compliance with the rules of the Paris Agreement could lead to a situation in which environmentally friendly countries turn against environmentally hostile countries using foreign trade instruments. For example, delegates at the UN climate summit, held in Katowice in December 2018 (COP24), discussed whether countries that failed to comply with the Paris Agreement should be excluded from international carbon emissions trading. Such a development at the transatlantic level would be a desirable outcome

neither for the US, nor for its transatlantic partners. It would be particularly awkward for Germany in the wake of the diesel scandal.

In addition, the reduction of public subsidies for research, innovation, and patents in the field of clean energy could lead to a competitive disadvantage for the US energy industry as compared to international competitors. According to Richard Morningstar of the Atlantic Council, the withdrawal from the climate agreement will mean the US is left behind by China and Europe in the area of climate research and new technologies. For example, some observers think the EU will soon take the lead on a satellite system to monitor global carbon emissions. This could lead to further tensions between the US and Europe with regard to climate research and innovation.

### **Potential for Cooperation between Europe and the US**

However, this gloomy view of the transatlantic situation is not the whole picture. Despite the recent decisions taken by the US administration, the end of an active climate and environmental policy in the US is not in sight. Americans and Europeans may, thus, continue to work towards common goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The glass can be considered half full for the following reasons:

#### *The Trump Agenda Is Not Yet a Reality*

Dramatic announcements alone do not constitute policy. US experts believe that many of the initiatives on Donald Trump's environmental and energy agenda are ineffective or difficult to implement. This applies, among other points, to the revival of the coal industry. In January 2017, experts from the Breakthrough Institute stressed in *Foreign Affairs* that cheap natural gas, particularly as a result of the "shale gas revolution", is killing off the US mining industry. This trend is set to continue, with or without the Clean Power Plan. Coal is no longer competitive in the US. According to the CSIS, natural gas and renewable energies are the fastest

growing energy sources. According to the World Resource Institute, solar and wind industries alone are creating jobs twelve times faster than the rest of the US economy. These economic trends – which have nothing to do with strict environmental regulations – have led to the closure of more than 200 coal-fired power plants since 2010. Energy experts are united in their belief that this trend will continue over the years to come, and will automatically lead to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the coal sector.

In addition, many of the deregulation measures announced by the Trump administration are currently facing legal challenges, delaying or potentially even halting their implementation. For example, on 9 August 2018, an American federal court of appeals ordered a ban on Chlorpyrifos after the EPA attempted to enforce the continued use of this pesticide in agriculture (Chlorpyrifos is linked to neurological and other developmental problems in children). In July 2017, another federal appeals court prevented the EPA from suspending an Obama-era law limiting methane emissions from new oil and gas wells. Back in spring 2017, the US Senate also rejected deregulation measures regarding methane emissions, and funding cuts to clean energy research. Legal challenges are already underway against the US government's latest initiatives on carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles and coal-fired power plants, and on how to handle methane leaks from wells. It is, therefore, currently still uncertain whether these policies will actually be implemented in the long run. Experts believe these court cases could take years to resolve.

Rulings made by the US Supreme Court mean that the US administration is bound to adhere to the climate policy goals set out in the Clean Air Act. Legal experts have made it clear that the Trump administration cannot simply repeal existing air quality laws without proposing other climate protection rules. In general, US courts have the power to at least temporarily halt executive decisions if they consider them to be illegal. For example, the construction of

the Keystone XL pipeline could be delayed by months or even abandoned after a federal judge in Montana once again blocked the project, on 8 November 2018.

### *Americans Are Greener than Their Government*

The Trump administration could score political points beyond its core electorate if it were to adopt an active environmental policy. A study by Yale University in August 2018 showed that 70 per cent of Americans believe climate change is happening, and 57 per cent believe that global warming is man-made. 61 per cent of people surveyed said they were concerned about global warming. The survey revealed a broad consensus on the question of whether global warming will harm future generations, with 70 per cent of US citizens believing this to be the case. 85 per cent of respondents agreed that funding should be provided for research into renewable energy sources, and 77 per cent supported a general regulation of carbon emissions. In addition, 68 per cent of respondents believed that companies in the fossil fuels industry should pay a carbon tax. And finally, according to this survey, 70 per cent of Americans think that protecting the environment is more important than economic growth.

The majority of people in the United States are also keen to be involved in the international fight against global warming. Despite the US's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, 81 per cent of respondents to a July 2018 Stanford University survey believe the US should try to reduce its greenhouse gases in order to meet its targets. In general, surveys conducted over recent years have shown increasing support amongst the US population for global action on climate protection, according to experts from the Brookings Institution.

### *The Private Sector Supports Clean Technologies*

In the spring of 2017, many major corporations such as Walmart, Google and Unilever, along with energy giants such as BP, Shell, Exxon Mobile and General Electric, spoke out in favour

of the US remaining in the Paris Agreement. Many experts have pointed out that, despite the US administration's current course, the energy industry in particular is standing by its low-carbon investments and continuing to advocate for renewable resources.

There are also economic incentives for this: analysts at Brookings stress that clean energy technologies, such as solar plants, are now in a better position to compete with fossil fuels thanks to innovative new technology and mass production. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in 2016, more than half of all global energy investment went into clean energy. The University of Texas has also calculated that natural gas and wind energy are now the cheapest sources of additional energy in most US states. According to Brookings, more than half of the US's fifty states have already decoupled their GDP from increases in harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Consequently, increased growth and employment will not lead to higher emissions. This implies that even if the US government fails to act, economic and technological developments in the US economy could help to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions.

## **The majority of innovations in clean energy and energy efficiency are linked to initiatives by individual US states.**

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### *The Rebellion of US States and Cities*

In addition to the private sector, many US states and individual cities provide hope that the Paris Agreement will still be implemented in the US. This is because many energy regulations are set at state and city level. The current initiatives of the Trump administration to redistribute certain decision-making powers in this area in order to gain more influence have met with little success. It should therefore be difficult for the federal government in Washington to block



regional and local authorities from pursuing an active climate policy in the coming years. These states and cities are potential partners for Europe in the international effort to combat global warming.

Experts such as William W. Buzbee, Professor of Law at Georgetown University, stress that the majority of the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and innovations in clean energy and energy efficiency are linked to initiatives undertaken by individual US states. Their leadership role should become even stronger in the coming years, as the announcement of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement triggered

a storm of protest across America and boosted the motivation of local actors. Many states and cities – mainly Democrat, but also several Republican – have responded to the direction being taken by the US administration with new initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

For example, the governors of several states came together to form the U.S. Climate Alliance in June 2017. Today, 16 US states, plus Puerto Rico, hundreds of cities, and almost 2,000 companies are involved in this initiative. Together they represent 40 per cent of the US population and an economic output of nine trillion US dollars. They have particularly ambitious plans in



Devastations: Time and again, the US experiences extreme weather events that are connected to global warming.  
Source: © Carlo Allegri, Reuters.

the area of solar energy, energy efficiency, carbon storage and zero-emission vehicles. At the UN Climate Change Conference held in Bonn in November 2017 (COP23), the U.S. Climate Alliance also pledged to work with Canada and Mexico, in order to ramp up its efforts to achieve an ambitious climate agenda in North America. In September 2018, the Governor of California also organised a Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco with the support of the United Nations and others. This summit brought together state and non-state actors from the US and around the world. Four billion dollars were raised to finance projects to combat global warming over the next five years.

### **Tackling climate change and protecting the environment may not be a priority for the current US administration, but it brings many opportunities for the future.**

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US cities are also currently working together in order to counteract the climate policy decisions of the Trump administration. For example, the Mayors National Climate Action Agenda (Climate Mayors for short) has attracted strong support since June 2017. The network was founded in 2014 to support cities in implementing the Paris Agreement. It had 61 members before Trump's announcement of the US withdrawal. Today it represents over 400 cities, which together account for 70 million Americans – around 20 per cent of the US population. From Seattle to Miami, Minneapolis to Dallas and New York to Los Angeles, most of the country's major cities are represented. In addition to local activities and networking within the US, the members of the association are also keen to work with international partners: "We will build and strengthen relationships around the world to protect the planet from devastating climate risks."

### **Conclusion**

Tackling climate change and protecting the environment may not be a priority for the current US administration, but it is a promising field for the future. Some positive aspects should here be highlighted: the competitiveness of clean energy technologies; the support of a majority of the population and a large part of the private sector; the commitment of many US states and cities; and, last but not least, the limits of the executive power. These points being considered, most experts agree that the United States will be unable to achieve the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement without government support.

Taken overall, the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the industry-friendly agenda of the Trump administration have led to political tensions in the transatlantic relationship. These tensions go far beyond environmental policy and have contributed to the fact that the US and Europe are currently drifting apart on many issues of foreign and security policy. New challenges in the areas of trade and innovation may also arise. This is particularly likely if the US administration decides to abandon its long-term targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

For Europe, the best way forward on climate change is not to give up on the US, but to focus more strongly on working with local stakeholders and private companies. There are many opportunities to do so via numerous international platforms in conjunction with the United Nations, as well as by means of initiatives such as, for instance, the Global Climate Action Summit held in San Francisco in September 2018. In this transatlantic context it is also vital that European countries take a leading role in all international bodies that are involved in tackling climate change: the UN, G7, G20, and the COP. Finally, Europe should pursue a long-term strategy with regards to the US. American investors currently show little interest in environmentally harmful technologies and seem to be speculating that future US administrations will return to lower-emission strategies. Therefore, Europe should not rule out the prospect of better

times ahead for transatlantic intergovernmental cooperation on climate change and the environment. A first small step in this direction was taken in December 2018. The Trump administration participated in the UN Climate Change Conference (COP24) right to the end, despite voicing loud criticism of the Paris Agreement, clear support for the further promotion of fossil fuels, and major differences of opinion relating to the results of the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). US diplomats have also been engaged in background negotiations to help draft the regulations for the implementation of the Paris Agreement – the main challenge tackled at COP24. Washington made a key contribution to achieving better transparency rules on greenhouse gas emissions that apply to all signatory states. This discreet, constructive cooperation on the part of the US government is a positive sign for further multilateral engagement on climate issues and, not least, for transatlantic intergovernmental cooperation.

*-translated from German-*

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[Looking West](#)

# Denier of the Liberal World Order?

Trump's Unilateralism and Its Implications

[Andrea E. Ostheimer](#)



With Trump's entry into the White House and the US's gradual withdrawal from the multilateral context of the United Nations, the zero-sum game in international relations seems to have become acceptable again. This entails an increased threat of violent conflicts breaking out. The value-based world order is eroding and the US's retreat into foreign, security, and development policies geared purely to national interests is finding its imitators.

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## Introduction

In the past, there have already been regular phases in US foreign policy where the US administration's involvement in multilateral organisations and thematic fields can be described as cautious or ambivalent. Illustrations of this include the Bush administration's withdrawal from the Rome Statute, which had previously been signed by President Clinton, and the US's refusal to join the International Criminal Court or contribute to its funding. President Obama was publicly committed to multilateralism and initiated multilateral fora, such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum. But even during his term, there were doubts in some quarters about whether US policy truly had a multilateral orientation.<sup>1</sup> With the election of President Trump, however, it became clear from the outset that US foreign policy would in future be guided by national interests and the "America first" paradigm. However, it was only possible to a limited extent to predict the extent of the impact of such a policy upon the world order, the scale of the instability it unleashed, and the challenges posed to established structures and standards. Particularly during the first few months of his presidency, when key posts were being filled at a snail's pace, there was still hope that President Trump would focus primarily on domestic issues and would leave foreign policy to key players in his administration. However, the first 24 months of his term have seen the termination of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the withdrawal

from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, the unilateral termination of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, and harsh criticism of NATO partners – all of which demonstrate that the president's foreign policy is guided purely by national interests and geared towards fulfilling his campaign promises in the short term. US policy is now guided by a cost-benefit approach whose impulses come primarily from the president's inner circle. The high turnover of staff on his foreign and security team is one illustration of this. The US's political positioning within the United Nations – an organisation that is the embodiment of multilateralism – is another: seen for instance through US withdrawal from both the UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO, as well as its cessation of support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The common ground between the US and its transatlantic partners is shrinking. The question remains, in which areas and multilateral initiatives it will still be possible to work together in the future, and to what extent Germany and Europe will be able to compensate for the withdrawal of the US. At present, nationalist and populist governments are already preventing Europe from acting together to solve global problems, as in the case of migration management. As a defender of democracy and human rights and a guarantor of multilateralism, Europe now has to look for new partners and, above all, put its money where its mouth is.

## Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration

The imitator-effect of Trump's policies is problematic. At a time when populist governments within the EU are also hoping for short-term political success, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the EU to present itself as a united bloc in a multilateral context.

The first example of this has already emerged in the context of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. This compact is the first intergovernmental agreement negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations to take a comprehensive approach to the many and varied dimensions of international migration management. The document as such is not legally binding, but, like other multilateral initiatives, it has a symbolic value that underlines the fact that current problems, due to their global dimension and complexity, can only be solved in a multinational context and through joint solidarity. The Global Compact on Migration addresses the challenges of migration for countries of origin, transit, and destination, while still emphasising the concepts of state sovereignty, shared responsibility, non-discrimination, and respect for human rights.<sup>2</sup> In December 2017, the US withdrew from the agreement just a few months after the start of negotiations, arguing that such an agreement would undermine national sovereignty and border protection, as well as challenge migration legislation.<sup>3</sup>

If the largest immigration country in the world (around 46.6 million of its 327.16 inhabitants were not born in the US) rejects an agreement with such a global character, repercussions are inevitable. Just one week after the UN General Assembly agreed on a final version of the compact, Hungary announced that it would not sign the document that was presented to the signatory states at the Intergovernmental Conference in Marrakech, in December 2018. The Hungarian Foreign Minister stated that the compact was contrary to common sense and endangered the restoration of European security.<sup>4</sup>

The right-wing populist FPÖ that forms part of Austria's coalition government rejected the compact on grounds that it also guaranteed the protection of migrants' human rights. For Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, the agreement does not adequately distinguish between legal and illegal migration.<sup>5</sup> Such arguments can easily be refuted in a written exegesis, but they are joining rank of Trump's line of argument.

## The Global Compact on Migration has caused deep division in Europe.

In the voting debate held in the UN General Assembly on 19 December 2018, many countries justified their support for the agreement by referring to the need for international cooperation in this area, and for a multilateralist attitude. However, Europe proved to be very divided, with Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joining Israel and the US to expressly vote against the agreement. Some EU member states, such as Bulgaria, Italy, and Latvia abstained from voting, while others remained completely absent from the vote in the General Assembly. In Belgium, support for the agreement led to a political crisis and the withdrawal of coalition partner N-VA from the government.

At present, Europe's differences are nowhere more pronounced than on the topic of how it should adequately respond to the complex issue of migration. The instrumentalisation of questions of national identity and state sovereignty, along with their positioning and weighting in a multilateral context, are often the actual causes that hinder the emergence of a strong, united Europe, and impede a guarantor of a multilateral world order to step forward. Instead of reaffirming the European Union's multilateralist foundations, Romania abstained from voting on the Global Compact on Migration in the General Assembly on 19 December, saying: "[...] in the context of a variety of views among European

Union member States and as a future President of the European Union Council, Romania considers it important to maintain a balanced approach.”<sup>6</sup>

### **United Nations Human Rights Council**

70 years after US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt paved the way for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Trump administration withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council in June 2018. It justified this step by citing the council’s bias against Israel, and its failure to condemn human rights abuses as a result of its composition.<sup>7</sup> The Human Rights Council has repeatedly been criticised for need of reform by the US in the past, but there was no majority in favour of this at the UN General Assembly. Although the criticism of the UN Human Rights Council is justified, and the autocratic regimes represented there often ensure that their own violations are not addressed, the Council is nonetheless the only global body for discussing human rights violations. If the Trump administration thought that the US’s withdrawal from the Council would improve the situation, then it has done a disservice to the work of protecting human rights. The vacuum created by the absence of a global stakeholder and advocate of democracy and human rights has now primarily been filled by non-democratic actors. Iceland succeeded the US in the UN Human Rights Council, but it hardly has the geopolitical weight to fill its shoes. Members such as Russia and China will now be able to use the vacuum which has arisen to further their own interests. China in particular has developed a new confidence under the presidency of Xi Jinping. In the past, it mainly concerned itself with blocking criticism of its own human rights violations and backing states with a similarly poor record. Yet, today, the Chinese government is primarily attempting to influence the interpretation of international norms and accountability mechanisms. These include universal periodic reviews (UPR), along with civil society participation mechanisms, and their independent monitoring. It is noticeable that there has been a return to the orthodox interpretation of national sovereignty and

non-interference at the expense of human rights and good governance.<sup>8</sup> Maintaining the previous set of standards would have required the US to stay in the game with its strong voice. EU member states, such as Germany and the UK, have expressed their regret about the US’s withdrawal. However, the EU will not be in a position to fill the vacuum, as the extent of China’s influence over EU member states such as Hungary and Greece – and their voting behaviour – is already becoming clear at the European level. In June 2017, Greece, which has benefited from Chinese investment in the port of Piraeus to the tune of 51 million US dollars, blocked the submission of an EU declaration to the UN Human Rights Council that would have condemned, inter alia, the actions of Xi Jinping’s government against opposition movements and civil society organisations.<sup>9</sup> The EU is not a member of the UN as such, so it has no legal power to act, but the international community nevertheless regards it as a key pillar in the protection of human rights. Within the framework of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the EU took up the cause of coherently advocating respect for human rights. The EU has long financed the cost of running the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as well as that of concrete projects (7.4 million euros in 2016–2017) by means of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).<sup>10</sup> If the cohesion of the European Union is now increasingly being challenged in the area of human rights, then its political influence and ability to be recognised as a norm-setting actor in this area will also dwindle.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Prime Example of a Multilateral Development System**

Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals it contains represent a prime example of a multilateral development system with universal aspirations. The goals and monitoring mechanisms apply to all states, regardless of their individual level of development. The 17 development goals ensure that only a comprehensive approach covering all sectors

(peace and security, development, environment, humanitarian aid) can lead to success. In addition, Agenda 2030 can no longer be a purely governmental undertaking; achieving its goals also requires mobilising the resources of both the private sector and civil society.

## **The 17 Sustainable Development Goals provide a framework for international cooperation and set out goals for the EU member states.**

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UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) Resolution 72/279 paved the way for the reform process of the UN development system and its repositioning in the context of Agenda 2030. For Germany and the EU, the SDGs not only provide a framework for international development cooperation, but they also set out goals for the EU member states.

But can the SDGs survive in a world where the Trump administration is renouncing multilateralism and promoting a policy that is not just “America first” but “America only”?

The SDGs have not yet been targeted by the presidential Twitter attacks. The US administration’s current stance on the matter can best be described as one of indifference. Interestingly, it is precisely these problem areas that brought Trump to the presidency that the SDGs are trying to address: growing social inequality, with sections of society feeling they have been marginalised and left behind. The SDG’s leitmotif “leaving no one behind” and goals such as Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8) and Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9) are perfectly in line with what Trump promised his voters. However, it will be difficult to politically market the SDGs under a label of multilateralism in the current climate in the US. So far, the US has made only limited progress towards achieving the goals. In the SDG Index

2017,<sup>11</sup> the US ranked 30<sup>th</sup> among the 35 OECD countries with the highest income levels. This is mainly due to the fact that although the US is an economic powerhouse, it still has pronounced differences based on income, gender, race, and education. The government provides few incentives for the economy to operate in a more sustainable fashion. However, the private sector





MAGA: Under the slogan "Make America Great Again" Trump operates a policy of "America Only".  
Source: © Chris Bergin, Reuters.

is increasingly recognising the opportunities offered by a sustainable economy. According to a study by the Business & Sustainable Development Commission, achieving the SDGs on agriculture and nutrition, urban development, and health and energy could create new markets worth twelve trillion US dollars.<sup>12</sup> Although the US government has shown little interest in the

SDGs to date, new partners could primarily be found in the private sector and American civil society.

Some of Trump's criticism of the inefficiencies of the multilateral development system and its largely fragmented and project-based approach is comprehensible. The various UN

development agencies run 1,400 offices around the world so far. These will now be merged within the framework of the reforms set in motion by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. A new system of Resident Coordinators at the country level will, it is hoped, achieve improved coordination and complementarity in the UN development system. The need for reform has been recognised, but the restructuring process launched at the end of 2018 will require time and, above all, the support of member states. The involvement of the private sector and a greater propensity for thinking outside the box are required in order to improve the effectiveness of development cooperation.

Irrespective of the financial support required for the UN development system, the consequences of reduced US funding for development cooperation and its political reorientation are already having a serious impact.

The announcement of the cessation of full support for UNRWA, 25 per cent of whose budget was financed by the US (around 350 million US dollars per year),<sup>13</sup> has already prompted solidarity among EU member states. At a meeting at the end of September 2018, Germany increased its UNRWA contribution and, together with the EU, Sweden, Japan, Jordan, and Turkey, sought further donor support. In the long term, however, the donor community will be unable to compensate for the withdrawal of the US from development cooperation, and this will have a lasting impact on achieving the SDGs.

Currently, projects in the Middle East are particularly affected. At the end of August, in addition to the suspension of UNRWA support, a further 200 million US dollars, intended for development projects in the West Bank and Gaza, were withheld. The US also cancelled the 230 million US dollars that had already been approved by Congress to help stabilise Syria. The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) current budget for bilateral programmes is 16.8 billion US dollars.<sup>14</sup> Under the Obama administration it stood at 25.6 billion US dollars.<sup>15</sup>

According to the New York Times, a total of three billion US dollars will be cut from the development budget in the current fiscal year.<sup>16</sup>

In his speech to the UN General Assembly, it became clear that, for Trump, development assistance has a transactional character, and that the interests of the US must take priority: "The United States is the world's largest giver in the world, by far, of foreign aid. But few give anything to us. We will examine [...] whether the countries who receive our dollars and our protection also have our interests at heart."<sup>17</sup>

### **Peace and Security in a Multilateral Context**

For the international community, UN Peacekeeping missions are an important multilateral instrument for stabilising states and minimising violence in increasingly complex, hybrid conflicts. These missions are, however, unable to resolve the underlying conflicts themselves. This must be done through political negotiations with all parties to the conflict, including those who benefit from it. President Trump had already expressed his opinion on the United Nations during the 2016 election campaign: "When do you see the United Nations solving problems? They don't. They cause problems."<sup>18</sup>

### **Cuts in US contributions to peace missions should motivate other countries to step up.**

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It was, therefore, hardly surprising that, upon taking office, President Trump demanded an annual reduction in the US contribution to peace missions of one billion US dollars (equivalent to 45 per cent). Until then, the US had provided more than 28 per cent of the total budget for UN peace missions. For 2018/2019, UN Secretary-General Guterres had to slash the budget for peace missions from 7.9 billion to 6.8 billion US dollars, but at least he could count on an American contribution of 25 per cent.

When President Trump addressed the General Assembly in 2018, he expressed his hope that US cuts would motivate other countries “to step up, get involved, and also share in this very large burden”. However, this seems an unrealistic objective. Of the 51 Americans in peace missions, only eight are not UN personnel (five police officers, three military observers).<sup>19</sup> States such as Ethiopia, Rwanda, Bangladesh, and India are the largest troop contributors and also suffer the highest number of casualties in UN operations.

A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office to Congress reveals that to the US, the costs of UN peacekeeping activities are far lower than those of comparable unilateral operations.<sup>20</sup>

The Trump administration’s insistence that other countries should contribute to peace and security, and particularly to their own security, calls into question the principle of collective security in the case of NATO. In the case of UN peace missions, it allows China to move into the emerging gap.

Meanwhile, China has increased its contribution to the financing of peacekeeping operations to 10.25 per cent and pledged one billion US dollars a year for the next five years. China has trained more than 8,000 soldiers of its People’s Liberation Army to serve in UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>21</sup> With 2,517 soldiers already deployed, China currently ranks among the ten largest providers of UN troops. China’s increased commitment to peacekeeping will certainly have to be taken into account when filling senior positions within the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations in the near future. When it comes to defining mandates for peace missions, China and Russia are already calling for the abolition of peace mission positions dedicated to the protection of human rights. During the budget negotiations held in June 2018, Russia demanded cuts of 50 per cent in this area. In the past, China has simply tried to prevent the creation of new positions, but now it is pursuing the same course as Russia. Given the changing nature of peace missions in complex and asymmetrical conflicts,

with mandates to protect the civilian population, this course represents a deep cut that is detrimental to the objective.

In recent years, Germany has significantly increased both its voluntary contributions and its involvement in peacekeeping. At present, 589 Germans are deployed in UN peacekeeping missions.<sup>22</sup> However, this still lags behind expectations, which will only intensify from January 2019, when Germany takes its non-permanent seat on the Security Council. Currently, the Bundestag has a mandate to support the UN mission in Mali with up to 1,100 soldiers. However, UN statistics from October 2018 reveal that only 436 soldiers (including UN personnel and police officers) are currently involved in the mission. It is important to have a local presence in order to be able to participate effectively in UN processes, and also to assess the form of the mandate. China recognised this and is making the most of the leeway provided both by the US withdrawal and by Europe’s restrained positioning in the area of peace and security.

## Conclusion

When Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change were adopted in 2015, multilateral regimes emerged whose function and success were based on the establishment of a normative framework and associated reporting mechanisms. They were based on nation states committing themselves to the goals, and on governments and societies taking responsibility for their actions. They were also based on a global consensus that the challenges faced by humankind can only be addressed collectively and that isolated actions by individual countries tend to be counterproductive.<sup>23</sup>

Trump and his administration may deny this, but they have not disproved it. With Trump’s entry into the White House and the US’s gradual withdrawal from the multilateral context of the United Nations, the zero-sum game in international relations seems to have become acceptable again. This entails an increased threat of violent conflicts breaking out.

The value-based world order created after the Second World War is eroding and the US's retreat into foreign, security, and development policies geared purely to national interests is finding its imitators. In the process, facts become secondary and discourse is dominated by truncated arguments that are often taken out of context but that appeal to emotions. In value-based policy areas that were regarded as irreversible, especially after the end of the Cold War, the US's withdrawal has left a vacuum that is quickly being filled by autocratic regimes with their own interpretations of sovereignty, participation, and non-interference. In the search for new partners and like-minded associates, Germany and those EU member states that still uphold the EU's compendium of values will have to detach themselves from a purely inter-governmental approach. It is particularly important to involve representatives of civil society and the private sector more closely in the dialogue and new partners need to be identified worldwide. He who pays calls the shots – at the moment it is mainly Europe that is paying the price and compensates for the absence of the US in many areas of multilateral cooperation. However, it often seems to lack the will and the concepts for shaping, and it remains reactive in its political responses.

*–translated from German–*

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