

Trump's Impact on European Security

Policy Options in a Post-Western World

Clingendael Report

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Summary

US President Trump's renewed emphasis on sovereignty and national interests requires Europe to take (more) responsibility for its own security and defence. This Report examines the consequences of the new transatlantic relationship for Europe in a broad sense, focusing on the impact of the EU's new commitment to strategic autonomy on NATO. It suggests that the Trump administration will become increasingly disinterested in continuing to fulfill the role of the "benign hegemon" supporting global institutions, and that this will have major implications for Europe's security framework. It argues that the current drive to build a "Europe of Defence" is risky, as is the European belief that global governance may flourish even without US backing. It calls upon Europe's small and medium-sized countries to assure that the right balance will be struck between more European responsibility for security and defence, and keeping NATO central to all matters military.

1 Introduction: Back to Basics

One year into the Trump presidency, it is time to assess the new US administration's impact on European security based on facts, rather than hyperbole. The 2017 US National Security Strategy (NSS) sets out the contours of a new US foreign policy based on Realism and sovereign nation-states. Trump's NSS makes it clear that "putting America first is the duty of our government and the foundation for U.S. leadership in the world (...). This National Security Strategy puts America first."¹ The US is now taking a more nationalist ("America First") approach that is informed by a transactional understanding of politics. As a result, the US has little patience or love lost for large multilateral endeavours. This was exemplified by the US decision (in December 2017) to end its participation in the UN Global Compact on Migration. The US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, explained that "our decisions on immigration policies must always be made by Americans and Americans alone. We will decide how to best control our borders and who will be allowed to enter the country. The global approach in the [UN] New York Declaration is simply not compatible with US sovereignty."² This renewed emphasis on sovereignty and national interests has led President Trump to remind allies around the world that the US "can no longer be taken advantage of, or enter into a one-sided deal where the United States gets nothing in return. As long as I hold this office, I will defend America's interests above all else."³ Europeans have received this message loud and clear: *Realpolitik* is back and Europe has to take (more) responsibility for its own security and defence.

The past months have also reminded us that US foreign, security and defence policy is not shaped by the President alone.

Although this may all seem straightforward, the past months have also reminded us that US foreign, security and defence policy is not shaped by the President alone. In July 2017, the US Congress effectively blocked Trump's initiative to lift some of the sanctions against Russia. In October 2017, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis publicly split with Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, arguing that it was in the US interest to stick with the deal, even though Trump has often dismissed it as a "disaster." Likewise, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson struck a very pro-European tone in his Wilson Center speech (on 28 November 2017) assuring that "the US will

1 *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, Washington DC (December 2017).

See also "Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly", *Whitehouse.gov* (19 September 2017). Online.

2 Quoted in Colum Lynch, "Trump Boycotts U.N. Migration Talks", *Foreign Policy* (2 December 2017). Online.

3 US President Trump to the 72nd UNGA Session (19 September 2017).

remain firmly committed to peace, stability and prosperity, and liberty for Europe”, recognizing that the “next chapter of European history must be written in Europe’s own words.”⁴

The bottom-line of many recent developments is that the US seems increasingly disinterested in continuing to fulfil the role of the “benign hegemon” supporting global institutions.

For most Europeans, the fact that President Trump may not single-handedly alter the course of US policy towards NATO, the EU and other key institutions will be reassuring. Still, 4 (to 8) years of Trump will be more than a tempest in a teapot, but is bound to alter the strategic landscape in Europe, probably forever and hopefully for the better. This Report examines the consequences of the new transatlantic relationship for Europe’s security in a broad sense. Some old questions will be raised which have gained in political pertinence since they have moved from the range of speculation to harrowing reality. For example, what will be the impact on the EU’s renewed commitment to strategic autonomy on NATO, and how may the EU-NATO relationship be recalibrated to ensure that a (possible) future European Security and Defence Union (ESDU) will not alienate the US and break up the Alliance as we know it? Other strategic questions have come into view and may need consideration sooner than we are comfortable with. For example, is the EU still fully committed to the US, or will it be prepared to forge new strategic alliances (e.g. with China) now that the spirit of transatlanticism is tailing off? Even more fundamentally, can the EU insulate itself from the (possible) demise of global institutions now that the US seems hesitant to continue its support for key pillars of the liberal international order?

The bottom-line of many recent developments is that the US seems increasingly disinterested in continuing to fulfil the role of the “benign hegemon” supporting global institutions. This has major implications for Europe’s security framework. NATO is directly affected, as well as other security institutions and arrangements (ranging from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE], to the World Trade Organization [WTO] and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT]). This will impact on Europe’s security and even casts doubt on the viability of the continent’s present institutional (security) landscape and may require the recalibration of the EU’s Strategic Partnerships beyond the US.

4 Samuel Osborne, “Donald Trump To Be Blocked From Easing Russia Sanctions After US Congress Agrees Legislation”, *The Independent* (23 July 2017). Online; Thomas Gibbons-Neef and David E. Sanger, “Mattis Contradicts Trump on Iran Deal Ahead of Crucial Deadline”, *New York Times* (3 October 2017). Online; and “The U.S. and Europe: Strengthening Western Alliances”, Speech by US Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson at the Wilson Center (Washington DC), *US State Department* (28 November 2017). Online.

This Report argues that Trump's impact on European security is profound, strengthening already existing political forces working towards the EU's strategic emancipation from US tutelage. If – admittedly a rather big if – European leaders are willing and able to find a new *modus vivendi* with the US, including a new EU-NATO deal on strategic planning and Headquarters, the “Trump revolution” may end well for all involved. Much will depend on whether European leaders will choose the transatlantic relationship as a preferred route to shape the new rules of emerging global governance arrangements. If they choose to go it alone, transatlanticism is bound to suffer. In the end, this may erode NATO and leave the EU without a trusted security back-up if their cherished European Security Defence Union (ESDU) project fails.

2 Finally Home Alone? Separating Hyperbole From Reality

Ever since President Trump took office in January 2017, the future of transatlantic ties has been painted in the bleakest possible colours: here, it was argued, is a President who seems to be doing away with America's traditional role of "leader of the free world", is keen to strike shady deals instead of standing up for freedom and human rights, and is even questioning America's willingness to back up European security. A recent Harvard study indicates that major European news outlets have covered Trump's policies negatively, often overwhelmingly so (BBC: 74% negative; ARD: 98% negative).⁵ Guy Verhofstadt, who represents the European Parliament in the Brexit negotiations, added to the hysteria by suggesting (in February 2017) that "[w]e have an American president who is no longer seeing European unity as a pillar for his foreign policy and he is saying openly he hopes for a disintegration of the European Union."⁶ As a result, the overall public mood in Europe is now clearly anti-Trump, feeding into already existing anti-Americanism. In The Netherlands, approval rates dropped from 92% support for President Obama, to a dismal 17% support for Trump. Similar figures can be seen throughout the EU.⁷

This poses a daunting challenge to European policymakers, who realise that regardless of the public mood, Europe relies on the US as its main economic, political and security partner. Still, the prospect of a possible transatlantic rift is appreciated differently in different European capitals. Some see the Trump administration as an opportunity for Europe to finally stand on its own two feet. This follows Josef Joffe's thinking, who famously argued (as early as 1984) that the US acts as "Europe's pacifier", not only keeping the peace in Europe but also preventing Europe from growing up strategically (sticking to the metaphor of a baby's pacifier).⁸ In France, enthusiasm for using the Trump era to push the old idea of a "l'Europe puissance", is particularly pronounced (see

5 Thomas E. Patterson, "News Coverage of Donald Trump's First 100 Days", *Harvard Kennedy School Shorenstein Center* (18 May 2017).

6 "Guy Verhofstadt: Trump is a Threat to Europe", *BBC News* (1 February 2017). Online.

7 "U.S. Image Suffers as Publics Around World Question Trump's Leadership", *Pewglobal.org* (26 June 2017). Online.

8 Josef Joffe, "Europe's American Pacifier", *Foreign Policy*, no 54 (Spring 1984).

below).⁹ In other European quarters (notably in Poland), any shift away from NATO (and US patronage) towards EU military autonomy is considered an anathema.¹⁰

Despite some rhetorical shift towards *Realpolitik*, there may be more continuity than change when it comes to European security.

One year into the Trump administration, it is now possible to identify the key tenets of the new US administration's attitude (if not always policy) *vis-à-vis* Europe. Trump's National Security Strategy has – rather predictably – been criticised (both in the US and in Europe) for its Realist overtones and its combative rhetoric towards rogue-states, such as North Korea and Iran. Still, the US has already offered some clear markers indicating that despite some rhetorical shift towards *Realpolitik*, there may be more continuity than change when it comes to European security. The December 2017 visit to Europe by Secretary Tillerson has put many policymakers at ease. Tillerson had already declared that “our message to Europe is nothing has changed in terms of our commitment to you”, urging “European partners who have not done so already to meet the 2 percent of GDP target for defence spending [since] the commitment we made seem[s] to be a little out of balance.”¹¹

The continued US commitment to European security is reflected in the (proposed) 2018 US European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) budget of US\$ 4.8 billion (US\$ 1.4 billion more than the 2017 European Reassurance Initiative, ERI), aimed at increasing the US military presence in Europe as well as training, readiness and interoperability of the Alliance.¹² Furthermore, during his July 2017 trip to Poland, President Trump reassured NATO allies that the “United States has demonstrated with its actions and not just in its words that it stands firmly behind Article 5.”¹³ Arguably, this US security guarantee to its European allies is the keel keeping transatlanticism (and NATO) steady enough to weather today's political storm.

9 See, for example, Éric Verhaeghe, “Nouvelle ère : la doctrine Trump va obliger la France et l'Europe à négocier âprement un nouvel équilibre de puissance avec Washington”, *Atlantico.fr* (29 May 2017). Online.

10 “Polish Views of the EU: The Illusion of Consensus”, *Batory Foundation* (January 2017).

11 Tillerson's Wilson Center speech (28 November 2017). See note 4.

12 Today, about 35,000 US military personnel are stationed throughout Europe, including 7,000 troops under the ERI-umbrella (deployed throughout Europe on a rotational basis). Early-2017, the US army deployed an additional heavy brigade to Poland (comprised of 3,500 troops and almost 90 tanks), as well as a unit of 500 troops to Romania. See Nolan Peterson, “Trump Bolsters European Defense Against Putin”, *Newsweek.com* (29 May 2017). Online.

13 James Rothwell and Matthew Day, “Donald Trump Says West Must Show ‘The Will To Survive’ in Face of Threats From Russia and North Korea”, *The Telegraph* (6 July 2017). Online. This US commitment was further confirmed by the news that the US will sell Patriot missile defence systems (in the most modern configuration) to Poland, despite loud and formal Russian complaints.

Still, Europe's security is not only "guaranteed" by NATO, but by a wide web of other institutions and arrangements. For example, the EU's 2016 Global Strategy considers managing climate change risks essential to Europe's security and prosperity. By signing the so-called Energy Independence executive order (March 2017), President Trump has rolled back much of his predecessor's climate change commitments (including the Paris Climate Accord of April 2016). The US has also taken a markedly different (and more mercantilist) approach towards international trade (see below, section 6), which may even compromise the future role of the World Trade Organization (WTO).¹⁴ The Trump administration has also made proposals to cut its financial contributions to the United Nations (up to US\$250 million for 2018-2019), which will put pressure on many of the UN's agencies and programmes.¹⁵ As one of the largest funders of the UN system (paying 22 percent of the entire budget), a changed US financial (and political) commitment will put pressure on bodies like the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, which receives 40 percent of its funds from US contributions); the World Food Program (WFP, 23 percent US funding); UN peacekeeping operations (22 percent US funding); and UNICEF (9 percent US funding).¹⁶ Although the immediate impact of these (possible) cuts may be modest, the political impact will be significant. It will signal and confirm that the US is gradually withdrawing from its role as the world's "benign hegemon", leaving behind a leadership vacuum that rising Great Powers like China may be happy to fill.

For Europe, the key question is therefore simple – are regional and global institutions sufficiently resilient now that the US may no longer be willing and able to provide funds, leadership, discipline and protection?

For the EU, this is particularly worrisome since its Global Strategy acknowledges that the "EU will promote a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core."¹⁷ For Europe, the key question is therefore simple – are regional and global institutions sufficiently resilient now that the US may no longer be willing and able to provide funds, leadership, discipline and protection? This is a question that extends far beyond "the future of NATO." Instead, it asks what norms and rules will apply in a future "post-Western" world¹⁸, a world no longer dominated by the US but under the nebulous aegis of global governance.

14 Shawn Donnan, "Trump's Next Trade Target", *Financial Times* (7 December 2017), p. 9.

15 "US Wants \$250 mn. Cut To UN Budget", *AFP* (13 December 2017). Online.

16 John McArthur and Krista Rasmussen, "What Would US Cuts to the UN Look Like?", *Brookings* (1 May 2017). Online; and Stewart M. Patrick, "U.S. Funding For the United Nations: More Than Anybody Realizes?", *Council on Foreign Relations* (28 September 2017). Online.

17 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Global Strategy For the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (Brussels, June 2016), p. 15.

18 Oliver Stuenkel, *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016). See also www.postwesternworld.com

3 A Tired Liberal International Order? Implications for European Security

Interestingly, this question has kept academics busy for many decades.¹⁹ Most scholars would agree that the US has been a “benign hegemon”, supporting regional and global institutions (ranging from NATO to the UN, the IMF and the World Bank) since this serves its economic, political and security interests (as well as that of its allies).²⁰ By doing so, the US has created a “rules-based global order” (now heralded by the EU in its Global Strategy) inspired by the liberal norms and values of its own open and capitalist society. The key question is whether the Trump administration is bringing this era of (so-called) “hegemonic stability” to a close.²¹

Trump’s transactional approach to international politics indicates that the US may no longer be willing (or perhaps even able) to invest in the liberal international order it created since World War II. In many policy areas, US client states (in Europe and elsewhere) have been “free riders”, benefitting from Washington’s commitment to defeat communism; to encourage global free trade; to limit WMD proliferation; to maintain (a semblance of) stability in the Middle East and Southeast Asia; etc. (the list is long). It was already clear under President Barack Obama that US commitment was dwindling. Famously, President Obama redefined American exceptionalism, suggesting that the US may no longer be the shining beacon of freedom for the rest of the world.²² As a result, the US has become a “normal” Great Power, on a par with China and Russia. What are the implications of these developments for European security?

As said, Europe’s worries extend beyond concerns for the future of NATO (discussed in more detail below), but pertain to a wide range of institutions and policy areas. For example, global trade and financial conventions remain embedded in the so-called “Washington consensus”, a set of liberal rules devised and guarded by the US

19 See, for example, Peter van Ham, “The Lack of a Big Bully: The Theory of Hegemonic Stability and Regimes in the Study of International Relations”, *Acta Politica*, vol. 27, no. 1 (January 1992).

20 Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

21 For a clear negative answer, see Salvatore Babones, “American Hegemony Is Here To Stay”, *The National Interest* (July/August 2015). Online.

22 Stephen Brooks, *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Obama* (London: Routledge, 2014).

and institutionalised in the (so-called) Bretton Woods Sisters (the IMF and the World Bank, most importantly).²³ But for how long? Since the nigh-on unstoppable rise of China, a new “Beijing Consensus” is gradually pushing Western liberalism aside, mainly under the guise of “international diversity.”²⁴ Within Western societies (and academia in particular), China’s call for “diversity” has met with an enthusiastic response, neatly fitting the postmodern narrative that norms, values and identity are “relational”, and that claims to exceptionalism (and hence superiority) are never justified.²⁵ As a result, the US has become less inclined to push its liberal values within key institutions, and many of its (former) allies are less willing to accept them. This has most recently resulted in the bizarre spectacle at the 2017 Davos World Economic Forum (WEF), where China’s President Xi Jinping was hailed as the defender of “globalisation” (Chinese style, that is). At that meeting, WEF Founder Klaus Schwab even argued that “[w]e can hope that China in this new world will assume a responsive and responsible leadership role”, filling the (assumed) vacuum left by the US.²⁶

This appreciation of a more modest US role in international affairs is partly informed by the desire to create a level playing field, which could – it is hoped – offer the EU an opportunity to develop into a global security actor (see below). This assumes that even without US hegemony, established public goods, such as international law and free trade, will remain available. It also overlooks the fact that US global military presence (e.g. the US Fifth Fleet in the Gulf) keeps a check on regional hostilities, which would otherwise quickly flare up, further destabilizing Europe’s strategic vicinity. Moreover, key security arrangements like the NPT and MTCR (just to name two) could hardly survive.²⁷ Without US hegemony, global strategic uncertainty would thrive, encouraging more states to fend for themselves, if need be with nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV’s, or drones).²⁸

The Trump administration’s strategic engagement in the Middle East as well as in Southeast Asia has increased compared to Obama’s half-heartedness.

23 Narcís Serra and Joseph E. Stiglitz (eds.), *The Washington Consensus Reconsidered: Towards a New Global Governance* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

24 Ties Dams and Frans Paul van der Putten, “China and Liberal Values in International Relations: Opposing the Promotion of Democracy, Human Rights and Liberal Market Economy”, *Clingendael Report* (December 2015).

25 Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

26 Noah Barkin, “Chinese President to Defend Globalization in Davos”, *Reuters.com* (17 January 2017). Online.

27 Peter van Ham, “The MTCR at 30: Ideas to Strengthen the Missile Technology Control Norm”, *Clingendael Policy Brief* (November 2017).

28 Chris Cole, “Drones, Proliferation and the MTCR: US Presents Discussion Paper”, *Dronewars.net* (2 November 2017). Online.

Needless to say, this scenario is not inevitable. Arguably, the Trump administration's strategic engagement in the Middle East as well as in Southeast Asia has increased compared to Obama's half-heartedness. Clearly, the US National Security Council has convinced Trump that US involvement in the Middle East is required to ensure that Russia and Iran do not become regional hegemony, and that China's strategic ambitions in Asia need to be checked by a significant and credible US military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. These conflicting signals from Washington – on the one hand a tit-for-tat, transactional approach to IO's and Alliances, on the other hand a building up of US military presence in key regions – get in the way of drawing clear conclusions for Europe's security. Still, President Trump's style of leadership and communication is creating so much confusion and uneasiness that cautious European leaders are choosing to hedge their bets and prepare for the worst. The US President's impulsiveness (which he already announced in his April 2016 foreign policy speech arguing that "we must as a nation be more unpredictable")²⁹, combined with his overnight Twitter-rants (which now reaches 45+ million worldwide followers) often touching upon current foreign, security and defence matters, ruffles many feathers worldwide. As a result, even staunch allies have become strategically disoriented.

Trump's strategic volatility comes at a time when Europe faces security challenges ranging from Russian aggression, Iranian nuclear ambitions, to Islamic fundamentalism and uncontrolled mass-migration. The imminent Brexit also underscores the fact that the EU is being challenged from within, reminding leaders that their own cherished "European Project" is more fragile than expected. The EU's Global Strategy still assumes that European values and interests "are best served in an international system based on rules and on multilateralism."³⁰ As a result, the EU has invested much of its financial and diplomatic resources in a strategy encouraging "effective multilateralism."³¹ The EU prides itself as being the single largest financial contributor to the UN system, funding 38 percent of the UN's regular budget, 40 per cent of UN peacekeeping operations and about 50 percent of all UN Member States' contributions to UN funds and programs. The European Commission is also a major UN partner, contributing over € billion in support of external assistance programs and projects. The EU has concluded so-called "strategic partnerships" with several of UN programs and specialised agencies, ranging from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, in 2004), the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization (WHO and ILO, in 2004), to UNHCR (in 2005), and UNESCO (in 2012).

29 "Transcript: Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Speech", *New York Times* (27 April 2016). Online.

30 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Global Strategy For the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (Brussels, June 2016), p. 4.

31 Edith Drieskens and Louise G. van Schaik (eds.), *The EU and Effective Multilateralism: Internal and External Reform Practices* (London: Routledge, 2014).

As indicated earlier, the US may decide (informed by self-interest) to maintain its support for NATO, and even be willing to work towards a new *modus vivendi* with the EU (see below). For now, most of Europe's second-tier security institutions and arrangements (like the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the International Criminal Court) will largely remain unaffected by a (possible) US retreat from global leadership. Key institutions such as the WTO may not get such an easy pass. For example, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer argued (on 18 September 2017) that China "is a threat to the world system", and that "[u]nfortunately, the World Trade Organization is not equipped to deal with this problem." Lighthizer further suggested that "the WTO, in dispute-settlement understanding, is deficient", and that the US "must find new ways to ensure that a market-based economy prevails."³² The new US NSS (December 2017) makes it clear that the US "will press to make the WTO a more effective forum to adjudicate unfair trade practices."³³

The unease about the future of American leadership in Europe (and beyond) has opened opportunities for proponents of a federal EU.

The unease about the future of American leadership in Europe (and beyond) has opened opportunities for proponents of a federal EU, of which the planned ESDU is a core component. Under the undeclared motto "never let a serious crisis go to waste", the European Commission, supported by key EU Member States such as France and Germany, is now making steps towards a Political Union that should hold its own on the world stage, even on key military and strategic matters.³⁴ Arguably, the "Trump Effect" has worked as a catalyst, strengthening and accelerating political forces keen on creating a "Europe of Defence."³⁵

32 Robert Lighthizer, "U.S. Trade Priorities: Robert Lighthizer, United States Trade Representative", *CSIS.org* (Washington DC, 18 September 2017). Online.

33 *National Security Strategy of the United States* (2017), p. 41.

34 European Commission, *Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence*, Brussels (7 June 2017). Online.

35 James Crisp, "Britain Must Drop Objections To EU Becoming 'Military Power' After Brexit, Says Michel Barnier", *The Independent* (29 November 2017). Online.

4 NATO and European Defence – Appreciating the “Trump Effect”

During his election campaign, Donald Trump startled many Europeans by referring to NATO as “obsolete” and warning them that the US might not always come to save them in the event of an armed attack. No American presidential candidate, Republican or Democrat, had ever questioned the US commitment to NATO’s core Article 5 – an attack on one Ally is an attack on all Allies – since the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949. Nor were any doubts removed by President Trump on his first visit to the new NATO Headquarters in Brussels on 25 May 2017. In his press statement, Trump conspicuously failed to make any reference to the US guarantee to Europe’s defence.³⁶

To many, it remains unclear whether the US attitude towards defending Europe has really changed. Most EU leaders have assumed that President Trump’s rhetoric was primarily meant to bully them into increasing their own defence spending. EU leaders have also emphasised the fact that the US is a complex and multifaceted democracy, in the hope that the President’s radicalism may not only be tempered by reality, but also by the checks and balances of the US political system, as well as bureaucratic tardiness. Moreover, from the moment they took office, Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Mattis left no doubt that the US commitment to NATO still stands; Vice-President Mike Pence has made equally reassuring comments.³⁷ The US Congress has also expressed itself overwhelmingly in favour of NATO, backed up by public opinion polls showing that the majority of the American population supports the Alliance.³⁸

36 According to a recently held poll, 74% of the population in The Netherlands agreed that Europe can no longer rely on the unconditional support of the United States for its security. According to the same poll, 71% agrees that Europe has to organise its own defence. See “Opiniepeiling NAVO”, *Atlantische Commissie* (November 2017). Online.

37 Emily Tamkin, “Amid Chaos in Trump White House, Diplomats Turn to Pence”, *Foreign Policy Report* (18 October 2017).

38 Stanley R. Sloan, “Transatlantic Relations in the Wake of Trump’s Turbulence”, *Atlantisch Perspectief*, no. 3 (2017). According to the latest poll organised by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 69% of the US population thinks NATO is “essential” for the security of the United States, compared to 65% in 2016. See Dina Smeltz *et al.*, “What Americans Think About America First – Results of the 2017 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy”, Chicago Council on Global Affairs (October 2017). Online.

As briefly mentioned earlier, the US has actually reinforced its military presence in Europe, suggesting that actions speak louder than words. A third combat brigade has been sent to Europe while heavy equipment for a fourth comparable unit is stocked in depots in Belgium, The Netherlands and Poland. For the first time since the World War II, US Marines are permanently deployed to Norway.³⁹ The number of American Special Forces present in countries close to Russia's borders has even quadrupled in 2017.⁴⁰ US air, naval and land forces are participating in one NATO exercise after the other. NATO's command structure is to be adapted to facilitate military reinforcements from the continental US to Europe and to support the movement of forces across the European continent. Furthermore, the US has expanded its sanctions on Russia and accuses Moscow of violating arms control agreements.

It can also be argued that it is not US President Trump but Russia's President Vladimir Putin who will largely determine NATO's future and the American involvement in Europe's defence. In 2017, US-Russian relations have reached rock-bottom, and are now even worse than at the end of Obama's period of office. Concerns about Russian disinformation and meddling in Western democratic processes (including the very US election that brought Trump into the White House) explain why Russia is now largely seen as NATO's strategic adversary. As long as President Trump has no strategy towards Russia to break the existing deadlock, Washington will have no choice but to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence posture.

It can be argued that it is not US President Trump but Russia's President Vladimir Putin who will largely determine NATO's future and the American involvement in Europe's defence.

The main benefit of the Trump Effect is that European leaders now realise that they have to step up their own defence efforts to keep NATO alive. All NATO members fully understand that Europe's strategic holiday is over; a sentiment clearly reflected in German Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement that "[w]e Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands."⁴¹ For President Trump – who primarily thinks in transactional terms – the criterion of 2 percent of GDP has become a key measurement tool.⁴² As a result, more European countries will spend 2 percent of their GDP on

39 Christopher Woody, "US Marines Are Extending Their Deployment to Norway, And It's Already Irked Russia", *Business Insider Nederland* (23 June 2017). Online.

40 Nick Turse, "US Special-Operations Forces Have Quietly Moved Onto the Russian Border", *The Nation* (30 October 2017). Online

41 Jon Henley, "Angela Merkel: EU Cannot Completely Rely on US and Britain Anymore", *The Guardian* (28 May 2017). Online.

42 At the NATO Wales Summit (2014) all NATO nations agreed to aim for spending 2% of their GDP on defence by 2024.

defence in the years to come, in particular Eastern European Allies (e.g. Poland and the Baltic States). Still, numerous European countries are unlikely to reach that target even by 2024 (among others Germany, Italy and The Netherlands).⁴³ But even these “laggards” may point to the upward trend in their defence budgets and to the real and concrete efforts that are made to improve their military capabilities. For example, Germany is restructuring its land forces to comply with NATO's Article 5 requirements and has taken up a leadership role in EU defence cooperation, together with France. Both countries have been in the lead to advance the ESDU starting with the launch of Permanent Structured Cooperation – or PESCO (mid-December 2017). European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has qualified PESCO as the “sleeping princess” of the EU's Lisbon Treaty (of 2007), claiming that today “the princess is waking.”⁴⁴ With PESCO, the European Commission will also set up a new European Defence Fund (EDF) that will inject €1.5 billion annually into multinational defence research and development as of 2021.

If the EU's desire for strategic emancipation from the US (and NATO) results in political and military doctrines that are no longer compatible with Washington, transatlanticism will inevitably suffer.

As EU leaders reiterate *ad nauseam*, PESCO and the EDF are no competitors to NATO. Still, much will depend on the way the EU and NATO will work together in future. If the EU's desire for strategic emancipation from the US (and NATO) results in political and military doctrines that are no longer compatible with Washington, transatlanticism will inevitably suffer.

43 The Rutte-3 Government will raise Dutch defence spending by €900 million in 2018 and gradually increasing it to €1.5 billion in 2021. According to current projections that will bring the percentage of GDP spent on defence in The Netherlands from 1.16 (2017) to 1.26 in 2021 – falling short of even reaching the European average (currently 1.47%). See *Introductiebundel Defensie - Hoofddirectie Beleid*, The Hague (October 2017).

44 Arthur Beesley, “EU Sets Timetable For Tighter Military Co-operation”, *Financial Times* (22 June 2017). Online.

5 Arms Control and WMD Non-Proliferation – More Agreement Than Meets the Eye?

Europe's security (and defence) extend beyond NATO and PESCO, and are also affected by a wide array of (conventional) arms control and WMD non-proliferation treaties and arrangements. While President Trump has made numerous, often rather contradictory statements on nuclear weapons, US policy seems to remain unaltered on key issues. For example, Trump's suggestion (as a presidential candidate) that Japan and South Korea should obtain nuclear weapons for their own defence, or that the US should triple the number of its nuclear weapons, have not been developed into formal changes in US strategic commitment to key Asian allies; both of these options are unlikely to be considered for the upcoming US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR, see below).⁴⁵

Concrete US policy changes on arms control are rather limited so far, and are generally not in line with European preferences. For example, the Trump administration has refused to recertify the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, often simply called the Iran Deal), which concluded a long multilateral process of negotiations to limit Iran's nuclear programme. Trump has repeatedly called the JCPOA "a bad deal" (claiming that Iran has at least breached the spirit of the 2015 Agreement), and made it clear that the US is willing to scrap the Iran Deal completely if no improvements are made. Trump's tough talk on the Iran Deal has pitted the US against all other parties in the Agreement: other permanent members of the Security Council, Germany, the EU, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is officially tasked to verify the JCPOA. Still, the US has fallen short of scrapping the Iran Deal in its entirety, and the formal decision now lies with the US Congress, which has yet to decide. As a result, the JCPOA remains a bone of contention in the transatlantic relationship, mainly because the EU considers the Iran Deal a triumph of multilateral diplomacy, whereas the Trump administration considers Iran an enemy to be isolated and sanctioned.⁴⁶

45 Andrew Rafferty, "Donald Trump Has History Of Contradictory Statements on Nuclear Weapons", *NBC News* (11 October 2017). Online.

46 Gardiner Harris, "Top E.U. Diplomat Rejects Trump's Call for New Iran Nuclear Deal", *New York Times* (7 November 2017). Online.

Were the EU and US to lock horns over the Iran Deal, matters could quickly escalate and negatively affect already tough dossiers like the future EU-NATO relationship.⁴⁷

Another problematic decision by the Trump administration is not to enter into negotiations with Russia to renew the New START Treaty. This bilateral US-Russian treaty (which specifies mutual limits on the numbers of nuclear warheads) is strongly and actively encouraged by most European countries, mainly because it sets the tone for global nuclear disarmament. The US and Russia currently possess some 95 percent of the world's (roughly) 15,000 nuclear weapons. Although the New START Treaty is due to expire in 2021, no negotiations to renew the treaty seem on the cards.⁴⁸ The same ambiguity and inertia apply to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty (between the US and Russia). This treaty already got into trouble under President Obama, with accusations of treaty violations traded back and forth. However, while the Obama administration put some effort into saving the INF Treaty, no activity of this kind can be seen under Trump. This may at least partly be related to the many unfilled vacancies at the State Department and the Pentagon. On the positive side, the US administration has not withdrawn from the INF Treaty either.⁴⁹

Were the EU and US to lock horns over the Iran Deal, matters could quickly escalate and negatively affect already tough dossiers like the future EU-NATO relationship.

The Trump administration has also not changed the traditional US approach towards the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Still, President Trump has made numerous statements calling for an increase in the number of US nuclear weapons, which certainly goes against the letter and spirit of the treaty itself (Article VI in particular). Former US Presidents (including Obama) often invested heavily in nuclear modernisation, but a possible future increase in the *number* of nuclear weapons would be a blow to the NPT, with unclear global ramifications.⁵⁰ The first indications of the new NPR give reason for

47 Tarja Cronberg and Tytti Erästö, "Will the EU and the USA Part Ways on the Iran Deal?", *SIPRI Commentary* (11 October 2017). Online.

48 Julian Borger and Ben Jacobs, "Trump Denounced Nuclear Arms Treaty in Phone Call With Putin – Sources", *The Guardian* (10 February 2017). Online; and Phil Stewart, "Despite Tensions, U.S. Sees Value in New START Treaty With Russia", *Reuters* (23 September 2017). Online.

49 Gregory Hellman and Brian Bender, "The Other Treaty on the Chopping Block", *Politico* (24 June 2017). Online.

50 Steve Holland, "Trump Wants to Make Sure U.S. Nuclear Arsenal At 'Top of the Pack'", *Reuters* (23 February 2017). Online, and Courtney Kube, "Trump Wanted Tenfold Increase in Nuclear Arsenal, Surprising Military", *NBC News* (11 October 2017). Online.

some concern.⁵¹ Christopher Ford, special assistant to the president on WMD policy, has argued that the “traditional post-Cold War approach of seeking to demonstrate disarmament bona fides by showing steady numerical movement towards elimination, while trying to avoid steps that could actually undermine US national security, has largely run its course and is no longer tenable, especially given evolving security conditions.”⁵² Rumours that the NPR may skip the traditional ultimate aim of a nuclear-weapons-free world, but may instead introduce smaller, easier-to-use nuclear weapons and even ease the strict conditions under which the US will use nuclear weapons, have raised concerns in Europe and beyond.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that the EU itself remains divided on nuclear arms control. For example, whereas Austria and Ireland are strong proponents of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (generally called the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty), all European NATO Member States oppose this treaty.⁵³ What is more, the Trump Effect has even torn down the long-standing taboo on discussing the possibilities of developing a so-called nuclear “Euro-deterrent.”⁵⁴ Ideas for the development of an EU nuclear weapons program have been floated since early-2017, and may well mature if the EU’s military ambitions materialise. The very notion of a nuclear “Euro-deterrent” remains a political minefield (and to some a strategic nightmare), but also indicates that the Trump Effect may work miracles.

On other WMD-related security matters the EU and the US have largely overlapping agendas and policies with only minor and certainly bridgeable differences. For example, within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN, the US and (most of) Europe are allied against Russia on the complicated dossier of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.⁵⁵ Over the next few years, the future role of the OPCW will have to be decided upon, mainly since all chemical weapons are set to be destroyed by 2023. In this debate on the OPCW’s future, the US and its European allies have yet to find a common vision. Given Trump’s reluctance to support multilateral endeavours, it is likely that the US will call for (further) reductions of the OPCW’s budget and staff, whereas most European states will focus on maintaining the expertise of the organisation.⁵⁶

51 Paul McLeary, “With Pentagon, State Positions Vacant, Trump Nuclear Review Slows Down”, *Foreign Policy* (15 September 2017). Online.

52 Julian Borger, “Trump Team Drawing Up Fresh Plans to Bolster US Nuclear Arsenal”, *The Guardian* (29 October 2017). Online.

53 Emil Dall, “A Balancing Act: NATO States and the Nuclear Ban Treaty”, *ELN Issue Brief* (July 2017). Online.

54 Max Fisher, “Fearing U.S. Withdrawal, Europe Considers Its Own Nuclear Deterrent”, *New York Times* (6 March 2017). Online.

55 “Russia Says UN-OPCW Syria’s Khan Sheikoun Report Looks Like ‘Amateur Document’”, *Sputnik News* (1 November 2017). Online.

56 Peter van Ham, Sico van der Meer and Malik Ellahi, “Chemical Weapons Challenges Ahead: The Past and Future of the OPCW - With a Case Study on Syria”, *Clingendael Report* (October 2017).

Except for the JCPOA and the New START Treaty, the level of disagreement between the Trump administration and its European allies regarding arms control and WMD-related matters remains ordinary.

Except for the JCPOA and the New START Treaty, the level of disagreement between the Trump administration and its European allies regarding arms control and WMD-related matters remains ordinary, and certainly not bigger than the major controversies of the past (the anti-nuclear protests in Europe of the 1980s come to mind). Although statements by the White House may at times diverge from the policies of (most) European countries, there is little in the way of actual, concrete policy change that goes against Europe's security and defence interests.

6 Salvaging Transatlanticism, With or Without Trump

It seems clear that strong transatlantic ties remain central to Europe's security, whoever occupies the White House. But is Trump the exception? Arguably for the first time ever, the Trump administration raises an existential question for Europe, and for the EU in particular: Should transatlanticism be salvaged, and if so: at what cost(s)? Should the EU stay its course and believe in "effective multilateralism" and global governance, or should it inch towards President Trump's more hard-nosed, Realist worldview? During the Obama era, the EU was strengthened in the belief that globalisation will encourage openness, interconnectivity, and – hence? – democracy. President Obama's reluctance to apply American hegemony throughout the world generally met with EU applause, mainly because Obama's liberal worldview harmonised with Europe's own self-image as a soft and normative power. Until recently, the EU was willing to invest in strong transatlantic ties to assure that the transition towards multi-polarity would be smooth. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is the major example of this strategy and may offer some guidance (and inspiration) for a viable way forward to keep transatlanticism alive (or at least afloat).⁵⁷

TTIP was widely seen as an effort by the transatlantic West to combine its economic and political preponderance to rewrite global trade rules reflecting its own economic principles and political values.⁵⁸ Although TTIP was also supposed to offer "jobs and growth", its main goal was geopolitical: Together, the EU and US were assumed to maintain regulatory dominance in an era of emerging trading blocs, probably led by China. As German Minister for Economic Affairs Sigmar Gabriel argued (in 2014): "A transatlantic agreement [like TTIP] should and must set standards for economic globalization."⁵⁹ Needless to say, these standards would be based on, or at least inspired by, Western practices such as liberal democracy and open markets. With Trump's "Make America Great Again"-approach to foreign policy, this preferred option of

57 Peter van Ham, "TTIP and the Renaissance of Transatlanticism: Regulatory Power in the Age of Rising Regions", *Clingendael Report* (July 2014).

58 Jeffrey J. Schott and Cathleen Cimino, "Crafting a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership: What Can Be Done?", *Peterson Institute for International Economics Policy Brief*, no. 8 (March 2013), and Klaus Günter Deusch, "Atlantic Unity in Global Competition: T-TIP in Perspective", *Deutsche Bank Research EU Monitor* (August 2013).

59 "Gabriel: Abkommen Setzt Maßstäbe für die Ganze Welt", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (5 May 2014). Online.

transatlantic agenda- and rule-setting may well be closed. At least for now. Shortly after his inauguration, President Trump withdrew the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a 12-nation agreement aimed at enhancing American influence in Asia through open markets and free trade. The remaining 11 nations have since made an effort to keep the plan alive (now mainly driven by Australia and New Zealand).⁶⁰ In November 2017, these 11 countries agreed (at the APEC Summit in Vietnam) to keep core elements of the TPP, even without US support. Still, the US withdrawal from the TPP is widely seen as a major blow to US influence in Asia, possibly leaving a leadership vacuum in Asia that China seems all too happy to fill.⁶¹

Although TTIP is not officially dead, it certainly is in a political coma (negotiations are on hold). On 25 May 2017, a new EU-US Joint Taskforce was set up to exchange views on a possible way forward. For Europeans it will be key to assure that a new "TTIP-like" trade deal remains feasible. Apart from keeping NATO afloat, boosting transatlantic trade (and avoiding serious trade conflicts) will be essential to maintain the spirit of cooperation and interdependence that has kept US-European ties healthy over the decades. Trump considers himself a great dealmaker, based on a transactional view of politics.⁶² The good news is that the EU-US trade relationship is largely balanced, and that the US trade deficit (of app. US\$ 500 billion, in 2015) "is being financed by largely European investment into the US manufacturing sector."⁶³ The logic and rationale of boosting transatlantic trade and investment should therefore be clear. This was confirmed by USTR Lighthizer, arguing that there is "just an enormous amount of trade between the United States and Europe. So improving the rules there is something we should do. And working with Europe on a whole variety of other things, including the challenge with China but also negotiations within the WTO, is also important."⁶⁴

Although the opportunities for transatlantic cooperation in the field of trade are therefore wide and open, for the EU the problem may be that "[n]o other American president since the second world war has been as unpopular in the EU as Trump is. Starting negotiations with Trump on trade runs the risk of transferring some of this negative image to the [European] Commission."⁶⁵ TTIP negotiations elicited massive public discontent even during the Obama era, raising concerns that such a deal will result in lower European standards on food safety, the environment, privacy and labour

60 "TPP Nations Agree to Pursue Trade Deals Without US", *CNBC.com* (20 May 2017). Online.

61 Timothy R. Heath, "Strategic Consequences of U.S. Withdrawal From TPP", *Rand.org* (27 March 2017).

62 Leon Hadar, "The Limits of Trump's Transactional Foreign Policy", *The National Interest* (2 January 2017).

63 Tim Worstall, "America's Trade Deficit Is Largely Paid for By European Investment in American Manufacturing", *Forbes.com* (22 June 2016). Online.

64 Lighthizer, "U.S. Trade Priorities:" (18 September 2017).

65 Daniela Vincenti, "EU, US to Set Up Joint Task Force to Make Progress on Trade in Trump Era", *Euractiv.com* (26 May 2017). Online.

conditions. For the sake of European security, the EU is well-advised to overcome its aversion to the current US administration and to capitalise on Trump's willingness to strike a "good deal" with Europe if this is on offer in future. This implies that EU officials, as well as European leaders in general, should refrain from vilifying the Trump administration in order to prepare the general public for a possible renewed era of transatlantic cooperation, with TTIP at its strategic core.

European leaders should refrain from vilifying the Trump administration in order to prepare the general public for a possible renewed era of transatlantic cooperation.

Much will depend on the EU's readiness to take the transatlantic track towards the "post-Western" world of global governance. Although this option remains wide open, current EU policy documents indicate that the EU is prepared – and even keen – to go it alone, which would be a serious strategic mistake with possible detrimental implications for European security. The European Commission's "Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation" (May 2017) suggests (in a rather tongue-in-cheek way) that "even countries that have traditionally championed an open global economy are now looking into ways to put a brake on imports, limit immigration and favour domestic production" (i.e., the US), while also underlining that "multilateral institutions and rules are needed to enable countries to jointly promote common solutions in a globalised world (...) Without them, the more powerful and less scrupulous countries and companies could impose their rules and interests on weaker ones. This would run counter to the EU's founding values of cooperation, the rule of law, equal rights and solidarity upon which the EU is built."⁶⁶ The conclusion drawn by the European Commission is (unfortunately) not that in order to set new rules for globalisation more transatlanticism is required. Instead, it is argued that to "better harness globalisation, we need more global governance and global rules."⁶⁷ Who will codify and enforce these rules remains utterly unclear. All this suggests that the EU assumes that the liberal international order will sustain itself, even without US hegemony. This is a high-risk strategy, where the future of European security is in the balance.

66 European Commission, *Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation*, Brussels (May 2017), p. 12.

67 *Ibid.*

7 Conclusion: European Policy Options in a Post-Western World

Some may expect (and/or hope) that the Trump interlude will be brief, and certainly brief enough for Europe to bide its time and wait for “normalcy” to return to the White House after the election of a Democratic US President. The smarter bet will be to expect that MAGA will not be an intermezzo, but will set the tone of a 4 or 8-year era. For Europe, and the EU in particular, the main security risk is that with President Trump at the helm, the liberal international order as we know it may not be sustained, and already-existing cracks will widen. This is unlikely to be a pleasant spectacle, since this erosion may take down many a cherished international organisation, regime, arrangement and treaty in its course. Although Trump will bear the brunt of this collapse, if and when this happens, we should acknowledge that we have seen this coming since the late-1980s.⁶⁸

Since Europe is so dense in institutions and is married to the belief that “effective multilateralism” will inevitably result in fair and equitable global governance, the consequences for European security may be more serious than for other regions. This especially affects Europe’s many small and medium-sized countries who have invested (or at times largely outsourced) their security and defence in these very institutions. Countries such as The Netherlands, for example, have *de facto* (and at times even *de jure*)⁶⁹ committed themselves to promoting the international rule of law, and accept the supremacy of international law over domestic law. All these (mainly European) countries will see their security affected negatively if the international rule of law is no longer (forcefully) supported by US hegemony, and/or if the IO’s that back this order are seriously weakened. The same will happen if the liberal international order becomes less liberal. Europe’s larger countries (such as the UK, Germany and France) will always find ways to influence global processes, with varying success. As a result, Europe’s small and medium-sized countries have most to lose if the EU alienates itself from the US.

68 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987). See also Patrick Porter, “Was Paul Kennedy Right? American Decline 30 Years On”, *Warontherocks.com* (17 June 2015). Online.

69 See Articles 90 and 94 of the Dutch Constitution.

What are the policy options for the EU and its Member States to escape and/or mitigate the consequences of America's dwindling global hegemony? Three options come to mind.

Firstly, the EU could continue its current approach and go full steam ahead towards strengthening global governance, with or without the US, depending on whether (transatlantic) interests and values overlap. Such a strategy will acknowledge that post-Western international platforms and arrangements will be looser, less formal and less streamlined than desired, but this will be taken for granted. That the outcome of such a multipolar international order may be less liberal than preferred, should then be accepted as well. Today, the EU profiles itself as a "force for a fairer global order", combining open markets with increased human well-being.⁷⁰ But in all EU documents on globalisation, the question as to who will set the future, "fairer" rules of global governance, and who will enforce them (if at all), remains unanswered. If the answer is China, this should set off political alarms. It should also warn us that investing in global governance is a risky, even dangerous enterprise, now that the liberal international order has proven fragile. The EU's expectations that "European norms and values" will inspire the new, global rulebook should be considered doubtful, at best. It certainly will prove to be a rather costly option, since the EU will be called upon to fill the financial gaps the US may leave behind after it defunds various multilateral project and agencies. For example, the US decision to reinstate the so-called Mexico City policy was countered by a Dutch-led drive to make up for the financial shortfalls of a US defunding of global family-planning policies.⁷¹ Will the EU and its Member States be able and willing to pay up, putting their money where their mouths are?

This steady-as-it-goes option will ruffle few feathers in Brussels, and will buttress already strong political forces calling for Europe to establish itself as a "normative power", supporting multiculturalism, open borders and globalism of all sorts. Under this option, the tendency will be strong to consider the Trump administration (and the President personally) as the antithesis of all things European. This will not make finding workable solutions to put EU-NATO relations on a new footing any easier. It will also complicate the process of reaching transatlantic consensus on complex foreign policy and security dossiers such as dealing with Russia, Iran, Islamic fundamentalism, or climate change. All these challenges raise the question whether they should be tackled through established institutions following the multilateral path of global governance, or whether *Realpolitik* and (military) force should prevail. As long as President Trump holds office, the EU's preference for global governance is bound to make matters worse for transatlanticism.

70 European Commission, *Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation* (2017), e.g. p. 13.

71 Claudia Dreifus, "In Response to Trump, A Dutch Minister Launches 'She Decides'", *New York Times* (20 February 2017). Online.

Secondly, the EU could decide to develop into a more hard-nosed global player, defining its interests autonomously from the US. This would open up opportunities to strike new strategic partnerships with Russia, China, India and other Great Powers when and where it sees fit. This follows the advice of scholars like Sven Biscop, who argued (in December 2017) that “the EU must invest in cooperation with the other powers [i.e., Russia and China], whenever interests overlap, and try to pull them into multilateral cooperation (from which the US is withdrawing).”⁷² The EU is already following a quasi-autonomous course *vis-à-vis* China. Many European countries joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) from the outset (contrary to US preference). The EU is also cozying up to China’s big geostrategic plan to strengthen its influence in Europe through its “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) project. Closer EU-China ties might alleviate Europe’s ongoing economic and financial woes (at least in the South), but would also further alienate the EU from the Trump administration, which seems prepared to take China head on.⁷³

As long as President Trump holds office, the EU’s preference for global governance is bound to make matters worse for transatlanticism.

Getting closer to China is a high-risk strategy many EU leaders seem to consider quite seriously.⁷⁴ An EU-China free trade pact is becoming increasingly realistic, particularly since China is already the EU’s second largest trading partner (after the US). The EU now even considers China a constructive partner in the global struggle against climate change, whereas the Trump administration positions itself as a sceptic.⁷⁵ Will China replace the US as the EU’s preferred (economic and strategic) partner? Clearly, this will not happen any time soon. For one, Europe’s concerns about Beijing’s human rights record will stand in the way of such a strategic *rapprochement*. But the simple fact that this option is now on the table is revolutionary, reflecting the new realities of a post-Western world. For the EU, the Trump Effect has made this option more palatable.

This option should also take into account that working towards Europe’s strategic emancipation from the US will seriously complicate the realisation of a new working relationship between the EU and NATO. If the European Security and Defence Union comes about, EU military planning will be in-house, and no longer farmed out to, and/

72 Sven Biscop, “The Great Powers Have Their Ways”, *Egmont Security Policy Brief*, no. 93 (December 2017), p. 3.

73 Andrew Rettman, “Trump is ‘Gift’ For China’s EU Agenda”, *EU Observer* (13 September 2017). Online.

74 “EU-China Summit: Moving Forward With our Global Partnership”, *European Commission Press Release* (2 June 2017). Online. See also Alicia Garcia-Herrero *et al.*, “EU-China Economic Relations to 2025: Building a Common Future”, *Chatham House* (September 2017); and Yang Yanyi, “Closer China and EU Cooperation Vital For Global Prosperity”, *EU Observer* (15 May 2017). Online.

75 Ed Davey, “China and the EU Confront Trump on Climate change”, *The Guardian* (1 June 2017). Online.

or coordinated with NATO. An EU with Great Power ambitions simply cannot accept relying on the US for its own security and defence. This implies that NATO may well go the way of the Western European Union (WEU): into history's dustbin. Moreover, were the EU to dress up as a Great Power (and behave as such), it would most certainly rouse Russia as well as China, but probably without formal US military backing (by way of NATO's Article 5). Despite the understandable *Wille zur Macht*, the EU is well-advised to steer clear of this option since it risks setting in motion a dangerous security dynamic in Europe without any EU escalation dominance.⁷⁶

Lastly, the EU could decide to make a committed and consolidated effort to save transatlanticism. Such a strategic choice is based on the understanding that – regardless of who occupies the White House – the EU can neither count on global governance nor on itself to provide for its own security and defence. This will be the hardest choice for the EU and those Member States that are keen to (ab)use the Trump Effect to coax Europe towards greater federalism. Assuring that all European NATO members will stick to their defence commitments will be essential. Developing a new EU-NATO relationship keeping the Alliance central in strategic and military planning will be of equal importance. Since 2016, the EU's Global Strategy aims for “strategic autonomy.” But, as Jolyon Howorth asked (in May 2017): “If the EU actually achieves strategic autonomy, what is NATO for?”⁷⁷ As long as this question remains unanswered, the EU's ambition for strategic autonomy has to be toned down and reformulated to include a central role for NATO.

With Brexit looming and the Franco-German axis in overdrive, it will be up to Europe's small and medium-sized countries to champion this option. They should start by increasing their own defence budgets (to a minimum of 2 percent of GDP), and by ensuring that the new EU-NATO relationship keeps the Alliance central to European security.⁷⁸ It may also include concerted efforts to open the way for a new “TTIP 2.0”, facilitating Brexit to make use of the United Kingdom's traditionally good ties with Washington. USTR Lighthizer's recent suggestions (see above) that the US and EU could join forces to challenge China and to reform the WTO remains an open invitation to breathe new life into transatlantic cooperation, across the board.

76 Peter van Ham, “The Power of War: Why Europe Needs It”, *Clingendael Diplomacy Papers*, no. 19 (December 2008).

77 Jolyon Howorth, “Strategic Autonomy and EU-NATO Cooperation: Squaring the Circle”, *Egmont Security Policy Brief*, no. 85 (May 2017), p. 2.

78 See for concrete suggestion on the future EU-NATO relationship: Julian Lindley-French (ed.), “GLOBSEC NATO Adaptation Initiative: The Future Tasks Of the Adapted Alliance”, *Globsec.org* (November 2017), pp. 19–20. Online.

The choice for global governance will open the door to China while ostracizing the US (option 1). This is as risky as betting on EU “strategic autonomy” without a NATO back-up (option 2). Much of the world (and Russia and China in particular) still considers the EU a “sheep in sheep’s clothing.”⁷⁹ PESCO will not change this, even if it gives rise to an ESDU. Since smaller European countries have most to lose (and since Germany and France are revving the Euro-engine), it will be up to countries like The Netherlands, Denmark and Poland to assure that the right balance is struck between increased European responsibility for their own security and defence, and keeping NATO central to all matters military. As usual, it is finding the middle ground that is most sensible. That this middle ground has become so contentious and narrow is what should worry us most.

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79 As Winston Churchill famously labelled Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald.