



Whither Transatlantic Security?

– Values, Interests, and the Future of
US–European Relations

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Sammanfattning

”Geopolitikens återkomst” är ofta hur dagens globala förändringar, och revanschistiska makters utmaningar av den internationella regelbaserade ordningen sammanfattas. Asiens ökande betydelse och påverkan på maktbalansen i världen och den ryska aggressionen mot Ukraina är bara två exempel på hur internationell politik dramatiskt har förändrats.

Även västvärlden, USA och Europa, präglas av förändring. Europeisk integration och Natos expansion är svårare frågor idag än vid millennieskiftet. Inte minst Brexit är en utmaning för EU:s utveckling. Nato har återigen behövt fokusera på Europa istället för på operationer långt borta. Det är dock alltså oklart i vilken utsträckning alliansens medlemmar delar samma hotuppfattning. I USA verkar retorik och agerande inte alltid gå i takt.

Denna rapport studerar transatlantiska relationer och vart de kan ta vägen. De frågor som relationen mellan USA och Europa ställs inför är dock av sådan fundamental karaktär att det är nödvändigt att ställa frågan: hur kan vi förstå transatlantiska relationer?

Nyckelord: EU, Europa, geopolitik, imperium, kalla kriget, Kina, Kissinger, NATO, transatlantiska relationer, transatlantisk uppgörelse, Trump och USA.

Summary

Tectonic shifts are underway in world affairs, global changes include the rise of Asia and challenges to the international rules-based order, not least given the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Often, these changes, and the actions of revanchist powers, are referred to as the 'return of geopolitics'.

There are also changes within the West, the US, and Europe, and transatlantic relations. The momentum of EU integration and NATO expansion is more complicated than at the turn of the millennium. Brexit poses a fundamental challenge to European integration. NATO has had to return its focus to deterrence and collective defence in Europe, a shift from out-of-area operations. However, it is unclear to what extent its European members share the same threat assessment. In the US, it often seems that the actions and rhetoric of the administration are not always in harmony.

This report examines the direction of transatlantic relations. However, their direction confronts issues that impact the fundamentals of the relationship between the US and Europe, making it necessary to address the question: How can transatlantic relations be understood?

Keywords: China, Cold War, empire, EU, Europe, geopolitics, Kissinger, NATO, Transatlantic relations, transatlantic bargain, Trump and the USA.

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Preface

FOI's project on Northern European and Transatlantic Security (NOTS) continuously tracks security and defence policy developments in Sweden's neighbourhood, the rest of Europe and the United States for the Swedish Ministry of Defence.

Transatlantic relations will have to adapt to a changing security environment. Both the European Union and the US are experiencing political stress, due respectively to Brexit and the Trump administration. Simultaneously, Russia, with its aggression against Ukraine, is challenging the European security order. This report explores and sheds light on the fundamentals of transatlantic relations and their future.

The author would first and foremost like to thank Emma Sjökvist for her considerable contribution to the planning and research of the report. Thanks are also due to Jules Bergman for bringing the report through all necessary processes. A special thank go to Dr. Mike Winnerstig, who reviewed the study, for his important and constructive comments.

Krister Pallin

Project Manager NOTS

1 Introduction

In the life of societies and international systems there comes a time when the question arises whether all the possibilities of innovation inherent in a given structure have been exhausted ... Are the stresses of today a sign of consolidation or the first symptoms of decay? Will they lead to renewal or to disintegration?

Henry Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership*, 1965¹

There is always change in the world, but the turmoil of the last few years has resulted in a number of publications discussing whether present trends are driving transatlantic relations to the breaking point.² The return of geopolitics in international affairs and the rise of Asia, and especially China, risk altering key assumptions that have underpinned transatlantic relations since the end of the Second World War: that the US and Europe face the same threat and that Western values result in common interests.

Until recently many experts in the West were looking outward at the problems of the world, assuming that the West was a known factor, with Europe safe and free, but recently there is so much that ‘just isn’t so’ about transatlantic relations. Analysing changes in transatlantic relations has now become crucial to understanding what is happening to the West’s role in international affairs. The world is experiencing the end of the era of economic and political globalisation, of increased democratisation and multilateralism under American leadership, which lasted from the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s until the economic and financial crisis and increased great power competition from the end of the 2000s. The ongoing economic crisis has exacerbated international tension, just as the economic crisis of the early 1930s, which followed the Wall Street crash of 1929, later contributed to international disputes. In terms of European defence, this is underlined by the shift in focus away from international military missions to a renewed focus on territorial defence.

The purpose of this paper is to further our understanding of transatlantic relations, more specifically to understand key problems that stem from a changing balance of power in the world and from the 2008 economic crisis. The main question, which of course can only be given a partial answer in

¹ Kissinger, Henry A. *The Troubled Partnership – A re-appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Published for the Council on Foreign Relations (1965), p. 249.

² See for example Wicket, Xenia. *Transatlantic Relations: Converging or Diverging?* Chatham House Report, January (2018), Aaltola, Mike and Gaens, Bart (eds.). *Managing Unpredictability – Transatlantic relations in the Trump era*. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Report 51 (2017), Lute, Douglas and Burns, Nicholas. *NATO at Seventy – An alliance in Crisis*. Harvard, Belfer Center Report, February, (2019) and Stelzenmüller, Constanze. *Normal is over – Europeans hope that the Trump era is an anomaly*. However, the transatlantic divide has never been so stark. Brookings – The New Geopolitics, February (2018).

a few pages is: How can transatlantic relations be understood? And, taking the cue from the Kissinger quote above: What are the fundamental challenges to the relationship today?

In order to answer the above questions, this paper deals with transatlantic relations in the following order: first, different perspectives on transatlantic relations are considered, then a brief analysis delves into the state of European security so that transatlantic relations can be understood. This is followed by a discussion of whether it is common transatlantic values or common interests that hold transatlantic relations together. This is then followed by an examination of how new global challenges put pressure on transatlantic cooperation.

In order to avoid semantic and philosophical confusion regarding ‘values’ in a transatlantic context, values here refer to the joint outlook enshrined in the Atlantic Charter in 1941, with its aims of self-determination, freer markets to prevent competitive protectionism, and collective security. The Atlantic Charter was the result of a summit, held at sea in August 1941, between US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, before the US entered World War II, about what kind of world the US and the United Kingdom wanted to see.³ After this, the post-war economic order was agreed at Bretton Woods, in 1944. The UN Charter followed in 1945. Concerning Europe in particular, the Marshall Plan came about in 1947 and was eventually followed by the Atlantic Pact, in 1949. All this was the foundation for the Atlantic political community.⁴

This spawned the international rules-based order of today. ‘Interests’, on the other hand, vary over time. It should be noted that countries often have similar and lasting national interests. Today, for example, environmental questions, such as those dealt with in the 2016 Paris Agreement on climate, are a major issue in transatlantic affairs, but in the 1980s a key issue was the nuclear arms race, and whether to forward base a new generation of nuclear missiles. The latter example was a sign of a deep-seated interest: to deter a common enemy.

The following pages are not an exhaustive analysis of all elements of transatlantic relations. Notably absent is an analysis of transatlantic financial relations and the intelligence ties across the Atlantic, both of which could, respectively, help to gauge the levels of mutual dependency and trust

³ NATO, ‘The Atlantic Charter’, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_16912.htm? (accessed 7 October 2019).

⁴ Ikenberry, John G. ‘Unilateralism in US Foreign Policy: What Role does America See for Europe’ in Lundestad, Geir. *Just Another Major Crisis? – The United States and Europe since 2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008), p. 81.

between the US and Europe.⁵ While the approach to transatlantic relations in this paper is traditional, with its focus on European defence and security, it is worth noting that since 2008 economic issues and security matters have blended into one another when it comes to transatlantic relations.

⁵ Intelligence cooperation is a 'patchwork' that is the result of when and how countries choose to work together; the mystery compared to other policy areas is only that this area is shrouded in secrecy, as pointed out in Herman, Michael. *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), pp. 203-204. About finance, see Tooze, Adam. *Crashed – How a Decade of Financial Crisis Changed the World*. London: Penguin Books (2018).

2 Defining transatlantic relations

Transatlantic relations as we know them today originated with the end of the Second World War, even if the focus for the past 25 years has been on economic growth and making common cause – or not – in out-of-area operations. However, recent developments have necessitated a look at the fundamentals of the US-European relationship.

2.1 The return of geopolitics

What is evident, at least since the economic crisis that began in 2008, is that an increasingly multipolar world does not necessarily result in strengthened multilateral institutions. Instead, it can result in international disputes, as in Ukraine and the South China Sea. That China and Russia turn to the traditional tools of great power politics at the expense of diplomacy presents challenges, also for transatlantic relations.

Writings about European security often equate transatlantic relations with the role and future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but one of the reasons that close transatlantic ties have survived is that they have been about more than security and defence. A number of trends may drive the US and Europe closer together, or apart. For example, it is also possible to approach the future of transatlantic relations from an economic perspective. As shown in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, such an economic approach cannot ignore international conflicts. According to the economic historian Adam Tooze, questions in the 2010s about financial diplomacy involving ‘the United States and the EU...were not posed in a power-political vacuum but in a geopolitical force field’...demonstrated... ‘by the clashes with Russia over the destiny of Georgia and Ukraine’.⁶ Whatever lens is chosen to study transatlantic relations, it is easy to be carried away by present challenges. In fact, the relationship between Europe and the US (and Canada, which is, of course, as important as any other European NATO member, but not as important as the superpower, the US, and hence not highlighted in each instant) have weathered many crises since the Second World War.

‘Geopolitics’ has become a popular term. Nowadays, many editorials, and indeed academics, use the term ‘geopolitics’ to highlight that security and defence are important issues. This is in contrast to the previous era of globalisation, 1990-2010, when economic cooperation was central to international affairs and conflicts were about combating terrorism or peace-

⁶ Tooze, Adam. *Crashed – How a*, p. 609.

keeping. Sometimes the new trend, characterised by territorial disputes and great power politics, has been described as ‘the return of geopolitics’.⁷

Apart from being a label, geopolitics is also a specific way of studying world affairs. Originally, geopolitics emphasised the importance of geography.⁸ This paper does not employ any geopolitical theory. However, different geopolitical perspectives today influence thinking about international issues. Throughout the following pages, there are a few references to theoretical uses of geopolitics.⁹ This paper discusses two uses of geopolitics understood as an approach to international affairs: the American interpretation of geopolitics from the 1940s, and ‘the return of geopolitics’.

The latter sticker has been used by some experts when trying to encapsulate the challenge from a few regional powers that seek to dominate their respective neighbourhoods while also trying – to a lesser or greater extent – to challenge the international rules-based order as led by the United States.¹⁰ Russia, China, and Iran are the primary examples and, hence, are often labelled as ‘revisionist powers’.¹¹

China, unlike Russia and Iran, is also associated with ‘the rise of Asia’, meaning the widespread assumption that leading states in Asia will have more political power and influence, including military means, as a consequence of Asia’s increased economic power. This shift in the global balance of power, combined with the behaviour of revisionist powers,

⁷ Changes in international relations often cause geopolitics to be discussed in one form or another. For an introduction to geopolitics and how it relates to international relations theory see for example Guzzini, Stefano (ed.). *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe? Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2012).

⁸ Colin, Gray. *Geopolitics and Deterrence*. *Comparative Strategy*, Vol 31, No 4, 24 September (2012), pp. 295-321.

⁹ The popularisation of geopolitics probably began in 2009 with the publication of George Friedman’s book, *The Next 100 Years – A Forecast for the 21st Century*, and the launch of his website, Stratfor. However, international developments probably contributed to the interest in geopolitics by explaining what the ideas of the 1990s perhaps could not. For theoretical uses, see for example, Wigell, Mikael. ‘Conceptualizing regional powers’ geoeconomic strategies: neo-imperialism, neo-mercantilism, hegemony, and liberal institutionalism’. *Asia Europe Journal*. Volume 14, number 2, June (2016), pp. 135-151. Geoeconomics and geopolitics are two parts of geostrategy, according to Wigell, but this is advanced interpretation, and here the generic and well-known label geopolitics suffices, since we seek to focus on issues, rather than framework.

¹⁰ Russell Mead, Walter. ‘The End of History Ends’ in Almquist, Kurt, Linklater, Alexander and Mackenzie, Andrew (eds.). *The Return of Geopolitics*. Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation (2016), pp. 13-14.

¹¹ Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defence Strategy of the United States of America* (2018), p. 2.

poses a fundamental test for transatlantic relations, but much of the ground has already shifted under our feet since the end of the Cold War, which is what the next section shows.

2.2 The American interpretation of geopolitics and the role of NATO

Geopolitics also exists as a theory, or rather as a bag of certain theories, and not only as a convenient modern label used to highlight strategic challenges. Many geopolitical theories predate the origins of modern transatlantic relations. Geopolitical reasoning may even have informed the policies that set up transatlantic security, i.e. NATO, in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹² The usefulness of a long-term view is evident from publications that explain NATO's continued existence after the Cold War by showing the organisation's adaptability.¹³

In strategic terms, something the US had at the end of the Second World War, unlike the Europeans, was a post-colonial and, for its time, up to date interpretation of the world, i.e. an American version of geopolitics. American decision-makers realised that the US could not risk another power dominating the Eurasian landmass. The US assumed that a Eurasia dominated by one single other power would have left the US vulnerable, even with the US situated on another continent, since the resources of Eurasia would then have easily been at the disposal of an American adversary. American awareness of this risk was heightened in 1941, when Nazi Germany seemed on the verge of conquering the Soviet Union and sharing Asia with its ally, Japan.

Similarly, just after the war, it seemed as if the Soviet Union, expanding its influence in the opposite direction into Central and Eastern Europe, could eventually dominate Eurasia. In the US, strategic thinkers realised that since land and sea power were linked, the Soviet Union would dominate the world if it controlled the so-called 'rimlands', meaning the coastal regions of the Eurasian landmass, such as Europe. Hence, the US had to counterbalance the Eurasian power, the Soviet Union, in the rimlands. NATO was the response to this geopolitical dilemma in the western rimland, Europe. In the Far East, the US came to rely on a hub-and-spoke

¹² For American geopolitics, see Art, Robert J. *America's Grand Strategy – and World Politics*, Routledge (2009) and Milne, David. *Worldmaking – the Art and Science of American Diplomacy*. New York: FSG (2017).

¹³ For an institutional analysis, see Johnston, Seth A. *How NATO Adapts – Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance since 1950*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins university Press (2017).

system of separate alliances, with allies tied directly to the US, but not to each other, instead of being linked together with the US in a multilateral collective alliance, such as NATO.¹⁴

Today's Russia is not on a par with the Soviet Union. Nor does Russia have an ideology that can be as easily packaged and sold globally as Soviet communism once was. However, none of this should detract from the fact that Russia is a danger to the West, as shown by its interference in Western elections and its readiness to engage in foreign policy adventurism, as is evident from its war with Georgia and its annexation of Crimea. This does not amount to a new Cold War between Russia and the West on a scale comparable to the first Cold War, since it is in the main a regional conflict.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there is the risk of a global Cold War between the US and its allies on one side and revisionist states such as China, Russia, and Iran, on the other.¹⁶

¹⁴ Rynning, Sten. 'Geopolitics and the Atlantic Alliance', in *European Security since the Fall of the Berlin Wall*. Mérand, Frédéric; Foucault, Martial and Irondelle, Bastien (eds.), Toronto: Toronto University Press (2011), pp. 173-179. Geopolitics as described in this paper is of course an abbreviation of the accomplishments of mainly Halford Mackinder and Nicholas Spykman. While the concept of geopolitics had a questionable reputation, given its association with Nazi Germany's ambitions, it was further developed by Nicholas Spykman in the early 1940s on the basis of Halford Mackinder's ideas from the 1910s. For a critical analysis of Spykman, see Art, Robert J. 'The United States, the Balance of Power, and world War II – Was Spykman Right?', in Art, Robert J. *America's Grand Strategy – and World Politics*, Routledge (2009), pp. 69-102. However, during the Cold War, there were a plethora of alliance arrangements, not all of which proved as durable as NATO; notably, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) failed, and the US had to rely on a hub-and-spoke system of alliances in Asia.

¹⁵ See also Lo, Bobo. *Russia and the New World Order*. London: Chatham House (2015), pp. xv and 166.

¹⁶ See Russell Mead, *The End of*, pp. 13-21.

3 Dawn of an old era in European security

For nearly three decades, European security has been defined in terms of ‘after the fall of the Berlin wall’, in 1989, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1991. However, at least since 2014, Russia has undermined European security, notably with its aggression against Ukraine.¹⁷ 25 years ago, in the Europe of the 1990s, things seemed somewhat different, and Europe appeared well on the path to becoming ‘whole and free’.¹⁸

3.1 The 1990s perspective and now

In 1994, Simon Duke, an expert on transatlantic and European affairs, compiled a list of all of the things that had changed since the Cold War. As he himself noted, the list could have been drawn up differently, but the point of it was to contrast the 1990s with what had gone before.¹⁹ His list is interesting, since the changes to security that at the time seemed new, yet permanent, do not seem so now.

Duke noted that the bipolar structure had ended in Europe. In today’s Europe, the Warsaw Pact has not been resurrected, but there is clear evidence that Russia is a revisionist regional great power. Furthermore, both Russia, with its military modernisation and threatening defence posture, as highlighted by its exercises, and the West, with its consequent new need to engage in deterrence, for example in the shape of NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic countries and Poland, represent a bipolar military structure of sorts.²⁰ Incidentally, this shows that another of Duke’s observations, that authoritarianism had failed in Eastern Europe, was of short duration. Today, authoritarian rule is on the rise in several states, not only Russia.

¹⁷ See Coker, Christopher. ‘The West and Russia – Another Front in the New Cold War?’, in Dahl, Ann-Sofie (ed.). *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region – Russia, deterrence and reassurance*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press (2018), pp. 49-53.

¹⁸ The phrase stems from a speech given by U.S. President George H. W. Bush on May 31, 1989, in Mainz, West Germany.

¹⁹ While a part of an academic tome, his list seems to have been compiled almost in passing, when events were fresh and alive to the things that mattered at the time. List in Duke, Simon. *The New European Security Disorder*. Oxford: St. Martin’s Press (1994), pp. 203-204.

²⁰ Shea, Jamie. ‘NATO’s Role in Baltic Sea Security’, in Dahl, *Strategic Challenges in...*, pp. 33-36.

In addition, both Russia and the US are updating their respective nuclear weapons arsenals.²¹ Russian discussions about the use of nuclear weapons are now, and from time to time, more freewheeling than in Soviet times. Unlike the West, Russia's posturing includes the use of nuclear rhetoric; this is seen, for example, when Russia claims that nuclear weapons are part of its standard military doctrine.²² The readiness to refer to the use of nuclear weapons can be a potentially powerful Russian tool to exert political pressure on other countries. In the 1990s, posturing at the arms-control table was thought a relic of the past. It has now made a comeback. The suspension of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, in 2019, is a case in point.

Duke also noted that the forward deployment of armoured units capable of short-warning offensives in Central Europe had come to an end (but that conclusion also depends on what one recognises as Central Europe). However, Russia is now involved in warfare in Ukraine, a country the American strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski thought was pivotal to the 'geopolitical balance' between a resurgent Russia and Europe.²³ Russia is most likely able to launch a military offensive against a NATO country bordering Russia, such as a Baltic state.²⁴ In other words, the security dilemma facing the West in Europe is reminiscent of the Cold War, although the potential area of confrontation has moved further east.

What Duke thought was the wave of the future has proven less than durable. Unlike what he expected in 1994, Europe now faces territorial threats and the need for military capabilities able to deter enemies.

3.2 Transatlantic friction – a long term trend

Already in the early 2000s, ten years later, the world was changing in terms of how secure it was – and transatlantic relations began to experience stress. In 2003, Geir Lundestad, a leading historian on transatlantic affairs, compiled a list of the state of transatlantic relations.²⁵ This was at a time when the US was preparing to take the plunge into Iraq and transatlantic relations were heading for a nadir, a situation probably unequalled until the

²¹ Department of Defense, *Summary of the...*, pp. 2 and 6.

²² From the conference 'Euro-Atlantic perspectives on Russia' in Helsinki, 17-18 June, (2019). Dalsjö, Robert; Korkmaz, Kaan och Persson, Gudrun. Örn, Björnen och Draken: Militärt tänkande i tre stormakter. FOI report, FOI-R--4103--SE, September (2015).

²³ See Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard*. New York: Basic Books (1997), p. 41.

²⁴ See, *Russian Military Capability*, from FOI, forthcoming.

²⁵ Lundestad, Geir. *The United States and Western Europe since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2003), p. 281.

arrival of the Trump presidency. Contrasting the present with Duke's and Lundestad's lists shows that things in transatlantic relations have taken a turn for the worse. Duke's points illustrate that European security is now facing greater security challenges than just after the end of the Cold War, whereas Lundestad's concerns about the future of transatlantic relations have been confirmed.

In 2003, Lundestad stated that the Cold War is over, which is true. *The Cold War belongs to the past. However, that great powers are engaging in geopolitics is not a thing of the past. Furthermore, the regional tension between Russia and the West in Europe is in many ways a Cold War 2.0, at least for countries in Northern and Eastern Europe. Now, the rules of engagement are uncertain and hence the dangers are more similar to those of the early Cold War of the 1950s, rather than to those of the Cold War's steady state in Europe in the 1980s. Furthermore, there is tension between the US and China (a situation that Section 6, below, delves into more fully).*

Back in the 2000s, transatlantic friction stemmed mainly from the apparent unilateralism of the US, which was a tendency Lundestad thought would increase.²⁶ With the US currently engaging in policies on the theme of 'America first', for example in trade, it now seems that it was the administration of Barack Obama, rather than that of George W. Bush, that was the exception to the rule. Unilateralism is perhaps the deeper trend, but its content has changed. Nowadays, the worst-case scenario (but not the most likely one) regarding American foreign policy is not the unilateralism feared in the 2000s. Then, President George W. Bush was thought to be ready to engage in large military operations alone, or with small 'coalitions of the willing', if deemed necessary, but now the fear is that President Donald Trump will steer US foreign policy entirely towards a unilateral isolationism, where the US retreats from its global responsibilities.²⁷

Lundestad foresaw that out-of-area disputes would become 'increasingly frequent and...difficult to handle for the two sides of the Atlantic'.²⁸ At the time, the issue was the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but, regarding the West's intervention in Libya in 2011, the roles of at least several European powers and the US were reversed, with some of the Europeans dragging the US with them.²⁹ The civil war that began in Syria in 2012, and all its reverberations, not only in Syria, but in the region and elsewhere, have

²⁶ Lundestad, *The United States and...*, p. 281.

²⁷ See, Rossbach, Niklas H. Trump och amerikansk säkerhetspolitik. En analys av president Trump och hans utrikespolitiska tradition. FOI report, FOI-R--4562--SE (2018).

²⁸ Lundestad, *The United States and...*, p. 281.

²⁹ Bindi, Federiga. 'Italy – the Middle Country', in Bindi, Federiga (ed.) *Europe and America – The End of the Transatlantic Relationship*. Washington DC: Brookings University Press (2019), p. 104

been difficult for the West to tackle, and the military response hesitant. The record has been uneven even in more recent conflicts, where diplomacy rather than military engagement, so far, has been at the forefront. The West has held the ring regarding the sanctions imposed against Russia after its illegal annexation of Crimea, but the West is divided on resuming sanctions against Iran. Furthermore, Lundestad thought the number of economic disputes would increase. Indeed, the present risk of trade wars is another issue that could increase transatlantic friction.³⁰

3.3 Hesitant European progress

In the early 1990s, Duke thought that a ‘more assertive and cohesive Western Europe’ would evolve. Ten years later, Lundestad still thought the EU was ‘slowly but steadily taking on an ever stronger role’.³¹ Integration has both deepened and evolved, also beyond Europe’s western half. However, with Brexit, no matter how it is resolved, European integration faces one of its greatest challenges. Even if Brexit eventually results in a stronger EU, it has not, so far, been a recipe for European cohesion, in terms of security and defence.

The number of different kinds of new regional collaborative defence formats is indicative of the lack of cohesion. There is the EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF), Germany’s Framework Nation Concept (FNC), and France’s European Intervention Initiative (E2I), as well as Britain’s operational Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF).³² Lundestad also pointed out that discussions about who is to lead and how burdens are shared are always difficult.³³ Indeed, the recurring transatlantic disagreement about burden-sharing has intensified since the 2000s. The positive view is, of course, that efforts are now under way.

Despite the establishment of an EU foreign service, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the traditional confusion remains – ‘whom to call when calling Europe?’ – about which institution, or institutions, should represent European security concerns. After the Russian aggression against Ukraine began, it was Germany and France who took a leading role, not the EU. This mirrors the leading role Germany played in managing Europe’s economic and financial crisis after 2008. In contrast to issues of

³⁰ Lundestad, *The United States and...*, p. 281

³¹ Lundestad, *The United States and...*, p. 281

³² Hagström Frisell, Eva and Sjökvist, Emma. Military Cooperation Around Framework Nations, Swedish Defence Research Agency FOI report, FOI-R--4672--SE, February (2019), p 11.

³³ Lundestad, *The United States and...*, p. 281

diplomacy and economics, most European states find that collective security rests with neither the EU, nor a leading European power, but NATO. Ultimately, the question of who handles security remains, at least partially, in limbo. European members of both organisations, the EU and NATO, have retained their prerogative and indeed the initiative on matters of security. Probably, much depends on the specifics of future security threats and how the EU's mutual defence clause, Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, will be interpreted. Whether the EU will redeem Duke's optimism from the early 1990s remains to be seen.

The issues Lundestad raised have at least not yet led to the end of transatlantic relations in the way they have functioned since the end of the Second World War, including those times when they have been less than cordial, but nonetheless basically stable. In order to understand the present and future state of transatlantic relations, it is necessary to look back at their fundamentals, which is the topic of the next section.

4 Values and interests – understanding transatlantic relations

At least one think tank would describe transatlantic relations since the end of the Second World War as cooperation between the US and Europe, which is characterised by a shared commitment to an international rules-based order and reinforced by common positions and rhetoric.³⁴ This is a succinct definition, but it may be profitable to dig a little deeper.

One way of studying transatlantic relations is to hunt for the minutiae of what constitutes them at this very moment. However, it is important to look at the basis of the transatlantic relationship itself, as a way of grasping the meaning of US-European relations over time, since the strength of transatlantic relations as a whole – as shown especially by NATO – has been their ability to adapt to changing times.

4.1 The ‘transatlantic bargain’

In terms of security and transatlantic relations, the latter’s foundation has sometimes been explained in past decades by the phrase ‘transatlantic bargain’. The implication is that the US provides security in return for Europe helping to defend itself and also ensuring internal stability.³⁵ Such an interpretation is reductionist and today seems oddly similar to Trump’s transactional view of US relations with other powers. In Sweden, the term ‘transatlantic link’ (*den transatlantiska länken*) is frequently used in reference to transatlantic relations, which make the relations seem more specific than they really are. Transatlantic relations are essentially about politics, and range across a number of different topics that, to a degree, change over time. For those themes that are continuously relevant, such as security, the specific content changes over time, e.g. from containing the Soviet Union to combating terrorism to once again having to deal with Russia.

³⁴ Definition partly borrowed from Wicket, *Transatlantic Relations: Converging....*

³⁵ The phrase was coined by the US ambassador to NATO in the late 1960s, Harlan Cleveland. See Sloan, Stanley. *NATO, the European Union, and the Atlantic Community – The Transatlantic Bargain Reconsidered*. Boulder, Colorado: Rowman & Littlefield, Boulder (2002). For a recent work along the same lines, see Sloan, Stanley R. *Defense of the West: NATO, the European Union and the Transatlantic Bargain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press (2016).

Given the amount of analysis devoted to transatlantic relations, it is perhaps surprising that the relationship between the US and Europe has not been clearly defined once and for all. Of course, continuous changes in political content and focus over the years are grist for the theoretical mills. Even so, for those who desire the ultimate definition of transatlantic relations, the main challenge is that the relations involve all areas of politics: defence, economic relations, such as trade, and multilateral cooperation on a global level.³⁶ However, transatlantic relations are not easily grasped, even when employing the entire toolbox of International Relations theory.³⁷

4.2 From an American ‘empire by invitation’ to a more equal partnership

Lundestad has a historian’s broad approach to transatlantic relations and argues that the American influence in Europe in the period immediately after the Second World War was essentially an “‘Empire” by invitation’, whereby Western Europe welcomed American troops, bases, and support for European economic integration. The most obvious transatlantic cooperation was in deterring the Soviet Union. However, the processes that have led to today’s EU also relied on tacit American support.³⁸ Such support became more problematic for the US once Western Europe became, in economic terms, more of an equal to the US in the decades after the war. Since a new foundation for transatlantic cooperation was laid in the late 1940s, it has involved all-important areas of politics, such as defence and economic affairs. Since then, they have grown to include many more areas of politics such as energy, the environment, and data protection.

More importantly, at a global level, transatlantic relations have been about the West’s take on international relations, bolstering what is now called the international rules-based order, but which has also been known by other

³⁶ An alternative approach would be Foreign Policy theory, the starting point of which is the actions taken by domestic actors and, primarily, decision-makers. See Peterson, John. ‘Introduction: Where Things Stand and What Happens Next’, in Alcaro, Riccardo; Peterson, John and Greco, Ettore (eds.). *The West and the Global Power Shift*. London: Palgrave (2019), pp. 16-18 (ebook). Peterson raises the possibility of building on Karl Deutsch’s theory of NATO as a “‘pluralistic security community””, although that opinion is from 1957 and does not consider the development of the EU.

³⁷ Forsberg, Tuomas and Herd Graeme P. *Divided West – European Security and the Transatlantic Relationship*. Chatham House and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (2006), p. 27. International Relations realists, at least, would most likely relate their arguments to the international balance of power.

³⁸ Lundestad, Geir. ‘Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3 September (1986), pp. 263-277.

names such as the American world order. The proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which had momentum before the Trump administration took office, was in some ways a matter of renovating the transatlantic relationship, but also an agreement that would have given more of an equal standing to the EU. Proponents of TTIP argued that such an agreement would allow the West to stand united against China's plans to alter world trade to its own benefit. From an American perspective, perhaps more than many Europeans appreciated, TTIP would also have been consequential for European security, since it would have increased the US's interest in it.³⁹ At present, TTIP is in abeyance, which indicates that the existence of common American and European interests cannot be taken for granted.

Lundestad highlights important perspectives in the literature on the relations between the US and Europe. These are: common values and interest go hand in hand; values were foundational to the Atlantic Community; and this was possibly more important than a common threat.⁴⁰ The present paper also points to values and a common threat perception as uniting factors. Accordingly, this makes it necessary to focus on both mainstays of transatlantic relations: that values and interest go hand in hand as well as that a common threat unites Europe and the US are both being challenged, and this is analysed in the following two sections.

³⁹ See Hamilton, Daniel S. (ed.), *The Geopolitics of TTIP: Repositioning the Transatlantic Relationship for a Changing World* Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations (2014). The two economies, the American and the EU, are roughly on par, in terms of economic and institutional maturity, compared with the rest of the world.

⁴⁰ Lundestad, *The United States and...*, pp. 5-7. Some of these reflections also go back to Deutsch. An overview of the literature on Atlantic affairs quickly shows that whenever a writer wants to emphasise NATO and its unique durability as an alliance with many members, the statement becomes a point of reference, even if the focus of each text lies elsewhere.

5 Western values no longer guarantee common interests

It has long been assumed that since Europe and the US share the same values they will also, by and large, share the same interests, but what if common values no longer result in common interests? ⁴¹ Some governments, such as France's, would perhaps argue that it has often been the case that the US and Europe have not shared the same interests, or views, on an issue. Stanley Sloan, an expert on NATO, says that the adaptability of NATO seems to have disproved the dictum of the 19th century British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, who famously stated that 'Nations have no permanent friends or allies, they have only permanent interests'. ⁴²

5.1 The West and the case for common values

One reason that transatlantic ties have trumped potentially divergent national interests is that Europe and the US have been closely associated with each other, and become known as 'the West'. There are of course different interpretations of the West, for example those that give more weight to the economy and that would point to the G-7, which includes Japan. The West's being one civilization is a huge claim, but one that has actually been linked to the Atlantic Charter, which is the basis for the post-war world in which we live, including NATO. ⁴³ The international rules-based order is, to a great extent, based on the agreements between the victorious powers of the Second World War (also, to a degree, the Soviet Union). For the Western powers, the US and Britain, the Atlantic Charter was foundational. Amongst other things, it resulted in the United Nations, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and, later, the World Trade Organization (WTO). ⁴⁴

Some analysts have argued that the entire transatlantic West shares a strategic culture. Defining strategic culture is beyond the scope of this report, but values are necessary to a culture, and a culture is a means to

⁴¹ The idea of this perspective stems from a conference in Brussels, The Making of European Security: Challenges for the Future, Maastricht University, Brussels Campus, 21 March (2019).

⁴² Sloan, *Defense of the...*, p. 3.

⁴³ Gress, David. *From Plato to NATO – the Idea of the West and Its Opponents*. New York: The Free Press (1998), pp. 411-414.

⁴⁴ Gress, *From Plato to...*, pp. 412-413.

expanding one's influence. With Europe and the US united by more than military necessities, it has been possible for the West to promote democracy and market economy as a 'way of life'. Transatlantic relations, including NATO, were central to expanding the influence of institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the past, this was underwritten by an American strategic culture, which, according to such an argument, was based on power projection, by military means. According to at least one interpretation, the West continued to try to dominate the world since the Cold War, but came to rely on the legitimacy of its institutions.⁴⁵ For example, after the Cold War, NATO also adapted and changed from a 'collective-defence organization into a collective-security organization', serving as a vehicle for stabilizing Eastern Europe.⁴⁶

Of course, as Sloan noted quoting Palmerston, there are alternative views on the centrality of values. One alternative view is that interests will eventually triumph. For example, it could be that the very adaptability of NATO has obscured a lack of shared European and US interests in the recent past. Deepened European integration in the 1990s and 2000s might not necessarily have been in the US interest after the Cold War. After all, whereas NATO is merely a tool of its member states, the EU has become a kind of supranational actor, and in some ways a potential rival to the US, at least in the economic arena. According to such an interpretation, the transatlantic relationship will change because of the supposed institutional maturity of the EU and pressure on Europe to adapt to a world of great power politics.

Sven Biscop suggests that the EU will have to assert itself as a great power in its own right in order to defend European interests.⁴⁷ In other words, the EU will have to adapt to a world of great power politics, 19th century diplomacy, geopolitics, and zero-sum games (or whatever labels are applied to it), a world less focused on multilateral efforts that characterised the era of 1990-2010. The consequence of that would be an EU on par with the US and that Washington could not always rely upon to make common cause with it. Already, the US cannot rely on the Europeans to join them in all causes, as shown in 2003 over Iraq. Nevertheless, at the time, the Europeans spoke with many voices and not one, enabling the US to build

⁴⁵ Aybet, Gülnur. *A European Security Architecture after the Cold War – Questions of Legitimacy*. Basingstoke: Macmillan (2000), pp. 26-28 and 255.

⁴⁶ Michta, Andrew A. *The Limits of Alliance – The United States, NATO, and the EU in North and Central Europe*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc. (2006), pp. 9 and 134-135.

⁴⁷ See Biscop, Sven. *European Strategy in the 21st Century - New Future for Old Power*. Abingdon: Routledge (2018).

coalitions of the willing and take the lead. Perhaps that is not too far from today's situation?

The fear that American and European interests might diverge to such an extent as to undermine the post-war transatlantic relationship has a long lineage. In the 1990s, many were cognizant of the risk that increased European integration following the end of the Cold War would make NATO redundant. The US wanted to avoid 'decoupling' of European security and defence from NATO and avoid a – probably costly – duplication of capabilities, on the one hand for the EU and on the other, NATO.⁴⁸ Actually, in the late 1960s Henry Kissinger had already argued that a 'united, supranational Europe' would be a rival for NATO's role, and would consequently undermine American influence in Europe.⁴⁹ However, until now, the EU and NATO have existed in interdependence, with both expanding into Eastern Europe, carefully citing 'shared values' and a 'European identity'.⁵⁰

5.2 Challenged Western leadership and values

The circumstances for both NATO and the EU changed with the economic and financial crisis, which successively hit the US, Europe, and the rest of the world from 2008 onwards. The crisis led to distrust of the West's way of doing things and opened up opportunities to challenge the West.⁵¹ The continuing economic crisis made the West seem less strong and the US and Europe less united, which might have tempted revisionist states, such as

⁴⁸ Bindi, Federiga. 'EU Foreign and Defence Policies and Transatlantic Relations', in Bindi, *Europe and America...*, pp. 13-14 and 16-19.

⁴⁹ Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership...*, pp. 236-237 and 241.

⁵⁰ Kuus, Merje. *Geopolitics Reframed – Security and Identity in Europe's Eastern Enlargement*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2007), p. 4. Some academics argue that this is a way of linking geopolitics to identity politics.

⁵¹ The international rules-based order that emerged out of the transatlantic partnership is increasingly perceived as less effective and relevant in meeting today's challenges. See Wicket, *Transatlantic Relations: Converging...* The legitimacy of institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is questioned from multiple sides – on the one hand by rising powers, such as the BRIC states, for being dominated by Western economies, and on the other hand by some Western countries for giving special treatment to developing countries. See Ministry of Defence. *Global Strategic Trends: The Future Starts Today*, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Center, 2 October (2018), p 106; Miles, Tom. Trump threats, demands spark 'existential crisis' at WTO, Reuters, 24 October (2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-wto-insight/trump-threats-demands-spark-existential-crisis-at-wto-idUSKCN1MY12F> (accessed 7 June 2019).

China and Russia, to be bolder than before. Another argument about why the West's grip on world affairs has weakened is that the institutions the West originally created no longer reflect 'the world's true balance of political and economic power'.⁵² However, if the West does not lead, the impact of its values globally is weakened, and such a 'normative fracturing' may have an impact on the relationship between the US and Europe as well, because values are important for how the West engages with the rest of the world.⁵³ Essentially, this risks becoming a feedback loop; a West that does not lead undermines its values, and with its values weakened the West becomes less united and less willing to lead.

In Europe, during the Cold War, Western norms helped pave the way for important agreements, such as the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, which secured the borders of post-war Europe, and was an essential part of the European security architecture, of which the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is a key feature.⁵⁴ It also paved the way for the Paris Charter, in 1990. The choice that small countries make in determining for themselves whether they want to belong to Europe's collective security arrangements relies on the interpretation of world politics that the Atlantic Charter represents.

Russia, of course, hankers back to a world where great powers supposedly had spheres of influence.⁵⁵ The Russian view could be said to represent the stance that geopolitics is the business of great powers, such as Russia, China, and even the US. Simultaneously, Russia has been critical of the West's pursuit of interventionism, such as NATO's campaign over Kosovo in 1999. Russia has also paid lip service to universal values.⁵⁶ What Russia would like, however, is for great powers to agree on matters of European security above the heads of smaller countries, in a new Yalta-like agreement, a reference to the deal-making between the allied great powers of the Second World War. This would serve to enforce Russia's standing as a great power.⁵⁷ What Russia has done with its annexation of Crimea and aggression against Ukraine is to undermine the agreements that are the foundation for modern European security, especially the Helsinki Accords. By extension, this is an indirect challenge to the entire international rules-based order, and indeed the values that underpin it.

⁵² Bremmer, Ian. *Every Nation For Itself – Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*. London: Portfolio (2012), pp. 3-5.

⁵³ See Lo, *Russia and the...*, p. 64.

⁵⁴ Lo, *Russia and the...*, p. 63 and Lundestad, *The United States and...*, p. 175.

⁵⁵ Lo, *Russia and the...*, pp. 44 and 56.

⁵⁶ Lo, *Russia and the...*, p. 64.

⁵⁷ Dahl, Ann-Sofie. 'Conclusion', in Dahl, *Strategic Challenges in...*, pp. 153-154.

5.3 Trump and a possible transactional relationship

In the past, the US could be counted on to uphold the international rules-based order. Now, however, the US might actually contribute to tearing it down. For many, Trump spells the end of transatlantic relations and the conduct of American foreign policy as it has been known for the past decades. Trump targets both adversaries and allies in his verbal diplomacy. His administration's foreign policy has been accused of rejecting values-based diplomacy, and of downgrading institutions and rules, such as the WTO and even NATO.⁵⁸ Some would argue that his rhetoric also damages the West's ability to deter its enemies.⁵⁹ More specifically, the US has withdrawn from the agreement on Iran's nuclear development and the Paris climate agreement. In addition, Trump has a not altogether comprehensible rapport with Russia's leader Vladimir Putin.⁶⁰

Trump's approach strikes at the core of the global order that the US built after the Second World War and in which Western Europe, and then Europe, has been an integral stakeholder. Of course, Trump's diplomacy may be in line with his thinking as spelled out in his best-selling management book, 'The Art of the Deal', where strong statements are means to reach a beneficial compromise. However, this may lead to a sequential diplomacy that can prove contradictory and disruptive, where one deal contradicts previous or other subsequent agreements.⁶¹ Putting off the TTIP may simply help to demote the EU from a potentially competing role and reinforce the US's standing in US-European relations, where NATO is the primary transatlantic link, and laying the groundwork for future transactional deals – or 'bargains'.

For many observers, the hope is that Trump is a blip and that things will eventually turn back to normal.⁶² This would mean a return to relations where the EU is on the trajectory of becoming more of an equal to the US. Actually, that Trump is a temporary phenomenon is not necessarily an unreasonable assumption, given that transatlantic relations were at a low ebb after the turn of the millennium and then improved during the Obama administration. Lundestad, writing against the backdrop of the build-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, pointed out that the end of Atlantic relations has been predicted many times before. According to him, there is an

⁵⁸ Smith, Michael. Brussels conference, 21 March (2019).

⁵⁹ Biscop, Sven. Brussels conference, 21 March (2019).

⁶⁰ Bindi, Federiga. 'Introduction', in Bindi, *Europe and America...*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Smith, Michael. Brussels conference, 21 March (2019).

⁶² Bindi, Federiga. 'Introduction', in Bindi, *Europe and America...*, p. 8.

‘Atlantic culture’ based on democracy and free markets as well as consumption and Christianity, and that this was evident in comparison to the rest of the world.⁶³ However, one reason that things might not return to the way things were is that Trump merely articulates the long-term structural trend of the US and Europe having different interests. This could make transactional diplomacy all the more logical.

5.4 Europe going-it-alone in defence and security

Trump’s rhetoric has sparked reactions in Europe, which may have the opposite effect of what he desires. For example, Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel has stated that the Europeans need to look after their own security. This is also the case regarding the need of a strengthened European military capability, as envisioned by French President Emmanuel Macron.⁶⁴ Plans for a significant European military capability, even with a supranational military force, have been around before, but come to naught. However, if a comparison is made between a common defence and the creation of the euro, it should be noted that the European Community, the precursor to the EU, went about coordinating monetary cooperation several decades before the efforts resulted in the euro.⁶⁵

In the early 1950s, plans were underway for a European Defence Community (EDC), including a European army, at the same time as West Germany was again allowed to have military forces of its own. When the EDC came to naught, West Germany was instead integrated into Western security through membership in NATO. In the 1990s, the reunified Germany was balanced by the Maastricht Treaty, which deepened European integration and created the Common Foreign and Security Policy, (CFSP). The CFSP, along with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) that it includes, has set a possible path towards a common European defence.⁶⁶ Now, Trump and Russia have again put the Europeans to the test, and the question is whether the Europeans will eventually come together in a manner that deals with the fundamentals of security,

⁶³ Lundestad, *The United States and...*, pp. 279-280, 284 and 288.

⁶⁴ Sanders, Lewis IV, ‘How the world reacted to Merkel’s pivot to Europe’, DW, 29 May (2017) and ‘France’s Macron pushes for “true European army”’, BBC, 6 November (2018) (Both accessed 8 October 2019).

⁶⁵ See Marsh, David. *The Euro: The Politics of the New Global Currency*. Yale: Yale University Press (2009).

⁶⁶ Bindi, Federiga. ‘EU Foreign and Defence Policies and Transatlantic Relations’, ‘Introduction’, in Bindi, *Europe and America...*, pp. 13-14 and 16-19.

existential threats, and territorial defence in a European Defence Union. However, the result, within the next few years, will likely be something significantly less than a European army.

A problem is that European governments do not necessarily share the definition of what constitutes defence,⁶⁷ just as they do not necessarily share the same threat assessment.⁶⁸ A development regarding European security and defence that has gained traction lately is the pursuit of so-called ‘strategic autonomy’. However, there also seems to be considerable confusion in this case, as well, as to what the phrase really means.⁶⁹ Yet, the implications of the phrase are potentially dire, depending, of course, on how it is interpreted. Biscop argues that the ‘only way to be a real actor’ is to have the ability to uphold territorial defence.⁷⁰ His view could be said to represent the maximum interpretation of strategic autonomy, of a European security and defence as independent of the US.

Nick Witney proposes a contrasting view. He argues that there could be ‘[a] distinct European pillar within NATO’.⁷¹ This would go part of the way towards the burden-sharing the US has long desired. The minimal interpretation of strategic autonomy suggests only an increased ability on the part of the EU to engage in military operations. However, during the last 15 years the EU has already undertaken more than 30 missions and operations without always relying on significant US support, even if their size has not been on a scale comparable to American efforts. What strategic autonomy perhaps really implies is not only a willingness to cooperate with the US, but also for the EU to ‘hedge’ strategically, and gradually prepare Europe for a situation where its security is not provided by the US.⁷²

Still, the US will expect its European allies to revitalize their defence, almost as a tit for tat upholding of the transatlantic bargain on security. Burden-sharing will remain a key issue, especially since Trump has fixed his sights on this issue as a tangible cost that he can relate to the American electorate, regardless of whether it makes sense in terms of military

⁶⁷ I’m grateful to Barbara Kunz for pointing this out during a recent seminar.

⁶⁸ Michta, Andrew, panel, Security Challenges in the Black & Baltic Sea Region, in Stockholm, Svenska Atlantkommittén, October 10 (2019).

⁶⁹ Kunz, Barbara and Kempin, Ronja. Washington Should Help Europe Achieve ‘Strategic Autonomy,’ Not Fight It. Texas National Security Review, War on the Rocks – Commentary online, 12 April (2018), <https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/washington-should-help-europe-achieve-strategic-autonomy-not-fight-it/> (accessed 8 October, 2019).

⁷⁰ Biscop, Sven. Brussels conference, 21 March (2019).

⁷¹ Witney, Nick. ‘Building Europeans’ capacity to defend themselves’, Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, 25 June (2019).

⁷² Fiott, Daniel. ‘Strategic autonomy: towards “European sovereignty” in defence?’, Brief Issue, European Union Institute for Security Studies, November (2018).

capabilities or not.⁷³ Disagreements about defence can also be the result of the US wanting to sell arms to Europe, instead of Europe producing its own equipment, and of differing views on further NATO expansion.⁷⁴ There are also a number of other issues that will either push the US and Europe together or pull them apart, such as trade wars and populism.⁷⁵

5.5 A NATO 'back to basics' – is it enough?

The fundamental issue is probably this: during the era of globalisation, from the 1990s until the 2010s, economic growth and multilateral cooperation were key features of international politics, and security was, in the main, about out-of-area operations for NATO, combating non-state actors. This era boosted the EU's role as a kind of strategic actor in the economic arena. With the return of geopolitics and revisionist powers prepared to challenge the international rules-based order, the EU can only be a strategic actor if it measures up in the field of security and defence. If values lie at the heart of transatlantic relations, this should not be a problem, since the EU and the US would then form a partnership. After all, TTIP could be seen as a step in this direction. However, in the distant future that could result in a NATO that is not a tool of its European members but of the EU and the US. That would be the ultimate test of NATO's ability to adapt. And, of course, not all EU members are members of the Alliance. At the moment, such an evolution seems a long way off. Given the present need to counterbalance Russia, it would also be a risk-filled process of changing horses mid-stream, transferring the responsibility of handling the Russian threat, for example in the Baltic, from NATO to the EU.

An immediate challenge for NATO's adaptability is whether it is able to tackle challenges that do not cross the threshold of war, i.e. conflicts in the

⁷³ Zandee, Dick. NATO in the Trump era: surviving the crisis, Clingendael Policy Brief, September (2018), p. 3.

⁷⁴ Riddervold, Marianne and Rosén, Guri. Unified in response to rising powers? China, Russia and EU-US relations, *Journal of European Integration*, Vol 40, No 5 (2018), p. 561.

⁷⁵ European Parliament. Consequences of US trade policy on EU-US trade relations and the global trading system, Study - Policy Department for External Relations, PE 603.882 - November 2018, De la Torre, Carlos (ed). Routledge Handbook of Global Populism. Abingdon: Routledge (2019); Traub, James. Does the liberal world order have a future? in *Managing Unpredictability: Transatlantic relations in the Trump era*, Mika Aaltola and Bart Gaens (eds.), FIIA Report 51 (2017), p. 21. Cox, Michael. The rise of populism and the crisis of globalisation: Brexit, Trump and beyond, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol 28 (2017), pp 9-17.

so-called grey-zone, between peace and war. Russia, or for that matter other countries, can try to undermine the West – or part of it, such as an individual EU or NATO member – for example using political warfare, psychological operations, cyber warfare, or a combination of any such methods. Those kinds of attacks can also be veiled, with deniability attempted by blaming a third party to ensure that Article 5 cannot be invoked.⁷⁶ However, the question is whether such attacks in the grey-zone fall under the competences of NATO, the EU, or individual countries. The answer to that might depend both on how the aggressor executes grey-zone attacks and how the country or organization attacked chooses to handle them. This can either strengthen or weaken NATO. It is important to note that it is often values that are under attack in a grey-zone conflict, perhaps even more so than in a hot war (for example through the temptation to use censorship to prevent fake news, even though this might curtail freedoms a Western society would wish to protect).

NATO has, to a great extent, returned to its original role of protecting the territorial security of its European members and constitutes the anchor of transatlantic relations. Despite French and German rhetoric, transatlantic relations have for the time being gone ‘back to basics’. This is perhaps a more comfortable and convenient outcome than some countries would like to admit, but the question is whether such a classic approach will work with a changing global balance of power, a question addressed in the next section.

⁷⁶ In a Swedish context, see Jonsson, Daniel. Typfall 5: Utdragen och eskalerande gråzonsproblematik. FOI Memo 6338 (2018).

6 The new rival makes Europe less important to the US

The US role in the world has not meant that it has dominated Europe, and done whatever it likes, in the name of the West. Nevertheless, Europe and the US have had the same main enemy since the late 1940s, first the Soviet Union and later fundamentalist terrorism, but now it is China that is more of a concern.

6.1 China – the new rival

There is already rivalry between the US and China for global influence. China, as both a land and a burgeoning sea power, is increasingly recognised as the greatest strategic challenge facing the US.⁷⁷ According to prominent experts, China is on a path to replace the US as the leading global power. This is supposedly shown by a whole host of indicators, such as being the biggest producer and consumer of goods, etc. Graham Allison, the renowned specialist on international security, calls the risk of conflict between the US and China ‘the Thucydides trap’: he argues that the very presence of a rising power that is positioned to replace the ruling power results in friction.⁷⁸

Employing the same geopolitical logic today as the US applied to the Soviet Union in the past indicates that China, not Russia, is the main rival of the US and the power that risks dominating Eurasia. Russia and China both want to undermine the US and are the ‘principal priorities’ of its defence efforts. China, however, seeks a more dominant global position than Russia could hope to afford. The Russian economy will most likely not be modernised. Nevertheless, one of Russia’s worst-case scenarios is perhaps that its dependence on fossil fuels exports will reduce it to a Chinese raw materials colony.⁷⁹ China will most likely be the US’s main future rival. The 2018 American National Defense Strategy characterises

⁷⁷ Mori, Satoru. US-China: A New Consensus for Strategic Competition in Washington”, *The Diplomat*, 30 January (2019), (accessed May 2019).

⁷⁸ See Allison, Graham. *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* Melbourne: Scribe (2017). See also Friedberg, Aaron L. *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company (2012) and Coker, Christopher. *The Improbable War – China, the United States & the Logic of Great Power Conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2015).

⁷⁹ See Rossbach, Niklas H. *The Geopolitics of Russian Energy – gas, oil and the energy security of tomorrow*, FOI-R--4623--SE, November, (2018) and Department of Defense, *Summary of the...*, p. 2.

China's strategic objective as seeking regional hegemony in the near-term and displacing the US globally in the long-term.⁸⁰

China's infrastructure scheme, the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), is a further sign of Chinese ambitions.⁸¹ Some experts argue that China is trying to increase its influence at the expense of the US, i.e. to reach its geopolitical goal of replacing the US, by economic means, or 'geoeconomic power'.⁸² And, indeed, the US sees the BRI as a Chinese instrument to change the global systems of governance.⁸³ The BRI also fits with a geopolitical interpretation, where China is the country that in the future will be trying to dominate Eurasia, with plans that reach deep into the Eurasian heartland and beyond, to Europe.

This geopolitical interpretation puts China centre stage, which makes the rimland in Asia more important than the western one, Europe. Several conflicts testify to this: Taiwan, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and territorial disputes in the South China Sea. This is why American military experts have been concerned with the Chinese attempts to build a capacity that would make it difficult for the US to reinforce its allies. This is known as an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capability, where China would use long-range weapons in order to prevent the US Navy from reinforcing allies in the Far East, primarily Taiwan.⁸⁴ In some ways, it could be argued, the US's policy towards China has been more consistent, from the Obama to the Trump administrations, than what the Obama administration was towards Europe.

That the US has realised its need to rejuvenate its major asset in the Far East, its alliance system, was evident from the Obama administration's so-called 'pivot to Asia', which involved the US rebalancing on a global scale to Asia, and away from Europe and other areas, such as the Middle East.⁸⁵ Even, if the label 'pivot to Asia' did not stick, the idea of focusing on Asia is evident in the Trump administration's foreign policy, with its trade war with China and the diplomatic attention given to North Korea.

⁸⁰ Department of Defense, *Summary of the...*, p. 2.

⁸¹ See Lo, Bobo. A Wary Embrace: A Lowy Institute Paper: Penguin Special – What the China-Russia relationship means for the world. Penguin (2017).

⁸² Allison (2017), p. 20. Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris are the experts referred to amongst others.

⁸³ Kirchner, Emil. Brussels conference, 21 March (2019).

⁸⁴ See Friedberg, Aaron. Beyond Air–Sea Battle: The Debate Over US Military Strategy in Asia. IISS (2014).

⁸⁵ See Rossbach, Niklas H. Amerikanska prioriteringar i Fjärran Östern – USA:s säkerhetspolitik och allianser i Asien och Stillahavsområdet. FOI report, FOI-R--4091--SE, June (2015).

6.2 China is a problem also for Europe

Despite Russia's aggression against Ukraine, European security will most likely not be as important to the US as it was during the Cold War. Nevertheless, the American National Defense Strategy, from 2018, claims that the US needs to be vigilant both in Europe as well as in Asia, but also in the Middle East. The aim of the American armed forces will be 'defeating aggression by a major power; deterring opportunistic aggression elsewhere...' ⁸⁶ If interpreted correctly, the new strategy shifts the American military focus from handling two regional enemies to defeating one strategic power. ⁸⁷ This could mean that Europe risks being relegated to secondary importance, just as the Far East was, in relative terms, during the Cold War. In a future global conflict, there might not be an American 'Europe First' strategy, where it is taken for granted that Europe is the main theatre of operations, as it was expected to be during the Cold War. ⁸⁸

An additional risk for Europe is that Sino-American relations may become extremely tense, or even spill over into an armed conflict, resulting in American forces, in the main, being tied down in the Asia-Pacific. That could offer Russia the opportunity to act in Europe in ways it otherwise would not dare. This could leave Europe having to deal with Russia's military might to an extent Europe has not prepared for. ⁸⁹ Accordingly, the issue of China as a rising power risks driving a wedge between the US and Europe, weakening transatlantic relations.

However, the US and Europe do not share the same threat perception; the EU does not see China as a strategic adversary. ⁹⁰ Nevertheless, even if China is a geopolitical conundrum for Europe as well, China is neither at the border of Europe nor across an ocean. Furthermore, unlike the US, the EU does not have a global position in every sense. At least not in every aspect that is geopolitically relevant, since the EU's military capability is

⁸⁶ Department of Defense, *Summary of the ...*, p. 4. For the National Security Strategy 2017, see Winnerstig, Mike and Rydqvist, John. Ny amerikansk säkerhetspolitisk strategi - geopolitisk stormaktskonflikt i fokus. FOI Memo 6415 (2018).

⁸⁷ Karlin, Mara. 'How to read the 2018 National Defense Strategy', Brookings online, January 21 (2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/21/how-to-read-the-2018-national-defense-strategy/>, (accessed 8 October, 2019).

⁸⁸ Biscop, Sven. Brussels conference, 21 March (2019) see also Biscop, *European Strategy in ...*

⁸⁹ Official Swedish Report, the Defence Commission, Ds 2019_8 Värnkraft - Inriktningen av säkerhetspolitiken och utformningen av det militära försvaret 2021-2025 (2019), pp. 18, 76 and 91.

⁹⁰ Biscop, Sven. Brussels conference, 21 March (2019). This is also evident from the EU's strategy, the European Union External Action Service. 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. June (2016), where the focus was on trade, investment and dialogue.

limited and its ability to project military power depends to a great extent on the US, NATO, and the UK, which is leaving the union. This leaves the EU with France as the only country with a significant ability to project power. Furthermore, NATO depends on the capabilities of its members, but the organisation does not have the potential ambitions of the supranational EU.

6.3 Every time the US tries to leave Russia pulls it back in

Despite China being the US's primary long-term threat, Russia could continue to be a source of significant problems for the US. In fact, Russia's posture could eventually give rise to a conflict in Europe. Before the First World War, the security problem for Great Britain, then the most important global power, and imperial Germany, then a rising power, involved issues such as a naval arms race and colonial tension. Both powers were surprised to find themselves in a great conflict, the First World War, because a German ally, Austria-Hungary, had become embroiled in a squabble with a fourth-tier power, Serbia. The analogy today would be that a European ally becomes involved in an initially limited conflict with Russia. In other words, the US could be pulled back into Europe, in a major way, by a similar, geographically peripheral dispute, but this time the great power conflict would originate in the Baltic, or Eastern Europe, rather than the Balkans. This suggests that the US ignores European security at its own peril. Even though Europe and the US do not now face the same primary threat, in the future they could still face the same threat and, in the worst-case, a coordinated challenge by revisionist powers that aim to take down the whole rules-based international order.

Neither Russia's aggression in Europe, its involvement in the conflict in Syria, nor even its contacts with Venezuela, can be compared to the kind of global threat that the Soviet Union constituted. From a Northern European perspective, that is no comfort, since Russian actions invoke the insecurities of the early Cold War, when it was unclear how far the Soviet Union was prepared to go and how it would behave.

The US is committed to European security, both in the Baltics and Poland, but to what degree it is prepared to engage in pushback on the Russian efforts to undermine European security, as in Ukraine, is perhaps not

entirely clear.⁹¹ This is a problem, since Russia's approach to European security could to some extent be said to represent a 'classical' security challenge, which builds on a trajectory of increasing boldness. The risk is that Russia will go even further in the future, as it has each time in the past: having first engaged in a combined cyber and psychological operation against Estonia in 2007, it then provoked a war with Georgia in 2008 and annexed Crimea in 2014, then subsequently attacked Ukraine. The difference is that today, unlike during the Cold War, the Russian military threat, from a Western perspective, is mainly focused on Europe. Instead of an offensive that would overwhelm Western Europe, as during the Cold War, Russia might hope for a limited incursion into Europe. This would be a gamble for Moscow, but one that would succeed if it led to NATO's unravelling or just appearing inadequate or dysfunctional. Russia would then hope that NATO and Western unity collapsed, like a house of cards. In such a scenario Russia could, for example, sue for peace, with a Yalta-like agreement amongst the great powers as its prize.

The number of military forces that need to be in Europe to deter Russia is debatable.⁹² Perhaps too many forces close to Russia's border would increase tension, causing Russia to strike pre-emptively. Nevertheless, a credible, not symbolic, deterrence is essential, if NATO is to fulfil its traditional tasks. NATO has recognised that it needs to be able to respond to Russian behaviour and aggression. The NATO summit in Wales, in 2014, resulted in the creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). The summit in Warsaw, in 2016, resulted in the enhanced Forward Presence, eFP, in Eastern Europe. After the annexation of Crimea, the Obama administration changed tack on its approach to Europe, and announced a fourfold increase in US defence spending on Europe, to \$ 3.4 billion, in 2017. This is known as the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), which before 2017 was known as the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI).⁹³

⁹¹ On the European presence in Europe, see Lindvall, Fredrik and Winnerstig, Mike. *Väpnad solidaritet – USA:s militära närvaro i Europa fram till 2020*. FOI report, FOI-R--4428--SE, February (2017). The US commitment to the conflict in Syria, during both the Obama and Trump administrations, is a sign of a limited American ambition that it perhaps behoves Europe to consider. For a brief, nuanced analysis, see Lieber, Robert J. 'Still the Indispensable Power – the United States and Baltic Sea Security', in Dahl, *Strategic Challenges in...*, pp. 13-15 and Hanhimäki, Jussi M. 'The Foreign Policy of the United States – Indispensable No More', 'Introduction', in Bindi, *Europe and America...*, pp. 247-250.

⁹² For a Swedish analysis, see, Pallin, Krister (ed.). *Västlig militär förmåga – En analys av Nordeuropa 2017*. FOI report, FOI-R--4563--SE, January (2018).

⁹³ The White House. Fact Sheet: The FY2017 European Reassurance Initiative Budget Request. February (2016), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/02/fact-sheet-fy2017-european-reassurance-initiative-budget-request> (accessed 23 August 2019).

6.4 The need for a transatlantic global threat assessment

A contrasting argument to the one that sees the present American geopolitical approach as potentially divisive for transatlantic relations would perhaps point to the need to interpret the Russian and Chinese threats correctly. Meaning that neither country aims at a military conflict just for the sake of it. They might be content to advance their interests by other means. Such measures might still be unacceptable to the West, but Russia could carefully calibrate such efforts to make them fall below the threshold that would activate NATO's Article 5. In fact, some would argue that the West, Russia, and China are already tipped against each other and that the Western countries are gradually adapting, sometimes even together.

In an echo of the Cold War era, the technological rivalry between China, Russia, and the West also extends to outer space. The US has announced the establishment of a new Space Force, amidst the growing threat of Chinese and Russian anti-satellite weapons.⁹⁴ References to an ongoing 'arms race' are also increasingly found in the cyber and artificial intelligence domains.⁹⁵ There appears to be a collective resolve across the Atlantic to strengthen NATO's cyber capabilities.⁹⁶ This suggests that the West is both able to come together and able to adapt. So far, the West, and above all the US, maintains technological superiority over the rest of the world, even if this hold may be weakening, a phenomenon that has been termed a 'geotechnological' shift.⁹⁷ What is also a positive sign for transatlantic relations is that under the Trump administration, the US, so far, has continued its increased support for European security. This is a turnaround that occurred at the very end of the Obama administration.

⁹⁴ Seligman, Lara. The New Space Race, Foreign Policy, 14 May (2018), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/14/the-new-space-race-china-russia-nasa/> (accessed 28 May 2019)

⁹⁵ Borrie, John. Cold war lessons for automation in nuclear weapon systems, in Boulanin, Vincent (ed.). The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Strategic Stability and Nuclear Risk, Vol I: Euro-Atlantic Perspectives, Stockholm: Sipri, May (2019), p 41; Ryall, Julian. North Korea hits out at Japan as cyber arms race heats up, The Telegraph, 23 May 2019: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/05/23/north-korea-hits-japan-cyber-arms-race-heats/> (accessed 28 May 2019)

⁹⁶ Brent, Laura. 'NATO's role in cyberspace', NATO Review Magazine online, 12 January (2019), <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2019/Also-in-2019/natos-role-in-cyberspace-alliance-defence/EN/index.htm> (accessed 5 September 2019).

⁹⁷ Khanna, Parag. Geotechnology and Emerging Superpower, Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO7JBi8NlpY> (accessed 28 May 2019); The Economist. Special Report: NATO at 70, 16 March (2019).

However, the US willingness to support Europe has perhaps more political traction in the US Congress than in the White House.⁹⁸

The Trump administration, just as its predecessor eventually had to, has acknowledged that Russia presents the US with a geopolitical challenge.⁹⁹ Anthony Cordesman, an established expert on defence economics, points to the fact that the Trump administration nearly doubled the Obama administration's spending on the EDI, to \$ 6.5 billion. His point is that it is necessary to look at what the US does, not what Trumps says.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, Europe cannot escape the geopolitical logic of China being the US's main rival. Europe, either its NATO members or the entire EU, might need a strengthened military capability of its own to be able to deter Russia and, if attacked, to hold out mainly without assistance for quite a while, in case the US is involved in another military conflict.

This suggests that if European states want to keep transatlantic relations intact and at *status quo*, going forward, then Europeans should accept the US's global threat perception, and not focus only on the Russian threat, terrorism, or threats close to Europe's borders. Europe should not welcome the BRI, but instead take a more strategic approach to its relations with China. Europe and the US inhabit the same world and both want to prevent the international rules-based order, which the West has built, from being undermined or even overturned. Sharing the same global threat perception would make it easier for Europe and the US to direct and coordinate their respective defence efforts, so that they together are flexible enough to handle a number of scenarios involving revisionist powers.

⁹⁸ Overhaus, Marco. 'A Matter of Credibility - Conventional and Nuclear Security Commitments of the United States in Europe'. SWP Research Paper 2019/RP 10, August (2019), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2019RP10/#hd-d49269e1117> (accessed 6 September 2019).

⁹⁹ National Intelligence Council. Global Trends – Paradox of Progress, January (2017), p. 44. See also Carlsson, Märta and Winnerstig, Mike. Irreconcilable Differences – Analysing the Deteriorating Russian-US relations. FOI, FOI-R--4276--SE, May (2016).

¹⁰⁰ Cordesman, Anthony H. The US, NATO, and the Defense of Europe: Underlying Trends. CSIS Analysis, 27 June (2018).

7 Conclusion

The close relationships between the US and Europe – initially with Western Europe – that have existed since the end of the Second World War can only be partially explained by mutual geopolitical concerns about each other's security. It would be wrong to assume that the relationship was originally only transactional or that the Atlantic alliance only became embedded in other areas of politics over time. The transatlantic relationship is a bit of a chicken and egg problem: Which came first? Shared values or shared interest? Europe, by and large, effectively signed up to the world the US wanted to build after the war, even before it was over. NATO came later as a necessity, to counter the main threat to that world order, the Soviet Union. What we today call the international rules-based order is the result of the 1941 Atlantic Charter and the seven-decades-long, close cooperation between the US and Europe in a number of areas, not only security. The post-2008 challenge that faces the West, including from China and other revisionist powers, is this: Can the transatlantic relations be modernised for the 21st century? If not, there will not be a 'West' that can continue to put its mark on the world.

Transatlantic relations should be understood as an enduring community of values. What has so far made NATO essential is that it has been a vehicle that helps to secure the existence of those values, at first in Western Europe, and later also as a catalyst for – the shared transatlantic interests of – spreading those values. What will happen to transatlantic relations in the future depends on the continued American and European interest in protecting those values and the international rules-based order built around them.

Europe and the US have in fact been so close to each other that to the rest of the world the transatlantic relationship has effectively been 'the West'. None of the at times quite significant friction between the US and European states has led to disengagement, because the relationship has been beneficial to both parties. Also, until the economic crisis of 2008, the West was able to sell to the rest of the world its version of globalisation, which, effectively, was based on the international rules-based order, which in turn was based on the Atlantic Charter. The political turmoil that has followed the economic crisis that began in 2008 means that transatlantic relations face their greatest challenge. Louder American demands for greater burden-sharing and the Russian aggression against Ukraine are only symptoms of bigger problems. The world is experiencing a changing balance of power and the West has so far not responded entirely in unison.

In the past, the US and Europe have often had different interests, but shared the same basic set of values. Arguably, even the matter of how to handle

Iraq in 2003 was a matter of perspective, not a disagreement on the nature of Saddam Hussein's regime. Now, however, there are grave doubts in the West about whether Trump is a symptom of a long-term trend, where the US and Europe drift apart when it comes to how they view the world. A shared outlook alleviates discussions about what to do about international security problem X, Y, or Z. Without such a common outlook, the ability to handle international crises or challenges from revisionist powers becomes more difficult. If the present transatlantic friction leads to the end of the common worldview, it is not entirely clear which values the international rules-based order will have. For example, on the one hand, the West has been able to come together on sanctions against Russia. On the other hand, the West might be divided over sanctions against Iran, but it is most likely regarded as less important than Russia.

There is a risk that the relationship between the US and Europe becomes increasingly transactional and that this leads to a decreased predictability about how the West will act in the future. That would increase international uncertainty, which could easily taint all other transatlantic ties as well as tempt revisionist powers to use what they see as Western weakness. It is possible that China might try to drive a wedge between the US and Europe in international affairs and Russia might be tempted to take its foreign policy adventurism one step further, in the hope that a limited conflict with NATO might bring the whole house down.

While the return of geopolitics has been good news for national defence efforts in the West, it is as yet not clear whether it is good news for bringing the US and Europe together. At the end of the day, the closeness of transatlantic relations does not depend on any transatlantic bargain, but on a willingness in both the US and Europe to translate Western values into common interests. Furthermore, there is a very real risk that Europe and the US do not share the same threat assessment of what constitutes their major threat. That makes it easier for revisionist powers that might try to overturn the international rules-based order, piece by piece, conflict by conflict.

NATO is the most durable of transatlantic ties thanks to its – perhaps surprising – adaptability, successfully moving from deterrence to ensuring political stability and out-of-area operations. Now, it is readapting to its original role of territorial defence. Returning NATO's focus to territorial defence is necessary to protect Europe in the present, but not necessarily enough to secure Western values and interests in the future. To paraphrase Kissinger, perhaps NATO has exhausted its innovative capabilities, its adaptability. Something else, like TTIP, might be necessary.

Trump may actually have boosted the importance of NATO when he criticised the lack of European burden-sharing. For the first time, that

traditional critique has had some effect, given the apprehensions that Trump, unlike his predecessors, might actually realise some of his threats, even if the security situation in Europe worsens even further. He might also have underlined, intentionally or not, the importance of NATO at the expense of the EU, just by concentrating his rhetoric on NATO. It takes the focus away from the EU and European defence efforts, at least for now. Simultaneously, Trump strengthens both NATO and the US's traditional influence in Europe by increasing US defence spending on Europe. In fact, he is continuing the turnaround his predecessor was forced to make. Trump's approach is a political choice that has diminished the momentum that was inherent in the free-trade plans, the TTIP, which could have helped the EU become more of an equal of the US.

That regional great powers engage in power politics in Ukraine and the South China Sea puts pressure on the EU. The result could be that the supranational EU has to become a real superpower in its own right, and not only a leading economic actor. It would also require the EU to be as adaptable as NATO has been. Just as European monetary cooperation predated the euro by several decades, now European defence efforts might eventually lead to an EU capable of defending its own territory. However, even if such a process gets under way, it will take a very long time. For now, NATO, since it includes the US, is essential in deterring Russia. Also, both the EU and NATO are dependent on the resources of its members and nation states might continue to be hesitant about experimenting with matters of security, especially as they might individually have to cope with the conflicts in the grey-zone, between war and peace, below the threshold of Article 5.

If the EU significantly increases its own role in defence and security, it must avoid putting the cart before the horse. It cannot only react to the zero-sum games of regional great powers; it must also decide which values it wants to protect. Otherwise, it is no different from revisionist countries, like Russia, that see great power politics and geopolitics as aims in themselves that prove their importance as great powers at the expense of small powers. The problem for both the EU and the US is that it may be that neither is strong enough on its own to protect its respective version of Western values.

Even if geopolitical logic has brought the US and Europe together, values are the glue of transatlantic relations. The recurring European frustration with President Trump's rhetoric is indicative of that. For the West, as for the US in the 1940s, geopolitics perhaps only makes sense if used as a method of analysis that aims to protect the international rules-based order. If Europe is to become more of an equal to the US in an increasingly

multipolar world, then the more important it is that they share a global transatlantic threat assessment.

The need for a common transatlantic outlook on the world of tomorrow also means that there is a need for Western renewal and consolidation. At a minimum, that could mean an increased European defence effort to safeguard Europe, helping the US to focus militarily elsewhere, as in Asia, if need be. A completely independent European effort might require a strengthened European deterrence, even including many more European nuclear weapons.

At the same time, NATO might not be enough to strengthen US-European bonds, and new structures might prove necessary. TTIP was an example of such renewal of the transatlantic relationship. Eventually, if the EU continues to evolve, it would want equal standing to the US and this could prove a challenge for transatlantic relations. However, concern about this development has been a potential issue for transatlantic security off and on since the 1960s, as shown by the Kissinger quote at the beginning of this report. This suggests that mere concern about the issue of transatlantic equality will not, by itself, be an issue that causes a permanent rift.

In terms of transatlantic relations, the challenge for the US is perhaps whether it will be prepared to see the EU as an equal – provided, of course, that European integration increases in the field of defence and security. The challenge for the EU will then be to become even more adaptable than NATO has been. The EU has to become a fully-fledged international actor, also in terms of security and not, in a global sense, a one-dimensional actor in the economic sphere, given its major role in the global economy. The challenge for NATO is to remain adaptable, regardless of whether increased European defence efforts result in a stronger European pillar in NATO, or in a NATO that is an instrument of the US and the EU, and not its European member states.

In the long-run, transatlantic relations will endure if the US and the EU share the same geopolitical outlook and safeguard their basic shared values. They must also avoid copying the politics and behaviour of the revisionist powers that challenge them, for whom ‘geopolitics’ just becomes another label for ‘might is right’, or, to put it differently: for the West, geopolitical analysis should be a means to an end, and ‘geopolitics’ not the end itself.

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This report relates transatlantic relations to the tectonic shifts underway in world affairs. Global changes include the rise of Asia and challenges to the international rules-based order, not least given the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Often, these changes, and the actions of revanchist powers, are referred to as the ‘return of geo-politics’.

There are also changes within the West. Brexit poses a fundamental challenge to European integration. NATO has had to return its focus to deterrence and collective defence in Europe. However, it is unclear to what extent its European members share the same threat assessment. In the US, it often seems that the actions and rhetoric of the administration are not always in harmony.

This report examines the direction of transatlantic relations. However, their direction confronts issues that impact the fundamentals of the relationship between the US and Europe, making it necessary to address the question: How can transatlantic relations be understood?