



MULTILATERAL UNILATERALISM

Europe's Second Chance
... on America's Terms



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Joel J. Sokolsky



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Table of contents

3	About the authors
10	At a glance
12	Introduction
13	Allies are discretionary
20	The Trump legacy
25	Back to the future: Biden's unilateral multilateralism redux
30	The economics of alliances
34	Complex interdependence
37	Nord Stream 2: A case study in transatlantic relations
40	The exploitation hypothesis revisited
42	Present at re-creation
46	Canada: A Euro-Atlantic player
55	Conclusion: It Is still America's NATO
62	Endnotes

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We assembled here today are issuing a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital and in every hall of power. From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward, it's going to be only America first. America first. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs will be made to benefit American workers and American families.

*President **Donald Trump**'s Inaugural Address,
January 20, 2017*

<https://globalnews.ca/news/3194820/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-and-transcript/>

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There's no longer a bright line between foreign and domestic policy. Every action we take in our conduct abroad, we must take with American working families in mind. Advancing a foreign policy for the middle class demands urgent focus on our domestic [...] economic renewal.

*President Joe Biden's address to the State Department,
February 4, 2021*

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

At a glance

- **The history of American foreign policy, including that of the United States and NATO**, provides evidence that alliances are not an end in itself – they are a discretionary means to U.S. ends. For the United States multilateralism has never been inconsistent with adherence to unilateralism that is at the core of American foreign and defence policy.
- **The Trump legacy has revealed** the glaring dichotomy of the 21st century liberal international order: the real liberal internationalist system as opposed to conceptions of the international system that are purely aspirational. European allies hoping for a return to a romanticized American internationalism will be disappointed
- **President Joe Biden's return to international coalitions** is consistent with maintaining the U.S. alliance system, particularly its transatlantic partners – a foreign policy that is broadly supported by the American public. However, that means maintaining alliances under US leadership and on American terms.
- **The economics of U.S. strategic partnerships** has taken center stage in the debate over the value of such alliances, as policymakers in Washington take aim at America's burden-sharing inequity. If American foreign policy is, as President Biden has declared, to serve the interest of the US middle class, multilateralism must be made to work more in America's favour.
- **The U.S. is leading a reluctant Europe** to reconceive its Area of Responsibility – effectively forcing its transatlantic partners to assume the full spectrum of responsibilities for the provision of security, stability and safety. At the same time, Washington wants

Europe to contribute to America's new security priorities in the Indo-Pacific.

- **Recent uncertainty over the future of Euro-Atlantic security** has threatened to call into question the whole basis for Canadian defence policy and Canada's ability to assert its interests by leveraging NATO as its most important multilateral security arrangement. Should the Biden administration prove unable to reassert US leadership in NATO while securing European followership, then bilateral defence ties with the United States, thus far largely insulated from transatlantic turmoil, may well become more important for Canada.

Introduction

With the reunification of Germany in 1990, the world had given the German people a second chance to return to the fold. Thus opined the great German-American historian Fritz Stern on the fate of the community of Euro-Atlantic nations. Three decades later, America's European allies have the fortuitous opportunity to return the favour: to President Biden. But are they prepared to do so? On Washington's old terms that characterized the transatlantic relationships of the Cold War and post-Cold War era? The Biden administration's sincere commitment to repair old alliances notwithstanding, it is actually America that is giving Europe a second chance.

President Trump was maligned for abandoning America's traditional approach to its alliances, brazenly putting 'America First'. But was this isolationism, or just unilateralism? The basic premise of study is that this nuance between these two concepts holds the key to unlocking the transatlantic relationship: past, present and especially future. Trump's approach was widely misconstrued as isolationist in tenor. But America has never been isolationist (at least not since the late 19th century). Rather, a legacy of unilateralism is the bedrock principle that upholds the American foreign policy tradition. This epiphany is consequential.

Allies are discretionary

Over recent decades the allies had grown used to a benign U.S. commitment to global stability through multilateralism. But the United States will not allow this network of arrangements to significantly constrain its exercise of unilateral power – especially when it is deemed necessary to protect American interests.

The famous words from George Washington's Farewell Address reverberate still: "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliance with any portion of the foreign world." The inaugural pledge of Thomas Jefferson equally unequivocal: "Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations-entangling alliances with none." The traditional United States conception of security was premised on the conviction that the country could best be protected if it had little to do politically and militarily with European powers, a position often accompanied by a plenitude of moral posturing and condemnation of European values and norms, as reflected during the 1930s in one senator's imprecation: "To hell with Europe and the rest of those nations."¹

In the wake of the Second World War, America did change its approach to alliances, especially in Europe. And yet, as Joshua Shifrinson has argued, for all its endurance, the post-World War II American commitment to Europe has exhibited "contradictory impulses when it came to NATO."² In seeking to project American power and influence in Europe and "gain legitimacy for U.S. ambitions, policy planners have seen NATO as a useful vehicle for organizing Europe in ways conducive to broader American interests."³ In fact, Stephen Saideman posits NATO as the very reason why the U.S. enjoys greater influence in Europe than in any other region in the world.⁴ Yet throughout the Cold War, the US was divided over its commitment to NATO. The US did not want the USSR

to dominate Europe. Still, it was never entirely clear what risks the US was prepared to take to keep the Russians out. This uncertainty was in fact built in to the NATO Treaty's famous Article V: "Often presented as imposing a Three Musketeers-esque 'all for one, one for all' pledge – obliged the United States (and each member state) to render only 'such action as it deems necessary' to protect the North Atlantic area.⁵ In principle, the United States could well have decided that no action on its part was required however grave the crisis."⁶

From time to time, American law makers remind European allies of just how tenuous support for the Alliance could be in Washington. In 1984, a group of senators led by Sam Nunn, the Georgia Democrat, proposed withdrawing substantial U.S. forces from NATO on an annual basis if European members of the alliance did not increase their military budgets. A bipartisan congressional panel in 1988 bluntly concluded,

"our allies are not sufficiently aware of the strong political pressure in this country to reduce our defense commitments to our allies unless they are willing to shoulder more of the burden. This view was shared by the Congress. Therefore, the panel stated in the strongest possible terms that Europeans had better be prepared to defend their own territory without a large-scale U.S. ground commitment, because that commitment cannot be guaranteed forever."⁷

Yet, with the end of the Cold War the United States seized the "unipolar moment" and came to champion the transformation of the Alliance into a broad globally oriented collective defence organization and its expansion right up to the borders of the now very much weakened Russia. America capitalized on NATO to advance an agenda of engagement and enlargement in Europe, spreading democracy and expanding market economies, all of which served American interests. At the same time, the "U.S. Senate agreed to ratify NATO enlargement only after receiving assurances that an expanded NATO would be a net gain for U.S. security and would not impose any new burdens on the U.S. military."⁸ The interventions in the Balkans, followed by the War on Terrorism, and especially the campaign in Afghanistan did take NATO

out of area under American leadership. But the Alliance's members split over the US attack on Iraq in 2003, indicating some underlying fissures resulting from the George W. Bush administration's allegedly excessive unilateralism. These fissures foreshadowed fault lines running through American public opinion to be laid bare by the election of Donald Trump whose retrenchment would prove equally divisive.

Akin to the Biden administration, President Obama came into office promising to restore allied confidence in the US. But Obama, in an approach reminiscent of the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, also wanted to reduce America's overseas burdens, shifting more to allies.⁹ In the case of Libya, the Obama administration tried to mobilize allies, especially those in NATO, to assume a greater share of the burden, while the US provided support. It was termed by some as an exercise in "leading from behind." While the alliance did conduct a multilateral operation that brought down the Gadhafi regime in the end, actual allied commitments rather than initial allied euphoria suggested a less than successful result. Obama came to regard the whole experience as a mistake and was especially critical of NATO allies who failed to step up in the post-conflict phase to stabilize Libya.¹⁰ As Shifrinson notes, "No less of a trans-Atlanticist than Robert Gates declared in his final speech as Secretary of Defense in 2011 that there was a "dwindling appetite... to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources [...] to be serious and capable partners in their own defense."¹¹

The pre-Trump history of the United States and NATO thus demonstrates that alliances are not an end in itself – they are a means to U.S. ends. In the aftermath of the Second World War, after having sat out the inter-war period to much of its eventual chagrin, the U.S. came to the conclusion that events in Europe, and across the globe for that matter, were henceforth consequential for U.S. interests. The U.S. had finally learned the hard truth that being a global power means being a European power. Since the end of the Second World War, America has assured itself of this influence through the Euro-Atlantic collective defence arrangements. Through this mechanism, the US does not abandon its sacred tradition of unilateralism, rather it pursues

an “independent multilateralism” of sorts. Ostensibly, the promise of American unilateralism, not multilateralism, keeps Allies (especially the smaller ones) on the borders of revisionist rivals with hegemonic aspirations such as China and Russia, secure from their powerful neighbours.¹²

Allies (mistakenly) tend to see American-led multilateralism as a means of either influencing or restraining US military and economic power in a manner that serves the interests and policy preferences of US allies. By contrast, the American view – consensus, in fact, since there is broad bipartisan agreement on this point across Republicans and Democrats – is somewhat different. For the U.S., multilateralism is as much a way to assist Allies and partners, as it is to encourage them to adopt policies that are beneficial to American interests. To paraphrase Groucho Marx: the United States should never be a member of any club which refused to accept American leadership.

Washington periodically voices concern about the level of allied military contributions and the size of the American military relative to that of its Allies, but for just that reason the U.S. maintains the capacity to fill in the gaps on its own. In fact, the United States does not wish to ever become so dependent on allied contributions that it would relinquish the option to act unilaterally, if necessary.

The Iraq invasion with its “coalition of the willing” proved the point. To be sure, allies are an asset. For Republicans and Democrats alike though, the episode reinforced that not even America’s closest allies can necessarily be relied upon when America perceives its interests to be at stake. Subsequent administrations and the American public took that to heart: Iraq was a sea-change for the transatlantic relationship.¹³ Washington realized that unilateralism was competitive: most “old” allies pledged “unlimited solidarity” (in the words of then foreign minister Joschka Fischer) – but proceeded to act unilaterally. In case that had not already sunk in, the Trump revelation to partners was the stark realization that U.S. membership has its privileges and (dis)loyalty has a price: ultimately, allies are expendable.

In a zero-sum game of the realist paradigm, states inherently put their

own interests first. Fundamentally, Presidents have always followed an “America first” approach. To greater or less degrees, all presidents have adopted a unilateralist approach to American foreign policy. Even when America acts in concert with other states, it seeks a leadership role that will protect and promote its interests first and foremost, and assure the security and prosperity of Americans – especially its politically powerful and vast middle class.

No one can match America’s resources; so, no ally can go it alone. Arnold Wolfers famously referred to the United States as the “hub power” of the West.¹⁴ As a result, America’s allies in general, and its European allies in particular, are programmed to think multilaterally. It is part and parcel of their foreign policy DNA by consequence, but also by U.S. design – recognizing that a repeat of the calamitous global disruption caused by the Thirty Years’ War (1914-1945) was not in America’s geopolitical interest. Out of the crucible of the ashes of two world wars, the U.S. intentionally conceived the post-World War II order as a function of multilateral institutionalism. The idea was to turn a perpetual “zone of war” into a quintessential “zone of peace” by forging ties that would unequivocally bind countries together primordially.¹⁵ The coveted prize was control over the territory of the country at the heart of Europe that had been fought over for 400 years: Germany. The result was a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (community of fate) composed of allies bound to the United States in a way that secured America’s position as the undisputed leader of the free world: all for one – and one for all. Not only were these partnerships multilaterally conditioned, for decades European domestic opinion has monochromatically perceived America’s foreign policy tradition as inherently multilateral. No more so than in Germany, steadfast the continental anchor for American world order interests. For Germany, the problem was never so much American power as the realization that America, post-Cold War, had been yielding its power differently: to the detriment of traditional allies and the multilateral institutional system America itself had spent decades building up.

That, however, is a fundamental misreading of the U.S. foreign policy prism, which actually refracts four quite different schools of thought.

These traditions result from the ideological variations of individual leading figures in American history, three of whom were Presidents, and how each one has sought to assert both America's domestic and international policies and interests. Walter Russell Mead's U.S. foreign policy traditions are associated with those who first embodied them – Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Woodrow Wilson.¹⁶ These are heuristic categories; U.S. unilateralism is traditionally a nuanced synthesis of two traditions. In the post-Cold War era, Clinton executed both Wilsonian and Hamiltonian foreign policies, each practicing unilateralism with a smile. George W. Bush, who declared that “you are either with us or with the terrorists,” followed a mixture of Jacksonianism and Wilsonianism and practiced unilateralism with an attitude. Obama leaned toward Wilsonianism and Jeffersonianism and followed an intellectual, thoughtful and deliberate unilateralism.

America's allies venerate an idealist construct of the Wilsonian tradition that fails to account for the actual complexities of Wilson as a person and statesman. On the one hand, Wilson became a late convert to internationalism, having famously remarked to a friend shortly before his inauguration that it “would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs.”¹⁷ He had been a professor of political science and history and Princeton, to be sure, but his doctoral dissertation was on American domestic politics and he had been elected on a strictly domestic political platform. Wilson did not want the U.S. to get entangled in alliances. The very idea of the sort of standing armies that underpin NATO would have been anathema to him, having remarked in 1916: “I am not one of those who believes that a great standing army is the means of maintaining peace, because if you build up a great profession those who form parts of it want to exercise their profession.”¹⁸ Moreover, Wilson himself was a complicated man: the apparent father of the internationalist human rights tradition held views that were

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deeply racist and antisemitic. In other words, the “Wilsonian tradition” has been appropriated by Allies rather selectively. It is a syncretism that has embedded Wilsonian elements in domestic allied political cultures and politics to rationalize and justify a certain perspective, one whose idealized version is a lot more complex to reconcile with the man, his vision and his actions than Allies like to pretend and whose Allied interpretation varies from its meaning in a U.S. context where it is but one of several contenders in pluralist foreign policy environment that is highly contested and competitive, and where Wilsonianism is neither the default, nor the obvious choice.

Trump jettisoned what had long been the common denominator in U.S. foreign policy: a form of Wilsonianism that, post-World War II, had taken on the trappings of reason and reliability which allies shared and understood – but Trump was quick to disavow that cherished tradition. Trump’s foreign policy logic was fundamentally at odds with the Wilsonian terms to which Allies had long grown accustomed. He was almost a pure Jacksonian, one who practiced a reactionary, not very well-thought-out unilateralism with a vengeance. Yet, Trump’s rupture with Allies was a second-order effect. First and foremost, it was a rupture within both, the American Wilsonian tradition writ large, and its Republican practice in particular. Trump rose to power by repudiating the hawkish ideology and haughty arrogance of the old guard of the GOP. The American electorate in general and Republicans especially had grown weary of the seemingly endless wars and free-trade deals that Trump’s Republican predecessors – the GOP’s “old guard” – had initiated. In a twist of irony, allies who had been apprehensive about those same wars and the “neo-liberalism” that allegedly informed these trade deals now took issue with an American public and president that called their very logic into question. Allies were not Trump’s primary target; they became collateral damage. Trump started an insurrection within the Republican party whose relentless crusade for the battle of the soul of the GOP, and of America, is ongoing.

The Trump legacy

Whatever its faults, the Trump approach compelled the United States to confront the meaning, purpose and, indeed, the very soul of American foreign and defence policy. On one side stands the old (Democratic and Republican) foreign policy elite. Its brain trust spans from Boston through New York City and Washington. Its forefathers ultimately won the day in a fierce debate over the United States getting involved in the Second World War. In 2019 their position was captured through a Congressional bipartisan pre-summit reaffirmation of support for NATO. Allies have largely assimilated it as *the* US foreign policy tradition.

Notwithstanding competing U.S. foreign policy schools, since onset of official American involvement in World War Two and the Cold War, they had not figured prominently, especially in actual U.S. foreign policy. The end of the Cold War inaugurated a resurgence of a more pluralist domestic debate over U.S. foreign policy. These contrarians were initially usurped by Clinton's unipolar moment, then upended by 9/11 and the offensive realism of the Global War on Terror. After 25 years – 1991-2016 – they found their standard-bearer in Donald Trump.

If the mere perception of the Soviet threat as existential were at the origin of the creation of the Alliance, it would have been unlikely to survive its demise. Its persistence proves that the Alliance does not just embody transatlantic security relations, but a durable Euro-Atlantic community. However, the resurgence of Russian revisionism from 2007 onward reinvigorated a sense of common purpose among the allies. How lethal a threat Trump would have posed to an Alliance absent the self-evident threat of Russian aggression is anyone's guess. For better or for worse, Trump reinforced what Lord Ismay had recognized at inception: that

the greatest and most persistent existential threat to the Alliance comes not from without, but from within. That risk, however, has long been mitigated by American global policy that is motivated by a strong desire to preserve a balance of power that is favourable to the United States vis-à-vis its enemies – and friends. Neither the US nor Canada need to be entangled in European security, but both want to be. Henceforth, however, the United States is bound to play less active a role than in the past. For reasons related to both American and European interests, capabilities, and preferences, the devolution of American managerial responsibility for the security of European allies that pre-dates the Trump administration is bound to persist.

Confronting “the Swamp” – as Trump liked to call the Washington establishment – are not only the narrow grass-roots nationalists of Trump’s base, but also those who argue that American global leadership may have served US interests in the past, but it is no longer necessary to assure American security and prosperity – or, for that matter, that of America’s allies.

Graham Allison wrote that Trump’s rhetoric had exposed the “myth of the liberal order” in its economic and military dimensions.¹⁹ Created and sustained during its Cold War heyday, American leadership was not primarily concerned about creating a new international order *per se*. Instead, the aim was quite limited: to contain and deter global Soviet expansionism – a relic long extinct.²⁰ “Rather than seek to return to an imagined past in which the United States molded the world in its image,” Allison argues, “Washington should limit its efforts to ensuring sufficient order abroad to allow it to concentrate on reconstructing a viable liberal democracy at home.”²¹

While the liberal internationalist order has been appropriated as a normative project by some John Ikenberry reminds us that it has never been a global system.²² Rather, the liberal international order has always consisted of two blocks: those who bought into the system, and those who did not. The real liberal international order consists of a limited number of U.S. allies and a few partners. The rest of the world either never believed in the system in the first place, or selectively embraced those dimensions that fit their interests while conveniently jettisoning

the rest. In other worlds, we need to distinguish between the aspirational and the real liberal internationalist systems, appreciating that the latter is actually quite limited, pitting the “West” against the rest of the world in its political, economic and fundamental human-rights values.

Walter Russell Mead argues that with Trump, America seems to have reached the end of a century of Wilsonianism, evidenced by weakened internationalism to the point of failure. Mead nonetheless concedes that the US and the world may only be in a “Wilsonian recession,” considering nothing lasts forever in politics, and hope is hard to kill: “The Wilsonian vision is too deeply implanted in American political culture, and the values to which it speaks have too much global appeal, to write its obituary just yet.”²³

While it may be premature to completely write off Wilsonianism, it is also unwise to dismiss the influence of those deeply ingrained older traditions in US foreign policy. If nothing else, Trump’s rhetoric, brought the fore strands of foreign policy that have not been prominent since the domestic debate over America’s entry into World War II was settled, sparking a ‘battle for the soul’ of America foreign and defence policy.²⁴ For the United States, Trump’s approach represented a return to US grand strategy of the 19th century – which, as Charles Kupchan contends, was largely successful.²⁵ In fact, multilateralism is not readily reconcilable with today’s multipolar world: when the U.S. was genuinely unilateralist in an isolationist sense, the world was multipolar, not multilateral. A multipolar world, then, is logically inconsistent with the Euro-Atlantic community. Its resurgence could well herald a significant realignment in US foreign policy, one that has been looming since the end of the Cold War, with momentous ramifications for allies.

Unsurprisingly, as Americans struggled over the soul of their foreign policy throughout the four long years of the Trump administration,

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European allies longed for a return to what they took as the golden era of America's benevolent leadership. As Coral Bell argued in 1999, during the post-Cold War other states were happy to follow American leadership, to "band wagon" on American power and influence, even after the unifying threat of the Soviet Union had disappeared. While the Clinton administration's policy of "engagement and enlargement" appeared to embrace a renewed multilateralism, in practice it reflected what Bell called the "pretense of concert," based upon the understanding that:

...the unipolar world should be run as if it were a concert of powers. In a sense, the post-World War II "institutionalization" of diplomacy--through the UN, NATO, the G-7, the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, the OSCE and so on--has more or less imposed that strategy on policymakers. Resolutions must get through the Security Council and consensus must be sought in the other organizations to "legitimate" the policies that are deemed to be in the U.S. national interest. Of course, the policies could be followed without seeking their legitimization by "the international community", but the advantages of securing it are worth the diplomatic labor it takes. A resolution or consensus eases consciences both in America and abroad, and helps protect U.S. allies from their respective critics at home (though not in Washington, of course).²⁶

What made President Trump's approach different was that he was unwilling to even pretend to adopt the pretense of concert. And in an Alliance where appearance has always been as important as substance, perhaps even more so, this deliberate shunning of diplomatic hypocrisy, shook NATO to its core.²⁷

According to Hal Brands, the damage done by the Trump administration has sown "doubts about the United States' long-term commitment to democratic norms and constructive global leadership" and "created a crisis of American internationalism that will outlast his presidency."²⁸ The challenge facing the Biden administration is to update the great tradition of internationalism "that has served the United States and

much of the world so well.”²⁹ This involves restoring democracy at home and rebuilding a foreign policy that will once again resonate with the American middle class. Abroad, it will mean strengthening the strained ties with US allies who, as Brands cautions, “may not come rushing back with open arms,” since President Biden “cannot simply declare that the United States has returned.”³⁰ But the challenges may be more daunting than Brands suggests, not because European allies will refrain from rushing back into America’s open arms, but because of the explicit and implicit unilateral conditions that come with the warm embrace of US security multilateralism.

Back to the future: Biden's unilateral multilateralism redux

In declaring all things Trump un-American – a corollary of Trump declaring all things Obama un-American – President Biden seems to aspire to the status quo ante: restoring America's leadership of the liberal democratic order even if it means reprising the pretense of concert. After all, traditional partners and U.S. allies have encouraged the new administration to sustain that order as they continue to look to the US to carry the mantle of what Josef Joffe called the world's “default power.”³¹

The Biden administration appears to be aiming for a combination of smiling Clintonian unilateralism, tempered by a recognition of changed global realities. That suggests an Obama-style thoughtful and deliberate unilateralism on the one hand, whilst domestically constrained by the persistence of strong Trumpist undercurrents on the other. Biden would ignore these undertows at his own peril as they pose an existential threat to electoral prospects of future Democratic presidential contenders.

Due to immutable electoral constraints, Biden's domestic and foreign policy agendas appeal to the same blue-collar and middle-class Americans as Trump's: they make up a majority of the US electorate and the bulk of swing voters. While Biden may not share Trump's disdain for allies and appeasing of tyrants, his central tenet of American retrenchment and building strength at home has conceptual similarities with Trump. According to Nicholas Dungan of the US Atlantic Council, “Biden isn't doing 'America First' but his policy is 'Americans First.' That makes total sense. It's why he was elected.”³²

This became readily apparent with the Biden administration's unilateral decision to pull out of Afghanistan by the end of August 2021 and

the September 2021 agreement with Australia and the UK on nuclear submarines which lead France to recall its ambassador to Washington and a rebuke from the European Union. Upon his departure the ambassador stated that he was being “recalled to Paris for consultations. This follows announcements directly affecting the vision we have of our alliances.”³³

All this leads Richard Haass, current President of the venerable Council on Foreign Relations, to conclude regrettably that the Trump administration heralded “a paradigm shift in the United States’ approach to the world,” one that the Biden administration, for all its internationalist rhetoric is continuing,

The new paradigm dismisses the core tenet of that approach: that the United States has a vital stake in a broader global system, one that at times demands undertaking difficult military interventions or putting aside immediate national preferences in favor of principles and arrangements that bring long-term benefits. The new consensus reflects not an across-the-board isolationism – after all, a hawkish approach to China is hardly isolationist – but rather the rejection of that internationalism. Today, notwithstanding Biden’s pledge “to help lead the world toward a more peaceful, prosperous future for all people,” the reality is that Americans want the benefits of international order without doing the hard work of building and maintaining it.³⁴

Yet, according to Shifrinson and Wertheim neither should these moves come as a surprise nor should there be any remorse or longing for halcyon liberal internationalist days gone by. They recently argued, while the President Biden has declared to bring America back into the multilateral, allied fold, the core of his approach to foreign policy has long been, “the pragmatic pursuit of national security over foreign policy orthodoxy.” Thus,

(a) though his predecessor, Donald Trump, gave voice to similar impulses, it is Biden who offers a more coherent version of pragmatic realism – a mode of thought that prizes the advancement of tangible U.S. interests, expects other states to follow

their own interests, and changes course to get what the United States needs in a competitive world. If Biden continues to apply this vision, he will deliver a welcome change from decades of overassertive U.S. foreign policy that has squandered lives and resources in pursuit of unachievable goals.³⁵

At the same time, this pragmatism is consistent with maintaining the US alliance system. The Biden administration understands that the American public remains broadly supportive of international coalitions. Yet it also recognizes that under Trump, “for the first time since WWII, U.S. alliances have become deeply politicized.”³⁶ Although America has the ability to leverage its disproportionate power to influence collective decision-making, Trump’s tenure revealed the limits of too solicitous an approach, at the expense of allied trust and confidence. That is, it revealed the limit of structural realism according to Kenneth Waltz where smaller states are not expected to have much influence over the decisions by superpowers. Although foreign policy experts from both political parties defend the Alliance system and its net benefit to the United States, the former Trump administration’s core supporters – a significant portion of the 74 million among 239 million eligible Americans who voted for him in 2020 – remain adamantly opposed. “With Congress and the public polarized on all manner of issues, the country’s alliances could remain the object of controversy even under Biden’s more internationalist leadership.”³⁷

The Biden administration is surely sincere in its commitment to revitalize America’s alliances, especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and to work with traditional allies in meeting the new challenges of a changed international environment. However, President Biden is not just looking to fully and enthusiastically return the United States to a seat at the multilateral table. He is also, in the best tradition of that American liberal international order that appeared to be under threat, fully intent to resume Washington’s place at the head of the table: to reassert and reaffirm America’s leadership position – a role that many allies came to miss during the Trump era. As with the previous post-1945 and post-Cold War administrations, the Biden team firmly believes in Joseph Nye’s admonition that America is “bound

to lead.”³⁸ “The world,” President Biden recently observed, “does not organize itself.” As he promised during the 2020 election campaign, “the Biden foreign policy agenda will place the United States back at the head of the table...”³⁹ Indeed, at the 2021 G-7 summit President Biden emphasized repeatedly: “America is back in the business of leading the world alongside nations who share our most deeply held values.”⁴⁰

If the world, meaning Europe, cannot organize itself – the struggle over reassessing the U.K. Deputy SACEUR’s responsibility for military coordination with the EU post-Brexit suggest that European members would be unlikely to agree on the country that should fill the position of SACEUR were the U.S. to step back – the clear implication is that, as with past American administrations, the United States will have done it. In this regard, the continued willing deference that allies pay for U.S. leadership meshes with what Nick Ottens recently identified as the persistent American view, “that European leaders are ‘weak,’ the American president is ‘bold.’” In a 2005 Op Ed piece in the *New York Times*, he notes how Simon Serfaty decried the “weakness” of the European leaders.⁴¹ In a 2014 article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled “Weak and Weaker,” Loring Redei from the LBJ School of Public Affairs declared that a recent EU meeting demonstrated that Europe would be unable to stand up to Putin’s Russia. “To the United States, the summit proved, once again, that even on issues that should rightfully be the EU’s problem, Europeans will drop the ball and shirk responsibility. Alone, the EU’s member states lack power. Together, they lack ambition.”⁴² A year later before Trump’s election Robert D. Kaplan writing in *The American Interest* despaired of Europe’s inability to handle the challenges that beset from without and within because of its lack of resolute leadership. “European leaders are, in the main,” he argued “gray, insipid ciphers who stand for little except finessing rather than dealing with the next crisis, and the next.”⁴³

Whether the United States under a Biden Administration will sustain its commitments after the doubts and worries of the past four years is not at issue. America is ready to lead again. But it is prepared to do so because fundamentally the US foreign policy elite, whether Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, realist or internationalist, is doubtful that European leaders, either individually or collectively can

manage their own security. Already the Biden administration has served notice that it intends to enlist Europe's support in assisting America's efforts in the Indo-Pacific region.

At stake for the Euro-Atlantic community, therefore, is whether America's allies, having witnessed the prospect of US defection, are again 'bound to follow' as they did in the past, manifesting in the immediate post-Cold War "unipolar moment." As allies have come to realize that American foreign policy is informed by multiple, competing logics, their trust and confidence in both the reason and reliability of U.S. leadership has been shaken violently. They now realize that "leadership" is but a trope, subject to the vagaries of the U.S. foreign policy establishment currently in office. Allies had better settle in to the new reality: rather than back to the future of a Golden Era of benevolent and magnanimous U.S. foreign policy leadership, it is now as apparent as ever that U.S. leadership comes at a cost. Post Trump, that cost has just gotten a whole lot steeper. One of the legacy holdovers from the Trump administration is that allies will henceforth be expected to pay more – for which they can expect less U.S. leadership in return. How likely are allies to give America a second chance? Absent credible alternatives, they do not have much of a choice.

The economics of alliances

The European Union aspires to a greater and more cohesive leadership role, but largely through the use of soft power. It is no match for the kinetic, expeditionary and offensive effects that America can bring to bear, nor its ability to act decisively as a unitary actor. Echoing the memorable words of its first Secretary General, Lord Ismay, U.S. leadership of NATO still remains the most effective means to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down”⁴⁴ and thus continues to be indispensable to global stability and the quintessentially American rules-based international order. Keeping the Americans in meant that the U.S. would centre its influence over continental Europe in Germany which, by design, would contain the Soviet threat. In what is now the European Union, “poor old Germany, too big for Europe too small for the world,” in the plithe quip of Henry Kissinger, would be able to overcome its hegemonic trap: exercise a leadership role in Europe whilst constrained by the U.S. This promise is precisely what caused Eisenhower to convert from Euro-skeptic to an unapologetic proponent of the then European Economic Community.

Mr. Trump’s admonitions about the need for Allies to increase defence spending and overall efforts did have some positive impact of which the Biden administration can take advantage. As Anthony Cordesman notes,

NATO is making real progress in spite of the differences between its members, their different interests and security policies, and the many challenges they face. The efforts to improve deterrence in the forward area, rapid deployment capabilities, and training for joint operations had made real improvements at the professional level thanks to NATO planners and command-

ers, in spite of the pointless bickering over burden sharing at the head of state and ministerial levels. As the Secretary General's Annual Report for 2018 makes clear, NATO has many productive initiatives underway that do focus on its real security needs, and that will help deter Russia and deal with the key issues in its military readiness and force planning. In fact, some 90% of the Secretary General's report focuses on such issues.⁴⁵

Indeed, NATO's first crisis over burden sharing dates back to... 1953. Frustrated with France for dragging its feet on an integrated European Defence Community that would lessen Europe's dependency on the United States, then U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles warned that the failure of EDC would "compel an agonizing reappraisal of basic United States policy" toward Western Europe.⁴⁶ President Dwight Eisenhower wanted the Europeans to invest in defence capabilities sufficient to create in Europe "a third great power bloc" so the U.S. could "sit back and relax somewhat."⁴⁷ But as it turns out, the same cultural values on which the democratic alliance rests give some members powerful disincentives to increase their level of commitment.

The aspirational goal of 2% has long been the subject of contention and derision within the alliance; hence, Cordesman concludes, to keep moving forward, the Alliance needs to abandon arbitrary metrics such as the goal of 2% of GDP and 20% on equipment.⁴⁸ As he shows, there is a "... lack of correlation between the level of spending in GDP and maintaining adequate force levels, the pointlessness of the spending 20% on equipment goal, and the need for the U.S. to stop bullying its allies by exaggerating its own efforts." The Alliance's "...force planning effort should set clear priorities for improving the mission capabilities of each individual member country – balancing force strength, readiness, and modernization...." As he succinctly puts it, "Spending more should not be the priority. Spending wisely should be."⁴⁹

Controversy over the European Union's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is a case in point. PESCO is meant to fostering greater capacity for autonomous European action while complementing NATO. Indeed, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas argued in an op-ed that Europe must be strong while remaining a part of NATO, and

not act “as a substitute” to NATO initiatives.⁵⁰ Maas’ cabinet colleague, then German Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer reiterated that point in a poignantly entitled op-ed: “Europe still needs America – No matter who is in the White House, we are in this together.”⁵¹ French President François Macron’s conception, by contrast, seeks to posture PESCO for greater European autonomy outside of the NATO and transatlantic security framework. To this effect, Macron has repeatedly insisted on a “European army,”⁵² – for which there has long been very little public support among European populations, ever since Dean Acheson first floated the idea.⁵³

On the one hand, it is likely that the Biden administration, while still looking to allies to share the collective burden, will be more sympathetic than was the Trump administration to some redefinition and flexibility in what constitutes allied contributions, and how they can be measured beyond the two percent solution. On the other hand, even a Biden administration will have little tolerance for approaches that do not reinforce NATO while possibly undermining the cohesion of the Euro-Atlantic community.

As the U.S. itself responds to its public’s desire to place domestic budget priorities first, Washington will be inclined to recognize that U.S. allies have trouble increasing their defense budgets for domestic political reasons – their citizens are accustomed to relatively low defense spending and resist budget hikes. In light of reality, and given the non-traditional nature of the threats, the allies can, however, contribute to non-military defense and deterrence. Most of this spending does not show up in military budgets; rather, it appears on foreign affairs, intelligence, and homeland security ledgers: spending on cybersecurity and signals intelligence is an example, as is EU spending on soft power such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, other European efforts to reinforce cohesion and build capacity, and the plethora of

The same cultural values on which the democratic alliance rests give some members powerful disincentives to increase their level of commitment.

military and civilian missions and operations under the auspices of the European External Action Service.⁵⁴ As outlined by Rapp-Hooper: “American treaty allies are leaders in covert information gathering, public diplomacy, and technological research and development. They can spend more easily in these areas.”⁵⁵

Such an approach would be a return to one of the characteristics of US leadership: When it comes to U.S. defense policy the NATO Alliance, the United States, both because of and in spite of its overwhelming power, has in the past – for its own interests – accepted however much of the “burden” its Allies and security partners are able and willing to assume. NATO Allies, and many individuals within the American national security establishment, hope that the United States will remain a “tolerant ally and security partner.”⁵⁶

Complex interdependence

The United States implicitly recognizes that there is a sweet spot on what allies spend on defence beyond which trade-offs generated reduced US utility: if Allies, especially large and wealthy ones such as Germany and Japan, were to go their own way and increase their level of defence spending accordingly, perhaps even developing more of their own weapons, they might be better able, and thus more inclined to act unilaterally. France's defence spending, posture and strategy, and its attitude on defence towards NATO and the EU, has long been a laboratory of experimentation in this regard. While Germany wants a better America, France wants a balance, that is, a weaker America.

Alternatively, they may grow tired of constant American complaints and demands for more defence spending and seek less costly security arrangements and understandings. By way of example, German polling shows attitudes shifting away from a preference of Atlanticist solutions to security challenges: only a plurality of Germans still favour the Euro-Atlantic community, with less confidence in the U.S. as a trusted ally after Trump, with the prospect of abandonment raising support for European autonomy or even German sovereignty outside of the EU and Euro-Atlantic community.

Those who favour greater European autonomy necessarily favour a more multipolar international system and are thus banking on American decline to level the international playing field in Europe's favour. That would require considerable effort and expense on the part of those in Europe who prefer to balance America, notably France. In the aftermath of Brexit, however, that position has necessarily gained relatively greater weight within continental Europe, which places a greater burden on those countries that are anchored in an Atlanticist approach. The

transatlantic triangle – the U.S., U.K. and Canada – has, for all intents and purpose, become the transatlantic quadrangle, with Germany presumed as its continental anchor.

The ground in which is anchored, however, is shifting. Aggressive information operations, foreign influence and foreign interference, especially among the roughly 1.5-3 million Germans of Russian background, and the rise of the Russia-friendly *Alternative für Deutschland* party have actively been undermining German attitudes towards the Euro-Atlantic community further. Other Allies, such as Turkey, might seek to reach accommodations with Russia. Turkey's purchase of the Russian-made S-400 after being spurned by the US and NATO on procuring the US Patriot system already exemplifies this possible trajectory.

Russia would capitalize on European disunity to re-assert its growing power over NATO's new Eastern members, and perhaps older Allies in Western Europe as well. This trend might be reinforced should Brexit result in a weakening of EU unity. In the worst-case scenario, Europe's security unity could fall apart along national lines, returning the continent to the competitive and disastrous power struggles that characterize much of its pre-World War Two history. As David Haglund writes: "It took four centuries of warfare for us to grasp that France and Germany cannot live apart from each other. If, today, you have the one without the other, then, tomorrow, you will have the one against the other."⁵⁷

In any scenario of defection, the United States would lose influence over its larger Allies and see America's global position diminish to the detriment of U.S. national security. This long-standing constraint on U.S. leverage goes back to NATO's inception. As the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), Dwight Eisenhower sought to ascertain the forces NATO could muster. Eisenhower judged the forces pledged by allies to defend Europe from Soviet attack wholly insufficient. This presented a commitment problem because lack of additional force commitments risked signalling weak resolve. When it became evident that this was the limit of allied commitments to collective defence, instead of doubling down on extracting greater defence commitments

from allies, Eisenhower ended up asking for a large estimate of full mobilization of U.S. support. As much to allied as to Eisenhower's relief, that request was authorized.⁵⁸ The is a case in point for the Economic Theory of Alliances explains why a larger ally, notably the United States, would shoulder the defence burden of a smaller ally by providing the latter with a relatively free ride, even though the latter is on or much closer to the front line than the United States. Ergo, there are limits on the ability of the U.S. to test the bonds of transatlantic unity. That is precisely why Barry Posen poignantly observed with regard to NATO: "Alliance partisans on both sides of the Atlantic find complaints about burden sharing irksome not only because they ring true but also because they secretly find them unimportant. The actual production of combat power pales in comparison to the political goal of gluing the United States to Europe no matter what."⁵⁹ In other words, the United States has been willing to accept some free and easy riding on the part of Allies if this means that these Allies (large and small) will not be tempted to ride alone, ride with a rival, or ride against each other. The Biden administration is also anxious to enlist European allies in what its strategic competition with China.⁶⁰ As Rapp-Hooper argues, "America still needs the system that put it on top."⁶¹

Nord Stream 2: A case study in transatlantic relations

And yet, while the US understands that a “flexible response” to the foreign and domestic constraints facing allies helps keep Americans at the head of the allied table, in the post-Trump era there may be more issues upon which Washington will find it difficult to bend to maintain existing partnerships. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline is a current example. The nearly completed project will bring more Russian natural gas to Germany and Europe via an undersea Baltic Sea pipeline that skirts around Ukraine and other East European allies, who also oppose the pipeline. Nord Stream 2 seriously undermines efforts to contain Russia by means of economic sanctions. At the same time, it provides allies with leverage. Acceding to the project would amount to a shift in U.S. strategy to an approach more akin to the sticks-and-carrots approach of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. Israel’s apprehensions about JCPOA are comparable to Eastern European allies’ reservations about Nord Stream 2.

The issue now appears to be resolved: in favour of Germany’s and Western European’s position of leverage through strategic engagement: the US has now dropped its objections and threats of sanctions against Germany. Still, according to Kori Schake, the Biden administration’s initial opposition to this project shows that for all its claims to restore allied unity, “the U.S. doesn’t know how to treat its allies.”⁶² It remains to be seen whether the shift in the Biden administration’s stance on Nord Stream 2 also signals a change in U.S. strategy on Russia more broadly, or just a tactical trade-off ahead of German federal elections that could result in a coalition with the Green party that has long been sceptical of American motives, NATO and the transatlantic security architecture.

Trump believed that the pipeline will further increase the European Union's dependence on Russian energy thereby making allies subject to Moscow's influence, to the detriment of Euro-Atlantic collective defence. This view is also widely held across partisan lines within the U.S. Congress. Apart from the contention that American opposition to the pipeline dismisses past European efforts to mitigate energy dependence on Russian gas imports and exaggerates possible security implications, American opposition ignores the very real and immediate domestic importance of Nord Stream 2 for Germany, in particular its commitment to transitioning to a lower-carbon economy. There is also the allegation that the U.S. wants Europeans to forego Russian natural gas brought in by pipeline in favour of liquid-natural gas exported from the United States.

Whatever the disagreements, as Schake argues, by asserting American preferences on this secondary matter, Washington was undermining its own efforts to enlist European allies in the more important efforts to deal with China's rise: "Biden has a choice – should he prioritize concerns about Russia, a nettlesome but less important rival power, or should he consolidate support among America's allies? The administration is on the verge of choosing the wrong option."⁶³ She notes that U.S. allies are already sold on the idea of containing China, developing Indo-Pacific strategies, or (Germany) sending a warship to help patrol the South China Sea.⁶⁴ The time is now for US and European democracies to forge a common front on China, not simply to dictate that they follow American leadership, but having allies "requires sacrifices grounded in common values; it does not mean that other democratic countries must in every case do what the U.S. wants."⁶⁵ Schake's concludes:

Having allies requires sacrifices grounded in common values; it does not mean that other democratic countries must in every case do what the United States wants. The Biden administration should compromise on Nord Stream 2, securing concessions that mollify Central Europe and Ukraine, and then let go of this outdated concern. Far from showing that "America is back," our uncompromising stance impedes the deepening of allied cooperation for our more important problems.⁶⁶

While the Biden administration may have relented on NORD Stream 2, its decision to collaborate with the UK on the Australian nuclear submarine program and the cancellation by Canberra of billions of dollars in defence contracts with France reinforces that there are limits to the “sacrifices” the Biden Administration is prepared to make to sustain the trans-Atlantic alliance. Indeed, torpedoing France’s deal with Australia raises questions about exactly how much NATO multilateral involvement the Biden administration really wants in the Asia-Pacific region, as opposed to the familiar subordination and followership applied to Europe.

The exploitation hypothesis revisited

As the US leans forward in the Indo-Pacific, it will, to be sure, also seek to sustain its leadership in European security affairs, even as the relative importance of NATO continues to decline for America. That is partially driven by the different characteristics of those two theatres: the Indo-Pacific is a naval theatre first and an air theatre second. The US Army has thus far been unsuccessful in carving out a role for itself there. By contrast, for the U.S. Army great power competition is still about Russia, not China. That priority is reflected in the fact that the U.S. Army maintains 35,000 troops in Europe. Ramstein Air Base has long served as a hub for U.S. Army operations in the Middle East. Which is why the neo-realist proposition by heavyweights such as Barry Posen, John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt and Andrew Bacevich that the U.S. simply leave Europe is improbable to eventuate.⁶⁷ So is the idea to Europeanize SACEUR: For SACEUR effectively plays the role of pro-consul to NATO's new members in the East. A U.S. presence on the Northeastern and Southeastern flanks along the lines of OPERATION REASSURANCE and its enhance Forward Presence and tailored Forward Presence is indispensable to deterring Russian aggression, at least towards NATO members and the territorial integrity of the European Union. However, the U.S. is likely expecting more heavy lifting by Europe along the Mediterranean rim on counterterrorism, counter-insurgency, stability operations, state- and capacity-building – in the Middle East and the Maghreb as well as across the Sahara-Sahel region.

President Obama's "leading from behind" doctrine already made it clear to allies that America's strategic interests in the region are limited, and with an abundance of North American oil in decline. Beyond specialized capabilities such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance along

that cannot be readily matched by allies, it is in America's interests to optimize the allocation of its deployed assets in the Indo-Pacific theatre. Biden's pullout from Afghanistan is in keeping with this prioritization. Following on the heels of NATO's advise and assist (commonly known as "training") mission to Iraq, the U.S. will expect European allies to engage in more bilateral, plurilateral, multilateral NATO and EU efforts across the Mediterranean, since their interests, not America's, are at immediate stake. Fully aware of this trajectory of "mission creep", although all NATO member countries were already present in Iraq, European allies nonetheless would have much preferred NATO shirk rather than work. Trump, however, forced their hand, with the aim of bolstering Europe as a pillar of collective defence. Right from its conception, the American idea was for Europe as a genuine partner in continental defence, not as a protectorate of the United States.

That precedent European allies desperately wanted to avoid setting, Germany first and foremost among them, for it would come at significant domestic political and financial cost. A European commitment, under the auspices of the Atlantic Council, obviates the risk of defection while forcing greater European cooperation on defence – in Iraq as in Latvia, under Canadian leadership. It also complements the already vast presence and expenditure of EU soft power throughout the region with a hard-power NATO capabilities. In Iraq, NATO has effectively been forced to displace the United States as the allied lead. Across the region, the United States will be looking to replicate this shift from U.S. to greater collective and European military responsibility so that it can focus its attention and resources on more pressing U.S. interests: containing China and, to a lesser extent, deterring Russia. To this end, the U.S. is leading a reluctant Europe to reconceive its Area of Responsibility: effectively forcing Europe to mature into assuming the full spectrum of responsibilities for the provision of security, stability and safety in those confines of its neighbourhood that is not reliant on the U.S. as a credible deterrent.

Present at re-creation

In meeting the new challenges that face the United States in 2021, the Biden administration is reaching into the American toolbox of the past. That is, allies can reasonably anticipate probable U.S. behaviour. In domestic policy the vast spending plans for public infrastructure and myriad expanded social and assistance programs to support the middle-class and families are reminiscent of both Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society of the 1960. In foreign policy and especially Euro-Atlantic relations, President Biden is reaching back to the immediate post World War II, early Cold War golden age of U.S. foreign policy, when the fabled foreign policy elite of the late 1940s persuaded their country to step forward to lead a Euro-Atlantic community desperate for leadership.⁶⁸

The most important accomplishment of those years, was the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Its durability makes it the core actor of the Euro-Atlantic security community. That seemed fundamentally at odds with all prior US foreign policy of non-entanglement in European affairs, going all the way back to George Washington's axiom for the U.S. to steer clear of Alliance entanglements, which continues to resonate with a significant part of the U.S. voting public, as Trump starkly reminded America's allies. Yet, the creation of NATO did not actually depart from America's bedrock adherence to unilateralism.

When representatives of the original 12 members of NATO stepped forward to sign the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, the U.S. Marine Band played two selections from George Gershwin's musical *Porgy and Bess: It Ain't Necessarily So* and *I Got Plenty o' Nothin'*. Then-U. S. Secretary of State, the legendary Dean Acheson, would later observe

in his memoirs, *Present at the Creation*, that the choice of music “added a note of unexpected realism.” Until the end of the Cold War, the alliance could never quite shake the suspicion that behind the burgeoning bureaucracy, the elaborate military command structure and the carefully crafted nuclear and conventional strategies, all was not necessarily so, and that in a real crisis NATO would be found to have plenty of nothing. These concerns seemed well-founded as the alliance, with far fewer member states, nonetheless coped with a never-ending series of internal divisions, dilemmas and seemingly insoluble contradictions about how it dealt with the threat from the East while holding itself together. The 1968 crisis in NATO civil-military relations when the political leadership within NATO would not acknowledge Soviet plans to invade Chechoslovakia for lack of articulated intent is a case in point.

But survive it did, because “flexible response” was not simply the official name given to the strategy adopted in 1967 – it was how the alliance approached seemingly intractable and inherently contradictory problems of a strategic and, above all, political nature. True to the messy nature of democratic government itself, this collection of (mostly) democracies continues to surprise and confound its critics and adversaries by adopting initiatives that placed political compromise above military and strategic orthodoxy and intellectual rigour. The end result was that the allies stayed allied and, in doing so, achieved ultimate victory in the Cold War.⁶⁹

In the post-Cold War and post 9/11 eras that followed, this flexibility would be both vindicated and challenged anew as NATO enlarged to the east and undertook new missions in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya. With the return of a Russian threat by the mid-2010s, the alliance engaged in significant reassurance policies and military deployments, as well as providing credible reassurance to the Baltic states and Poland.⁷⁰

Ostensibly successful in meeting the challenges of the late twentieth and early twentieth centuries, the character of the Alliance and its place in American foreign policy was shifting. Although seemingly a triumph of multilateralism, the first Gulf War accentuated the gap between the

military power and sophistication of the US military and that of its European allies, a chasm which widen as the 1990s progressed, notwithstanding the effectiveness of the Balkan interventions. Within two years of the great unity demonstrated after 9/11 and allied expedition into Afghanistan, NATO would experience a profound split over the Iraq War. At that time, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld dismissed the opposition of France and Germany as the outdated views of the “old NATO”.

Washington’s push for enlargement had created a new NATO, one composed of former Warsaw Pact members and Soviet Republics whose dependency on the US could be counted upon to guarantee greater support for American’s global strategies. Indeed, the core of NATO appeared to have been transformed from a trans-atlantic bargain to a trans-European one wherein the American security guarantee skipped over Western Europe and was now anchored in the Alliance’s new, less militarily capable and more vulnerable, Eastern members.

But with the advent of the Presidency of Donald Trump, it appeared that NATO’s renowned flexibility had finally met its match. Mr. Trump raised serious doubts about the future of the American commitment, that indispensable bulwark that has made the alliance work since 1949. Until Trump, the Alliance had shown a remarkable ability to defy critics who, since inception, have repeatedly predicted that its demise was at hand. Trump could not bounce burden shippers from the club, but he raised the ultimate prospect of retribution: U.S. defection. The moral hazard associated with membership became abundantly clear when Trump made good on it in other multilateral forums dear to European allies: from the Paris climate accord to the World Health Organization.

But reports of the alliance’s imminent demise due to weakening U.S. support, like Mark Twain’s obituary, may have been “greatly exaggerated.” U.S. allies in Europe welcomed the election of the Joseph

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R. Biden administration with great relief. It is almost as if the venerable transatlantic security community has been recreated, with the status quo ante Trump returning and the United States eager to re-engage in the broad and consultative multilateralism of Euro-Atlantic collective defence.

Yet, as Acheson mused in 1949, “it ain’t necessarily so;” at least not in the way many Europeans are anticipating America’s return to the allied fold. For in reaching back, trying to re-create in substance and spirit the Euro-Atlantic community of old in a new era with different threats and challenges, the Biden administration not only wants to assume the mantle of leadership America held in the past, but it also wants to enjoy the prerogatives of leadership in setting the agenda for its allies. In other words, as it seeks to resurrect American unilateral multilateralism as the core feature of the future Euro-Atlantic Security, the President is reaching into a toolbox that was present at the creation – of both, NATO and the American Republic. This may well be a time of re-creation and second chances, on both sides of the Atlantic; but Washington is still expecting, however sincerely and magnanimously, to set the terms of endearment.

Canada: A Euro-Atlantic-player⁷¹

In Ottawa too, the election of the Biden administration was met with an audible sigh of relief. As with many older allies, Canada was unable to escape pointed criticism from President Trump for its failure to assume its fair share of NATO's collective burden. The uncertainty about the future of Euro-Atlantic security called into question the whole basis Canadian defence policy. It also seriously jeopardized Canada's standing in the world, and Canada's ability to assert its interests by leveraging NATO as its most important multilateral asset.

Canadians have long understood, although not always admitted so openly, that there is not much North America in the North Atlantic Alliance and that fundamentally, for both the Americans and European, NATO is about Europe. Nevertheless, the Alliance has allowed Canada to be a player in Euro-Atlantic security. It has afforded Canada the opportunity to harness the synergies of its two most important strategic relationships, first and foremost with the United States, along with its subsidiary strategic relationship with Europe. NATO allows Canada to overcome the fallacy of allied composition: the transatlantic relationship allows Canada to counterbalance U.S. hegemony while asserting Canadian sovereignty by hedging against "defence against help" from its powerful neighbour.⁷² However, the theory offers more prescription than description for Canada to overcome many of the continental security dilemmas it has confronts.⁷³ Without NATO, Canada would have to spend far more on defence and foreign policy, while yielding far lower rates of return on investment.

In short, NATO is existential to Canadian defence and interests. Moreover, it is existential to Canadian unity. The greatest challenge to Canada's unity arose out of conscription during the two world wars.

Canadian unity is thus inextricably linked with peace and stability in Europe. Nowadays, given Canada's ethno-cultural diversity, one might contend that Canadian unity actually depends on regional and global stability. Although, like all member states, Canada seeks to leverage its membership in NATO as a force multiplier for its interests, Canada's foreign policy is disproportionately shaped by the transatlantic relationship: Canada is able to draft behind the Euro-Atlantic community for its foreign policy, thereby avoiding a potentially deeply divisive national debate in a deeply diverse country over what Canada's foreign policy should be. Foreign policy, it has long been said, is the purview of kings; it is in Canada's interest to keep it that way. For democratizing foreign policy debate in Canada could unravel the country as much as it could unravel the alliance.⁷⁴

Since the late 1940s, from the ups and downs of the Cold War, right up to Canada's recent re-commitment to the "enhanced Forward Presence" (eFP) mission in Latvia, Canadian defence policy has been shaped by the US-led multilateral, liberal-democratic Western internationalist security order.⁷⁵ This was especially the case in Europe through NATO and in North America through a wide array of bilateral defence and security linkages and the 'binational' North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD).

Not surprisingly amid the turmoil and angst created by Mr. Trump's rhetoric, Canada emerged as one of the most vocal defenders of the venerable transatlantic Alliance, reaffirming its commitment: "Our engagement in NATO," declared Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in July 2018, "[...] has only expanded over the years, and with good reason – it reflects Canadian values, and is essential in preserving the rules-based international order. We will continue to step up and work together with our Allies to build a safer, more peaceful world for our citizens and people around the world."⁷⁶ This may have seemed disingenuous, even hypocritical. From the perspective of the Trump administration, Canada was one of the 'laggards' whose levels of defence spending appeared to give ample justification for another round of American complaints about the commitment of many Allies to the fundamental collective defence purpose of the Alliance.

President Trump sent a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau in which he castigated Canada for underspending on security. Yet, American demands for Canada to spend more on defence are hardly new and bipartisan. Mr. Trudeau's close friend Barack Obama made the same demand, as had his predecessors. In all likelihood, Mr. Trump was unaware of the "fully costed" spending projections in the 2017 Canadian defence policy statement, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* – had he been, it would only have added fuel to his ire. In line with allied commitments at NATO's 2014 Wales Summit, Canadian defence spending, as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is projected to rise from the present 1.1 percent to 1.4 percent by 2024/25 – a long way and two federal elections off, and even then still falling well below NATO's aspirational target of 2 percent of GDP.

But the Prime Minister stuck to his policy guns, claiming that what counted was not some arbitrary, inconsistently applied measure of the portion of national wealth devoted to defence spending – the French and British contribution has long been calculated on different metrics than those of other members and Croatia raised its defence spending by 0.4% of GDP simply by rolling veterans pensions in to the defence budget – but capacity, capability and commitments to NATO's collective defence posture. Accordingly, Mr. Trudeau announced a multi-year extension and modest increase of Canada's nearly 500-person commitment to the allied eFP mission in Latvia, which Ottawa leads as the "Framework" Nation.⁷⁷ Trudeau also announced a new commitment to lead NATO's training mission in Iraq and continued Canada's support for Ukraine where it is part of the Joint Multinational Training Group and Multinational Joint Commission on Defense Reform and Security Cooperation in Ukraine. Canada has committed over \$785 million in multifaceted assistance to Ukraine since 2014 and in April 2015 launched Operation UNIFIER to develop the capacity of Ukrainian

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security forces. The training mission is run in coordination with similar training missions led by NATO allies Lithuania, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Denmark as well as EU-member Sweden.⁷⁸

However, such commitments by Canada and other alleged laggards did little to satisfy Mr. Trump. His public scolding, and the unconventional take on NATO it reflected, was not about specific quantitative measures of allied burden sharing, but rather the fundamental US strategic commitment to Europe.

Nevertheless, as NATO marked its 70th anniversary on 4 April 2019, Canada was most certainly “back” in the allied fold. Not only was the Alliance driving much of Canadian foreign and defence policy, entailing relatively significant diplomatic and military commitments, but Ottawa also appeared to be taking the lead amongst its Allies “in shoring up” the Alliance. It was pushing back, in word and deed, against the Trump anti-allied verbal offensive to show that “NATO was neither obsolete nor a club of states free-riding on American largesse.”⁷⁹

But if Canada could make a valid case that it was not by any means a “free-rider,” it also had to acknowledge that it remained an “easy rider.”⁸⁰ As conspicuous as Canada’s commitments leading up to NATO’s 70th anniversary were, they were not onerous burdens fiscally or politically. Based upon the 2017 defence policy statement, Ottawa apparently felt comfortable putting Washington and Brussels on notice that Canada will not adopt the two-percent solution. More importantly, the present policy of NATO engagement represents an optimum approach for Canada, reminiscent of previous instances of commitment and re-commitment to the Alliance.

While Trump’s Washington may not have bought in that Canada was doing enough toward making NATO “strong, secure, and engaged,” it continued to welcome and acknowledge the contributions that the highly regarded Canadian Armed Forces are making in Latvia, Ukraine, and Iraq. Ironically, if the Trump administration had suddenly changed its tune and wholeheartedly embraced NATO’s importance to American security, it might have asked for even “more Canada.” This

would have placed Ottawa in a difficult position, as it would have upset Canada's "just enough" approach to allied obligations.

Despite efforts by Congress, a large part of the American foreign policy elite, Canada and its allies, the transatlantic bargain risks unraveling were Europe and America to part ways. Ottawa would be forced to return back to the *status quo ante* in 1948, only this time it would be accompanied by a level of lingering acrimony and mistrust not seen since the nineteenth century. The US might have seen itself as better off, as some of those who challenge NATO's worth to America contend. Already beset with strains to the European Union, European Allies might descend into inter-state rivalries not seen since the end of the Second World War. As a result, Ottawa may have to choose between being "home alone" with the United States in North America, with the strictly binational North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) as its only 'alliance' or try to maintain a disinterested and perhaps crumbling counterweight in Europe. In this situation, the whole basis for Canadian defence policy would have had to have been re-thought with a reduced commitment to European security being not a deliberate policy option but an unavoidable inevitability.

Canada's most recent rhetorical and substantive reaffirmation of its commitment to NATO was made somewhat easier by the fact that the wide array of bilateral defence collaborative arrangements between the United States and Canada for the defence of North America, apparently have traditionally not been included in the politics of allied burden sharing. Though formally North American defence is covered by the NATO Treaty, security relations are strictly a bilateral matter between the US and Canada – an arrangement both governments have long preferred, particularly with regard to NORAD. Headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado, this uniquely 'binational' defence organization, twinned with United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), marked a very low-key 60th anniversary in 2018.⁸¹ It was a low-key affair with neither Mr. Trump nor Mr. Trudeau in attendance. Indeed, notwithstanding the fact that Canada's contributions to NORAD have been lagging for some time, and with new aerospace threats emerging, Ottawa will need to spend more on modernizing its air defence posture

as NORAD escaped the rhetorical doubts voiced by President Trump about the benefits to the U.S. of allied relationships.⁸² With regard to the strictly North American dimension of the Euro-Atlantic collective defence burden, Canada did not even show up on Mr. Trump's radar.⁸³

Yet, as noted above, this is as it has always been. From the American perspective, the Euro-Atlantic community, with NATO at its core, has always been all about European security. A recent book on the importance of alliances to the United States, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances*, makes no mention of NORAD at all, and refers to Canada only once in passing as one of those allies who underspent on defence, relative to their ability to pay, in the 1980s.⁸⁴ While this mission may strike at Canadian sensitivities, it is neither surprising nor significant. Although the United States' closest allied collective defence relationship and most direct shield when it comes to securing the American homeland, NORAD and other US-Canada bilateral defence arrangements attract little attention in the vast literature and public discourse on U.S. foreign and defence policy.

In 1980, James Earys wrote that "From virtually every perspective of Canada's external policy, it appeared to those in charge of it that membership in a North Atlantic coalition would be for their country – in more ways, perhaps, than for any of its other members – a beneficial outcome."⁸⁵ The same might be said of Canada today. As NATO emerges from the uncertainty and acrimony of the Trump years and welcomes the Biden administration reassuring and comforting declarations of support and commitment to the Euro-Atlantic community, Ottawa finds itself in a position perhaps more favourable than that of its allies.

Over the past four years, and in fact since the Russian seizure of Crimea and aggression against Ukraine, Canada has rallied to the allied cause. It has made relatively significant and much appreciated contributions in Latvia, Iraq and Ukraine, commitments that have markedly, if not entirely, compensated for its decision to remain below the NATO goal two percent of GDP devoted to defence. As the Biden administration encourages, rather than demeans, allies into doing more, Ottawa can, with much truth, say that it has already paid it forward.⁸⁶

To be sure, as with its European allies, Canada has, at least rhetorically, embraced the view that multilateralism was a way to discipline American unilateralism, providing a mechanism for consultation with, and the exercise of influence by, its security partners. However, given that focus of these discussions has always been the security of Europe, which was ultimately guaranteed by the United States, Canada has been the ‘odd-man-out’. As Henry Kissinger astutely wrote in 1979:

Canada’s somewhat aloof position combined with the high quality of its leadership gave it an influence out of proportion to its military contribution... (It) was beset by ambivalences which, while different from those of Europe, created their own complexities. It required both close economic relations with the United States and an occasional gesture of strident independence. Concretely, this meant that its need for American markets was in constant tension with its temptation to impose discriminatory economic measures; its instinct in favour of common defense conflicted with the temptation to stay above the battle as a kind of international arbiter. Convinced of the necessity of cooperation, impelled by domestic imperatives toward confrontation, Canadian leaders had a narrow margin for maneuver that they utilized with extraordinary skill.⁸⁷

It is clear that Canada’s instinct in favour of the common defence has remained strong, indeed the experience of the Trump years appears to have made it stronger. But Canadian leaders and diplomats are also acutely aware of their narrow margin for maneuver. As America’s closest, but by no means most important ally, Canada has no illusions about the reality of American multilateralism: that it comes with acceptance of American leadership and the pretense of concert.

Secure within a nominally bilateral yet profoundly lopsided North American partnership which brings with it an almost automatic guarantee of security, NATO has provided Canada with a politically convenient multilateral dimension to its defence policy. This approach has worked well for Canada in the past, and is likely to be even more effective under the Biden administration, which will champion the familiar American

unilateral-multilateral leadership. In doing so, the US will provide Canada with much needed security in the Euro-Atlantic Community and the opportunity to participate in, although not influence, key allied consultations regarding that security. Above all, it can be expected that Ottawa will welcome a return to American acceptance of Canada's "just enough" approach to defence policy, affording Canada the ability to determine the size and nature of its substantive contributions to the collective allied common defence burden.

This might not, though, mean a continuation of Canada's current commitments in Latvia and Ukraine or an assumption of new obligations in Europe. Calls for Canada to devote more attention to the Indo-Pacific region have been heard for nearly a decade now.⁸⁸ If the Biden administration looks to NATO allies to assume more of the burden in the Pacific, Ottawa might well see an opportunity to reduce Canada's own burden further by shifting its NATO emphasis to the Pacific. Such a commitment would only require the occasional participation in multilateral maritime exercises with Canada-based naval and air forces (which it has been doing for years already). Combined with modest increases in NORAD and broader North American security efforts, Ottawa would satisfy already low US expectations, even if it meant easing away from its traditional Euro-Atlantic focus.

Conversely, with NATO allies such as Germany and the United Kingdom, turning their attention to the Pacific area, security gaps remain in Europe. Indeed, Russia might see in the Alliance's pivot an opportunity to increase pressure on Baltic allies and especially on Ukraine. In these areas the Canadian contribution, though small relative to NATO's overall collective military power, is integral to sustaining the immediate mission. Moreover, as is now clear from the 2021 Federal Budget, Ottawa

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is not planning to measurably increase defence spending. Even for small and middle NATO members with restricted defence budgets, in fact especially for them, a realistic strategy means hard choices, beginning with “the prioritization of goals by assignment of resources.”⁸⁹

Thus it might be argued that Canada should not follow other allies in devoting more of continually scarce defence resources to the Indo-Pacific region, but rather sustain its commitments in the Euro-Atlantic region, notably the Baltics and Ukraine, where they continue to be needed. Combined with the limited – but nonetheless costly – demands that will be unavoidably required for NORAD modernization and improvements in Arctic security, Ottawa will be hard pressed to maintain a “just enough” defence posture without the additional burden of a greater commitment in the Indo Pacific region.

Conclusion: It Is still America's NATO

In 1963, the Canadian Ambassador to Washington, Charles Ritchie, recorded his observations of the self-proclaimed “best and the brightest” of the Kennedy administration:

...they are all cocksure here, all the leading officials-Ball, Acheson, Rusk, McNamara, and so on, right down the line. And at the top, in the Presidency, there is no humility, no self-doubt. The cast of thought in Washington is absolutist. It is true that there are a number of incompatible Absolutists, often in embattled struggle with each other, but all are Absolute for America, this super nation of theirs which charges through inner and outer space engine by its inexhaustible energy, confident in its right direction, the one and only inheritor of all the empires and the one which most fears and condemns the name of Empire, the United States of America, exhorting, protecting, preaching to and profiting by-half the world.⁹⁰

Nearly sixty years later, another group of the best and brightest have assumed power in Washington, “absolute for America” and “cocksure” determined to restore America to its rightful and necessary leadership role in the Euro-Atlantic world. They are aware that the potential costs to the United States of defection from the transatlantic security architecture are high, but from the President on down, they are convinced that costs are higher for Europe and exorbitant for Canada.

This confidence is further bolstered by the reality that for all the recent set-backs abroad and at home which have raised, not for the first time, doubts at home and abroad about America’s future and its

commitment to allied leadership, the United States, as Eugene Gholz and Harvey M. Sapolsky reminded us, remains “the most powerful nation in the world,

It has the most powerful military, the biggest economy, and the most dominating culture. It is the world’s leader in science, engineering, and medicine. Its universities are the most admired. Its corporations are the richest and most successful. People eat Big Macs, drink Coca Cola, fly on Boeings, use their iPhones, and watch Hollywood movies around the globe. Everyone knows the name of the American president, what the CIA does, and who you should call if there is trouble on your border.

The United States is also a very secure country. It is surrounded by two big oceans and two unthreatening neighbors. Its surveillance systems scour the globe looking for dangers. It has nuclear weapons, a Navy and Coast Guard on constant patrol, an Air Force on high alert and with a global reach, and an Army and Marine Corps second to none in capability and recent combat experience.⁹¹

The “plenitude” of continued unmatched power makes unilateral multilateralism the preferred choice for the conduct of U.S. foreign and defence policy. In this, Americans and their leaders can readily see that in the end, the transatlantic alliance turned out to be what sceptics in the U.S. always knew it would become: expensive and burdensome. U.S. returns on investment are largely political, not military: the initial Iraq episode dashed American hopes in expeditionary expectations of its allies, and showed that even when expectations of combat were removed, there was little appetite in Europe for Out-Of-Area NATO missions. Still, even, or especially, for the U.S., NATO membership has its privileges, such as corralling allies into collective commitments they would otherwise be highly unlikely to make. And while European allies were caught off-guard and upset about the unilateral American withdrawal from Afghanistan – the location of NATO’s most extensive out-of-area operations – no allies offered to step forward to replace US troops to save the gains made there.

From America's vantage point, America's allies in Europe are secure, and all the more so when compared to America's allies and interests in the Asia-Pacific. As long as these conditions can be expected to prevail, America will be looking to minimize its transatlantic security investment in Europe, optimize NATO for contributions by allies, and corral European allies and NATO to take greater responsibility along the European periphery wherever U.S. interests are not immediately at stake, not only the Maghreb and Sahara-Sahel but also to a growing extent the Middle East. Iran may be a possible exception, but even here the Biden administration seems to be been drafting patiently behind America's European allies.

Max Bergman has suggested that the European Union should be encouraged by the United States to play a greater role in military and security matters and that the EU is the military ally that America needs. This approach is not an alternative to the Alliance. Rather, "the EU should ultimately work hand in glove with the alliance, much the same way a member state would do. U.S. support for EU defense will not be a panacea, but it will go a long way toward strengthening the European pillar of NATO."⁹² Indeed, the EU has "earmarked 1.7 billion euros (\$2 billion) from its joint budget until 2028 to improve so-called military mobility in support of NATO," and has recently admitted outside partners such as the United States, Canada and Norway into this increased mobility effort.⁹³

Looking to the EU to support NATO Europe to assume more of the burden of Euro-Atlantic security is reminiscent of Richard Nixon's Guam Doctrine, the 1969 statement, born of America's exhaustion and discontent over the Vietnam War, and indeed, the cost of Cold War leadership. As noted above, President Obama's efforts at restraint echoed this approach. Under Trump, those reverberations became louder. But the Trump approach was not entirely consistent with the "less from the summer of '69."⁹⁴ Nixon had become convinced that the US had become needlessly fixated on peripheral issues, such as Vietnam at the expense of its resources and its vital interests. He did not want to abandon America's global western leadership role, nor its commitment to key allies in Europe and Asia. But he did want to place foreign policy

on a more realistic basis and look to regional allies to do more, as Ford and Cooper point out the Guam doctrine shook and concerned US allies in Asia, not notwithstanding Nixon's pledge. Some allies hedged against a further American disengagement and America's experience after Nixon's Guam doctrine suggests it takes time to convince allies that the United States "remains powerful, principled, present, and predictable"⁹⁵

The Biden administration wants to restore allied confidence in Europe in American security guarantees, even as it, in the Nixon-Obama-Trump tradition, seeks to foster greater contributions from allies and responsibility collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic area especially as Washington continues to turn its attention to the Indo-Pacific region. Indeed, not only does the US want Europe to take on more responsibility for security in Europe, in a continuation of post-Cold War urgings for the Alliance to go out-of-area, the US would like to see some of its NATO allies to go very far out of area and enlist under American leadership in the far East.

At the same time, European ambitions for military autarky outside of the Euro-Atlantic security community, would be very expensive, arguably hobbled by even greater collective-action problems without the incentive to "keep America in", and unlikely to yield greater political consensus. To be sure, given U.S. expectations about European and NATO engagement in and out of area, European allies now have a strong incentive to offset American pressure on spending more on defence by harness military synergies amongst European allies so as to complement rather than duplicate NATO. To that end, American expectations play into the hands of a majority of European allies: they know that both strategically and financially, they are better off with America than without, Germany first and foremost among them.

This is a political choice. Germany's multilateral deployment concept makes its expeditionary capacity dependent on the multinational battlegroup concept that involves 10 neighbouring countries. From a German perspective, that ensures significant expeditionary ventures must be multilateral by design, which relieves Germany from coming under unilateral pressure by the United States or other allies. At the same

time, it gives Germany leverage of those 10 partner countries, the same way that the United States exercises leverage over NATO. Germany has thus already hedged on a “light” version of European defence.

The eFP shows initial fruits of that labour: Germany as the framework nation providing leadership and headquarters capacity, but within the national battlegroup concept that, aside from Lithuania as the host nation, at different times has drawn on contingents from Belgium, Luxemburg, Norway, the Netherlands, France, Croatia and the Czech Republic. The eFP is very much in keeping with the new transatlantic spirit of ad hoc internal coalitions: NATO member states helping other NATO member states, but without having to rely on the United States to lead the entire operation. It proves the point: that NATO expansion actually made NATO less of an “Atlantic” entity. Most new members have neither geographic nor historical links to, let alone across, the Atlantic.

For Canada to decide to heed the call for leadership on both the eFP (as the framework national for Latvia) and the advise and assist mission to Iraq is testimony to the existential importance of NATO for its defence policy and national interest. Its geographic location means that it is relegated to playing second fiddle within Europe, just like it plays second fiddle in North America. However, Canada has very successfully harnessed the Euro-Atlantic architecture to maximize its ability to assert its national interests within a plurilateral framework. Indeed, it was Canada that first proposed the idea of a transatlantic alliance to begin with. It is also why Canada championed NATO as more than merely a military pact, and the need to forge economic, political and cultural bonds among its members. Canada was – and remains – seized with the idea the durability of the alliance depends on it being not merely a functional collective defence arrangement, but rooted instead in a Euro-Atlantic security community. That

Canada has very successfully harnessed the Euro-Atlantic architecture to maximize its ability to assert its national interests within a plurilateral framework.

qualitative difference is enshrined in Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty, commonly referred to as the “Canada article”. As one articulate Canadian diplomat put it during the negotiations that led to the North Atlantic Treaty, “[t]his link across the North Atlantic seems to me to be such a providential solution to so many of our problems that I feel we should go to great length and even incur considerable risk in order to consolidate our good fortune and ensure our proper place in this new partnership.”

From this vantage point, NATO is not merely a “democratic alliance,” it is an allied community of liberal democracies that has deeply affected the collective identity of its members. Thomas Risse’s well-known argument is that this sense of community helped the Europeans influence American policies through three mechanisms: norms that committed the allies to timely and meaningful consultation; norms that frowned on the use of material power resources in intra-alliance bargaining, but allowed leaders to invoke domestic pressures and constraints to gain leverage; and the penetrability of the American and allied political systems, which encouraged the formation of transnational and transgovernmental coalitions.⁹⁶ These coalitions extend to societal and bureaucratic actors, which frequently tipped the balance of power in Washington in favor of the Europeans. In effect, transnational norms explain why weaker states and wield power out of proportion to their material capabilities.

Alliances are also a tool of political statecraft, especially for middle powers such as Canada and Germany whose security fate is tied up in transatlantic relations, and who thus have a vested interest in their quality. For Canada, it means mitigating the risk of being left behind in international affairs. Meanwhile, transatlantic relations allow Germany to optimize its foreign multilateral policy payoff: with the European Union on soft power, and with the United States on hard power and especially (extended) deterrence.

That, however, comes at a price: leadership roles in the eFP and in current-day Iraq, earlier in Afghanistan and expanded expectations around the Mediterranean rim. At the same time, the U.S., irrespective of president, is looking to increase that price, in the form of concessions, such as on Nord Stream 2 and a common front on China at the expense

of (some) trade with China. On that file, Germany is more exposed than Canada because of its much larger and less asymmetric trading relationship with China.

The proposition behind the economic theory of alliances is also known as the exploitation hypothesis: the decision-making constraints imposed by the domestic lag effect of Trumpism along with shifting U.S. geostrategic preoccupations means that allies can expect the U.S. to put a higher price on the transatlantic relationship. Yet, as Robert Keohane observed so poignantly, allies still can exercise considerable political leverage over solicitous American foreign policy.⁹⁷ Whether the eFP or Iraq, Canada and Germany started paying it forward already during the Trump administration. They have myriad other options, such as purchasing more U.S. military gear and reallocating investments in soft power to areas where it will generate greater mutual benefit.

Whatever marginal options might be available to allies large and small, the Alliance will continue to be America's NATO if it is to survive at all; shaped in the future as it was in the past by its utility to United States national interests. Often characterized by some politicians and scholars a collection of ungrateful burden-shirking laggards, the Alliance did not fundamentally alter Washington's capacity to make the old and new NATO operate in accordance with American needs.

Ergo, allies had better get used to the latest manifestation of American multilateral unilateralism: while it may have been more subtle in the past, American allies can expect its rough and ready manifestation of late to persist behind the scenes, irrespective of presidential administration. President Biden is giving Europe a second chance – on America's terms.

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