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Can the Biden Administration Reignite the Transatlantic Partnership?

POLICY PAPER / FEBRUARY 2021

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Executive Summary

This paper explores the future of presently-strained US-EU relations. First, the ways in which former-President Donald Trump contributed to the breakdown of transatlantic trust will be expositied. A discussion will follow about what are likely to be the most prominent points of collaboration between the Biden Administration and European Union leaders as well as areas where policy disagreements are predicted. The issues in focus will be:

- The realignment of US climate-change policy with European values of environmental protection;
- US-EU joint efforts in the Middle East, including reigniting the JCPOA;
- Transatlantic divergence on China; the forging of a Sino-European economic agreement and what this means for EU-US collective opposition to human rights abuses and totalitarianism;
- NATO reform, and Biden's influence and the necessity for leaders to configure an alliance equipped for 21st-century challenges.

Can the Biden Administration Reignite the Transatlantic Partnership?

Policy Paper – Josephine D'Urso, February 2021

Following the tumultuous year 2020, people are looking towards the future with trepidation about what further challenges might be ahead, but for many in the United States and Europe, starting 2021 with a new US President represents a flicker of hope amidst the uncertainty. In the political and academic worlds, there is a tentative optimism that President Biden will usher in a new era of EU-US cooperation, helping to prove the resilience of the transatlantic bond. The partnership was forged in strife and has come up against many challenges from the Soviet threat to economic turmoil, but when the reins of the country once thought to be a global leader were passed to Donald Trump, the relationship between the bloc and the US was truly put to the test. Now, as Joe Biden inherits the tattered remains of long-relied-upon international alliances and a tarnished reputation, the world is watching to see if his leadership can be the unifying force needed to face the novel hardships of the modern world. The European Union and the United States will need to work together to address climate change, pursue peace in the Middle East, formulate a coherent policy towards China, and bolster security capabilities attuned to the trials of an increasingly-digital world. But to understand where EU-US relations are headed, one must first grasp how the Trump presidency impaired the bond in the last four years.

Restoring European Trust in the US

Former-President Donald Trump damaged the European Union's trust in the US with his antagonistic attitude towards NATO and other respected institutions such as the World Health Organization. Perhaps most problematic was Trump's opposition to the European Union itself, calling it a "foe" of the United States.¹ While Biden must make strides to restore the EU-US relationship, a number of EU leaders say some damage is irreparable but necessary. No longer having the guarantee of US support led European governments to realize the importance of implementing strategic autonomy, a development which will likely remain despite Biden's recent election. As Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, Věra Jourová, stated at the November 2020 conference on the Multiple Challenges for Transatlantic Partnerships: "The fact that our partnership was shaken and put to the test helped the European Union to stop its unhealthy reliance on the partnership. We were forced to reassess the situation."² Nonetheless, if there is any hope for joint efforts bolstered by the partnership between the bloc and the United States, the trust must be actively rebuilt.

The consequences of Trump's 'America First' attitude have already taken shape as Europe has sought to define its own relationship with China, distinct from that of the United States'.³ On

¹ Elena Lazarou, Jana Titievskaja, and Cecilia Handeland, "US Foreign Policy after the 2020 Presidential Election: Issues for the European Union" (European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020), 3,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659382/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)659382_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659382/EPRS_BRI(2020)659382_EN.pdf); Pat Cox, "Biden's Europe Challenge: Repair Tattered Transatlantic Ties," POLITICO, November 23, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/biden-europe-challenge-repair-broken-transatlantic-relationship/>.

² Institute for Politics and Society, *Multiple Challenges for Transatlantic Partnerships*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HGMZUwdaE&feature=emb_title.

³ Cox, "Biden's Europe Challenge."

the domestic front, Trump's legacy's most damaging impact was the division sown amongst the American people, with many of his supporters believing that democracy died on the day that their hero left office. Once a “beacon of democracy”, Trump’s attempted degradation of the rule of law has left the US’ claim to global leadership blemished, weakening its position on the international stage when exerting pressure on governments which do not conform to democratic values.⁴ Bringing order to the domestic front will be Biden’s first challenge in improving the United States’ relationship with its former allies, but what must follow is strategic reconciliation based on shared policy goals.

Climate Change: US-EU Rapprochement

Citizens around the world are increasingly concerned about the existential threat to life on Earth caused by climate change. They are looking to their leaders to take definitive action to slow global warming. Joe Biden’s campaign website outlines a bold but vital plan to combat climate change, showing Americans and international allies alike that his stance on climate change is steadfast.⁵ This is an important departure from the waffling of the previous administration, whose climate change policy was non-existent and whose belief in the veracity of global warming was constantly in flux.⁶ With Democratic control of the House and the Senate, even if by a narrow margin, there is renewed optimism about Biden’s ability to enact positive change in various policy areas; nonetheless, experts warn that environmental legislation passing through the Senate with ease is not a guarantee.⁷ But what exactly will the Biden-Harris administration try to get passed through the House or the Senate? It is likely to, at least initially, be dominated by reversals of Trump-era policies which deregulated environmental protections up until Trump’s very last day in office. Part of Biden’s day-one executive order on climate protection included initiating a review of all climate-related actions taken during the Trump Administration that are contrary to the environmental aims of the current leadership.⁸ According to a recent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report, “78 deregulatory actions” were enacted under the Trump Administration.⁹ A change in EPA leadership will be an important first step outside of the legislature and judiciary for Biden’s climate plan. Under Trump’s picks for the heads of the EPA, Scott Pruitt and Andrew Wheeler, the Agency’s mission was completely eroded, and environmental protection was dismissed in favor of for-profit environmental degradation.¹⁰ Biden’s nominee for the role, Michael Regan, represents a return to the EPA’s important position as a protective institution.¹¹

⁴ The Economist, *How Biden Can Be a Global Leader*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjVc32sOIWs>.

⁵ “Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice,” Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>.

⁶ Helier Cheung, “What Does Trump Actually Believe on Climate Change?” *BBC News*, January 23, 2020, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51213003>.

⁷ Rebecca Beitsch, “Senate Majority Offers Biden New Avenues on Trump Environmental Rollbacks,” *The Hill*, January 18, 2021, <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/534526-senate-majority-offers-biden-new-avenues-on-trump-environmental>.

⁸ Joseph R. Biden, “Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis” (2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-protecting-public-health-and-environment-and-restoring-science-to-tackle-climate-crisis/>.

⁹ Beitsch, “Senate Majority Offers Biden New Avenues on Trump Environmental Rollbacks.”

¹⁰ Jeff Turrentine, “Meet Michael Regan,” *National Resources Defense Council*, December 22, 2020, <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/meet-michael-regan>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The most critical reversal of a Trump-era policy for repairing the transatlantic partnership will be rejoining the Paris Agreement, which Biden enacted via executive order on his first day in office. Trump's withdrawal from the climate agreement signaled to Europe and beyond that the man in the White House would not be a friend to the climate or international commitments. Biden's reenrollment in the plan, which legally binds its signatories to a global warming target of below 2 degrees Celsius, "compared to pre-industrial levels," allows European leaders to breathe a sigh of relief but also to set their sights on more ambitious targets, such as US cooperation on methane regulation.¹² Thankfully, Biden seems to be doing precisely that, as he follows through on his campaign promise of imposing "aggressive methane pollution limits" as a day-one executive order.¹³

Biden has also committed to working with international partners on combatting climate change through heightened American research efforts.¹⁴ Once a leader and member of the global climate research initiative launched by the Obama Administration, Mission Innovation, the US under Biden will rejoin the EU and 23 other countries in intensified research, development, and investment.¹⁵ Another boon for European climate goals will be President Biden's promised pledge of net-zero emissions by 2050.¹⁶ Although emissions pledges and the Paris Climate Agreement are important long-term goals, countries also recognize the need for fast-acting consequences when big polluters do not keep their promises. US support of the EU's proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) would do just that.

The CBAM is an innovative method for preventing firms located in carbon-restrictive countries from seeking out foreign suppliers that sell high-emissions products for less than could be obtained domestically.¹⁷ By imposing carbon duties on countries which have not committed to an internationally-agreed-upon carbon price, the CBAM would encourage countries to join the trade coalition. The EU hopes that the coalition will be WTO-compatible because the aim would be "global carbon abatement" rather than increased domestic competition.¹⁸ One of the benefits of the CBAM would be holding China accountable for its commitment to net-zero

¹² Elliot Douglas, "Joe Biden's Climate Pledges: Are They Realistic?" Deutsche Welle, January 13, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/joe-bidens-climate-pledges-are-they-realistic/a-56173821>; Douglas Hengel, "Quick Wins for the Biden Administration on Climate Cooperation with the EU," The German Marshall Fund of the United States, January 6, 2021, <https://www.gmfus.org/blog/2021/01/06/quick-wins-biden-administration-climate-cooperation-eu>.

¹³ "Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice"; Biden, Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Frank Jordans and Jeff Schaeffer, "As Leaders Set Fresh Climate Goals, Biden Pledges US Support," Associated Press, December 12, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-climate-climate-change-paris-france-6e21f86b5c4affae8ee04e870a1ea6c>.

¹⁷ Andreas Kluth, "Biden and the EU Can Forge a New Path on Global Warming," The Sydney Morning Herald, January 7, 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/biden-and-the-eu-can-forge-a-new-path-on-global-warming-20210107-p56scp.html>; "A New EU-US Agenda for Global Change," Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council (Brussels: European Commission, December 2, 2020).

¹⁸ "A New EU-US Agenda for Global Change"; Kluth, "Biden and the EU Can Forge a New Path"; Frédéric Simon, "EU Proposes 'Transatlantic Green Trade Agenda' in Wake of Biden's Election," *Euractiv* (blog), December 3, 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-proposes-transatlantic-green-trade-agenda-in-wake-of-bidens-election/>.

emissions by 2060 and ensuring present-day action to meet that long-term goal.¹⁹ The likelihood of Biden's support for the Mechanism may be found in the internationally-oriented portion of his Climate Plan which states:

Biden will not allow other nations, including China, to game the system by becoming destination economies for polluters, undermining our climate efforts and exploiting American workers and businesses. As the U.S. takes steps to make domestic polluters bear the full cost of their carbon pollution, the Biden Administration will impose carbon adjustment fees or quotas on carbon-intensive goods from countries that are failing to meet their climate and environmental obligations.²⁰

It may still be unknown exactly what the next four years have in store, but those concerned about climate change can rest assured that the Biden Administration's policies will align more closely with European environmental values, opening up chances for conscientious collaboration that enacts critical change before it is too late.

The Middle East Peace Process

Yet another international agreement that Donald Trump abandoned upon his ascension to the role of chief executive was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known as the JCPOA or the Iran nuclear deal. Trump's withdrawal from the agreement aimed at resuming the economically punitive approach towards Iran, the failure of which had been the original impetus for the JCPOA. The reasoning for the Trump Administration's decision rested on the former President's dissatisfaction with certain terms of the agreement.²¹ He took issue specifically with the fixed term of the deal, which would have had the agreement expiring after ten years, and with the narrowness of the prohibitions, which still allowed Iran to develop ballistic missiles and support "terrorist proxies and militias".²² Former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, specifically mentioned that the Trump Administration's solution to the issue of Iran's nuclear weapons development would be a "lasting" one, an allusion to the ten-year expiration date on the JCPOA.²³ Politicians from around the world implored the former President to attempt negotiations with Iran over the problematic terms rather than withdraw entirely, saying that a withdrawal from the deal could spell disaster in the Middle East.²⁴ Ultimately, Trump's strategy, rather than dissuading Iran from nuclear pursuits, caused Iran to ramp up its nuclear program.²⁵

¹⁹ David Keohane and Victor Mallet, "France Sees EU-US Push for Carbon Tax under Biden," *Financial Times*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/651c2e88-9ec8-4bf7-832c-56b92dcbcc9d>.

²⁰ "Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice."

²¹ Zack Beauchamp, "Trump's Withdrawal From the Iran Nuclear Deal, Explained," *Vox*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/5/8/17328520/iran-nuclear-deal-trump-withdraw>; *The New York Times*, "Read the Full Transcript of Trump's Speech on the Iran Nuclear Deal," May 8, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/us/politics/trump-speech-iran-deal.html>.

²² *The New York Times*, "Read the Full Transcript of Trump's Speech on the Iran Nuclear Deal"; Beauchamp, "Trump's Withdrawal From the Iran Nuclear Deal, Explained."

²³ Mike Pompeo, "Statement by Secretary Pompeo on President Trump's Decision to Withdraw from the JCPOA," U.S. Embassy in Uruguay, May 9, 2018, <https://uy.usembassy.gov/statement-by-secretary-pompeo-on-president-trumps-decision-to-withdraw-from-the-jcpoa/>.

²⁴ Mark Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html>; Beauchamp, "Trump's Withdrawal From the Iran Nuclear Deal, Explained."

²⁵ Paul Adams, "After Trump, What Will Biden Do about Iran?" *BBC News*, November 18, 2020, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54958361>.

The pressure for President Biden to repair the damage caused by Trump’s sanctions-based approach and to force Iran to keep its non-proliferation commitments comes not only from Democrats in Washington but from European allies as well.²⁶ Yet, Biden will need more than ideological support from the EU in repairing the Iran situation. At present, Iranian leaders are demanding reparations for the economic damage caused by the Trump Administration’s “maximum pressure” approach.²⁷ Formulating economic incentives for returning to the JCPOA that avoid rewarding Iran for non-compliance and which engage the country diplomatically will need to be undertaken by both the US and the EU. Their shared goals include stopping Iran’s advancement’s nuclear research and development.²⁸ However, European and US ambitions for future engagement with Iran may be shut down by the upcoming Iranian elections. The “ultraconservative” Paydari Party is widely expected to rise to power after running on a platform of “non-conformism” and opposition towards the US.²⁹ If the Paydari Party, also known as the Front of Islamic Revolution Stability, clinches a 2021 victory, there may be no more hope for reinstating the JCPOA, not to mention the potential increase in radicalism and Islamism that a Paydari win would likely bring about.³⁰

Although the European Union has a vested interest in curbing Iran’s development of nuclear weapons, experts say that the question of how to pursue peace in the Middle East is likely to strain the transatlantic bond regarding other regional issues.³¹ Tensions are projected to arise due to the varying degrees of impact on the US and the EU, with instability in the Middle East affecting the EU to a much greater extent.³² Regarding Israel and Palestine, Biden is expected to align more with European values than did former President Trump. Still, Biden may not prioritize the conflict in his foreign policy as much as the EU would like.³³ Nonetheless, this does not exclude the possibility for a united pursuit of peace through a combination of European policy options and Biden’s outspoken advocacy for human rights.³⁴ While differences in priorities may divide the EU and the Biden-led United States, their shared objectives in the Middle East will hopefully present an opportunity for cooperation.

The European Union and Joe Biden have both made clear their support for ending the Saudi intervention in Yemen which has resulted in perpetual civil war and the country’s descent into the “world’s worst humanitarian disaster”.³⁵ The Obama administration mismanaged

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Julien Barnes-Dacey, “Trump or Biden: Three Ways to Make Europe Matter in the Middle East,” ECFR, October 15, 2020, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_trump_or_biden_three_ways_to_make_europe_matter_in_the_middle_ea/.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Leadership Change In Iran’s Leading Ultraconservative Party Ahead of 2021 Elections,” Iran International, December 25, 2020, <https://iranintl.com/en/iran/leadership-change-irans-leading-ultraconservative-party-ahead-2021-elections>; Dr. Majid Rafizadeh, “What Will Iran’s Presidential Election Bring?” Arab News, November 8, 2020, <https://arab.news/2t2dc>.

³⁰ Rafizadeh, “What Will Iran’s Presidential Election Bring?”

³¹ Institute for Politics and Society, *Multiple Challenges*.

³² Barnes-Dacey, “Trump or Biden.”

³³ Jamie Pleydell-Bouverie and Gabriele Tallone, “An Opportunity to Rethink the Middle East Peace Process,” EIP, November 30, 2020, <https://www.eip.org/an-opportunity-to-rethink-the-middle-east-peace-process/>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Khoury, “The Biden Administration’s Yemen Imperative,” *Atlantic Council* (blog), January 8, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-biden-administrations-yemen-imperative/>.

the situation in Yemen by focusing too narrowly on achieving the Iran nuclear deal and by having “empowered via logistical and material support” the Saudi-led coalition’s invasion in Yemen.³⁶ The Trump administration’s direct support of the Saudis has shown complete disregard for the human rights abuses and countless deaths in Yemen for which they are responsible, with the President approving the sale of \$290m worth of bombs to Saudi Arabia in December alone.³⁷ Righting the wrongs of the past two US Presidential administrations falls on Biden, and international commentators hope that he will not only end US support to Saudi Arabia but work to end the war entirely.³⁸ Luckily for Biden and his European allies, this task may very well coalesce with their intention to restart the nuclear deal with Iran.³⁹

To balance the European desire for regional stabilization and lessening the migrant crisis with the American plan to reduce its presence in the region, the EU will need to “focus on partnership around key issues where US engagement can play a critical role.”⁴⁰ Seeing a more unified transatlantic policy in the Middle East develop over the next four years will require strong European leadership that capitalizes on Biden’s prioritization of human rights.

Biden, the European Union, and China

While the first three years of his term saw the former President focusing on an economically oppositional approach towards China, in 2020, the administration’s policy began to include more condemnation of the Chinese government’s human rights abuses. Experts forecast that Biden will build on Trump’s approach, taking it further by putting increased pressure on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁴¹ Trump consistently prioritized attempting to secure a trade deal with China above coming down on human rights abuses, but was not entirely inactive when it came to showing the consequences for the Chinese government’s policies. Under Trump’s presidency, multiple CCP officials faced sanctions for their involvement in the mass internment of between 800,000 and two million Uighur Muslims.⁴² Trump also closed China’s Houston consulate,⁴³ but, for the chief executive of a country once considered a global leader, the response to atrocious human rights violations was significantly lacking.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Julian Borger, “US Approves Sale of \$290m in Bombs to Saudi Arabia,” *the Guardian*, December 30, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/30/us-approves-sale-of-290m-in-bombs-to-saudi-arabia>.

³⁸ Khaled H. Alyemany, “President-Elect Joe Biden Can Help End the War in Yemen,” *Atlantic Council* (blog), December 18, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/president-elect-joe-biden-can-help-end-the-war-in-yemen/>.

³⁹ Khoury, “The Biden Administration’s Yemen Imperative.”

⁴⁰ Barnes-Dacey, “Trump or Biden.”

⁴¹ Lazarou, Titievskaja, and Handeland, “US Foreign Policy after the 2020 Presidential Election,” 3.

⁴² Pranshu Verma and Edward Wong, “U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Chinese Officials Over Mass Detention of Muslims,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/world/asia/trump-china-sanctions-uighurs.html>; Ivan Watson and Ben Westcott, “China’s Xinjiang Records Revealed: Uyghurs Thrown Into Detention for Growing Beards or Bearing Too Many Children, Leaked Chinese Document Shows,” accessed January 12, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/02/asia/xinjiang-china-karakax-document-intl-hnk/>; “The China Challenge, Part 3: Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law,” § Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy (2018).

⁴³ “Would a Biden Administration Be Softer than Trump on China?” *The Economist*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2020/07/30/would-a-biden-administration-be-softer-than-trump-on-china>.

Biden has not yet “laid out a detailed China strategy,” but he is expected to take an approach characterized by multilateral pressure from the US and its allies.⁴⁴ Analysts predict that one potential strategic path for Biden to pursue is to increase “the US’s economic engagement with Asian countries,” thus, simultaneously benefitting the US economically and decreasing China’s global and regional power.⁴⁵ The Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) offers a potential route towards this aim and was supported in its original form by Biden during his time as Vice-President.⁴⁶ Yet, the near-certain establishment of the rival trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) could compromise Biden’s goals. The partnership would augment China’s regional economic dominance and weaken any chances of the United States leveraging the economic powers of other Asian countries to bring down China and curb human rights abuses.⁴⁷

Transatlantic relations will undoubtedly be further challenged by the recent European Union decision to conclude an agreement with China known as the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI).⁴⁸ The agreement enhances the equality between Chinese and European companies on the economic stage in both Europe and China.⁴⁹ Although Chinese state-owned companies already hold significant economic power in various EU member states, the CAI enables European companies to have more access to the Chinese market.⁵⁰ China’s expansion of extra-territorial power has relied on an investment strategy which can ultimately force the hands of European leaders regarding European Union decisions: “Chinese state-owned banks and state-owned enterprises invest in member states to gain leverage. Then Beijing pressures them to block critical joint statements on sensitive topics, such as China’s human rights record or the country’s island-building campaign in the South China Sea.”⁵¹ A European Union divided by the varying degrees of influence that China exerts on them economically is not the ideal partner for the new American Administration set on championing human rights internationally. One economic expert observed that the agreement demonstrates “that the EU does not see itself as ‘wholly in the U.S. camp’ in the U.S.- China rivalry, but will rather pursue a ‘middle of the road/playing both horses’ strategy between them.”⁵² The biggest difficulty presented by the Sino-European deal is that it leaves the incoming US president with reduced coercive power in confronting China’s human rights abuses by showing that European investment in China is not contingent on political changes. Should the RCEP be finalized, that deal, like China’s investment deal with the EU, will communicate that Chinese economic

⁴⁴ David Brunnstrom and Humeysra Pamuk, “China Unlikely to Find Biden a Soft Touch,” *Reuters*, November 7, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-china-biden-idUSKBN27NoXP>.

⁴⁵ Lazarou, Titievskaiia, and Handeland, “US Foreign Policy after the 2020 Presidential Election,” 3.

⁴⁶ Yen Nee Lee, “Biden Would Want the U.S. to Rejoin Trans-Pacific Partnership, Leading China Watcher Says,” *CNBC*, November 4, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/04/biden-would-want-the-us-to-rejoin-tpp-says-harvard-scholar.html>.

⁴⁷ Lee; Tim McDonald, “RCEP: Asia-Pacific Countries Form World’s Largest Trading Bloc,” *BBC News*, November 16, 2020, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54949260>.

⁴⁸ Natalie Liu, “EU-China Investment Deal Threatens US-Europe Relations,” *Voice of America*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/voa-news-china/eu-china-investment-deal-threatens-us-europe-relations>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Frank Langfitt, “Biden Is Good News For Europe, But China Challenges Await,” *NPR*, November 30, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/30/939005408/biden-is-good-news-for-europe-but-china-challenges-await>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Liu, “EU-China Investment Deal.”

dominance has made the country essentially immune to international retribution for human rights abuses or security concerns.

How will Biden Change Transatlantic Cooperation Within NATO and Renovate the Institution Itself?

Joe Biden is entering office with many domestic challenges to address, leaving some experts concerned that foreign policy may fall by the wayside.⁵³ But Joe Biden's public- and international-facing assurances have made clear his intention to engage with allies where Trump turned away from them. Strengthening US participation in and support for NATO is one of Biden's objectives on this front.⁵⁴ Despite Biden's enthusiasm, the question of welcoming the US back into the prized position of power it once held has Europe divided.⁵⁵ While Emmanuel Macron advocates for a highly-autonomous approach informed by the lessons in self-reliance of the past four years, other leaders, including NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, are eager to repair the transatlantic relationship and access the strength that comes with it.⁵⁶

European leaders are looking forward to increased predictability under the Biden Administration, but the scars from Trump's unilateral and bewildering moves are not going to heal overnight. Joe Biden's remedies for specific actions of Trump's, like the withdrawal of troops from Germany and Afghanistan, will play a key role in defining the future of joint transatlantic defense. Trump's July 2020 decision to withdraw nearly 12,000 troops from Germany was met with shock within NATO as well as at home in Congress.⁵⁷ The punitive measure, despite being labeled "strategic" by the Trump Administration, went against the interests of the United States and its allies.⁵⁸ Experts are hopeful that Biden's campaign commitment to reviewing the decision will result in a reversal of Trump's plans.⁵⁹

Biden's choices are much more limited when it comes to reconfiguring Trump's military moves in Afghanistan. Biden campaigned on a promise to "end the forever wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East", so while Trump's decision to withdraw militarily from Afghanistan in hopes of peace-talks with the Taliban is widely regarded as a mistake, Biden is pigeon-holed into following the path on which Trump put the US.⁶⁰ This leaves Biden in an unsavory position

⁵³ Institute for Politics and Society, *Multiple Challenges*; Lazarou, Titievskaia, and Handeland, "US Foreign Policy after the 2020 Presidential Election," 2.

⁵⁴ James Marson, "Biden's NATO Amity Sparks Debate Among European Allies," *Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/bidens-nato-amity-sparks-debate-among-european-allies-11606559627>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Marson; Teri Schultz, "What's Next for NATO After Donald Trump?" *Deutsche Welle*, December 28, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/whats-next-for-nato-after-donald-trump/a-56056751>.

⁵⁷ "US to Withdraw 12,000 Troops from Germany in 'strategic' Move," *BBC News*, July 29, 2020, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53589245>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Sabine Siebold, "Biden May Review Plans for Troop Withdrawal from Germany: German Minister," *Reuters*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-germany-withdrawal-idUSKBN27X1CB>; Sylvie Lanteaume, "Why Biden Could Reverse US Troop Removal from Germany," November 11, 2020, <https://www.thelocal.de/20201111/us-president-elect-joe-biden-could-reverse-germany-troop-removal>.

⁶⁰ "Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice"; Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldor, "Pentagon Says US Has Dropped to 2,500 Troops in Afghanistan," *Associated Press*, January 15, 2021, sec. Politics,

with NATO allies, whose stance on Afghanistan has been “in together, out together,” and also disadvantages the President when it comes to negotiating with the Taliban.⁶¹ While the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan may be a sticking point for the US and its NATO allies, Biden’s advocacy for protecting human rights and democratic values can unify NATO members and coordinate joint action.

While limiting the power of authoritarian regimes has tended to be a point of agreement between the US and the EU, the United States’ decision to impose sanctions on any companies that assist with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has sown division within NATO,⁶² exposing the necessity of a coherent policy towards Russia. The pipeline, which was scheduled to be operational by the end of 2019, would enable Germany to receive Russian gas cheaply and directly, avoiding the pipelines which go through Ukraine and Poland and the tariffs associated with them.⁶³ The US opposition to the pipeline is supported by several eastern and central European countries, which share concern over the expansion of Russia’s influence in Europe.⁶⁴ Germany, the EU country which would benefit most greatly from Nord Stream 2, has consistently excoriated the US sanctions as a gross extraterritorial interference in internal European affairs.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, Biden, following the precedent set by the two administrations preceding his, remains committed to preventing the project’s completion, a stance which will continue to cause friction between the US and Germany.⁶⁶

Hopefully, Joe Biden’s proposed global Summit for Democracy will be an uncontroversial method for galvanizing multilateral opposition to authoritarianism and corruption.⁶⁷ In the outline for the Summit, Biden demonstrates his awareness that he must first realign the United States’ domestic policy with the values of human rights and the rule of law in order to act as a democratic world leader.⁶⁸ Accomplishing this will necessitate, *inter alia*, ending “the horrific practice of separating families at our border and holding immigrant children in for-profit prisons” and abolishing “the travel ban against people from Muslim-majority countries”, two goals which the President identifies as crucial in restoring the character of

<https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-donald-trump-afghanistan-taliban-united-states-16cc1dd5b2f74d463311d212ad0d215a>.

⁶¹ Nina Werkhäuser and Sandra Petersmann, “German Government Opposes Donald Trump’s Afghan Troop Withdrawal,” Deutsche Welle, November 19, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-government-opposes-donald-trumps-afghan-troop-withdrawal/a-55666100>; Steve Coll, “Joe Biden Will Have to Address the War in Afghanistan—Again,” *The New Yorker*, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/joe-biden-will-have-to-address-the-war-in-afghanistan-again>.

⁶² Petr Iskenderov, “Nord Stream 2 Undermines NATO Unity,” *Modern Diplomacy*, July 13, 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/07/13/nord-stream-2-undermines-nato-unity/>.

⁶³ Andrius Sytas, “EU Leaders Sign Letter Objecting to Nord Stream-2 Gas Link,” *Reuters*, March 16, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-eu-energy-nordstream-idUKKCNOWI1YV>; Ryan Jacobsen, “US Sanctions on Nord Stream 2,” January 2021.

⁶⁴ Sytas, “EU Leaders Sign Letter Objecting to Nord Stream-2 Gas Link”; Jacobsen, “US Sanctions on Nord Stream 2.”

⁶⁵ Iskenderov, “Nord Stream 2 Undermines NATO Unity.”

⁶⁶ Timothy Gardner and Trevor Hunnicutt, “White House Says Biden Believes Nord Stream 2 Pipeline Is ‘Bad Deal’ for Europe,” *Reuters*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biden-nord-stream-idUSKBN29V29X>.

⁶⁷ “The Power of America’s Example: The Biden Plan for Leading the Democratic World to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century,” Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website, accessed January 27, 2021, <https://joebiden.com/americanleadership/>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the nation and engaging with allies as a respected model of democracy.⁶⁹ Russia and China are clear targets in Biden's call to oppose election interference and human rights abuses, a mission which a united NATO could help facilitate.

Yet NATO is facing novel challenges on more fronts than the disagreements amongst its member states. Experts are calling for NATO reform which responds to the emergent conflict domains of the 21st century, including cyberspace, crisis management, and climate change.⁷⁰ If Biden wants NATO to remain the "single most significant military alliance in the history of the world", as he lauded it to be in 2019, he will need to help reshape NATO to adapt to the hybrid conflicts of the modern era.⁷¹ President Biden's acknowledgement of the relevance of cyber threats elicits hope that he can help NATO stand up against Russia's dangerous interferences in the internal affairs of NATO and its member states.⁷² The 2021 NATO summit to which Biden has been enthusiastically invited will be the indicator of how EU-US cooperation on defense and security will respond to the new US Administration and the unique challenges of the hybrid world.⁷³

Conclusion

With a raging pandemic, deep political divisions, and economic disrepair, President Biden has much work to do on the domestic front, so the results of the new Administration on the EU-US partnership may not immediately manifest in a flurry of summits and agreements. Nonetheless, the domestic actions taken within the US carry great weight globally, as the country has traditionally played the role of an international enforcer of democracy, something challenged by the international ridicule which the Trump presidency attracted. From reversals to reform, Biden can surely be expected to stand up for human rights, including the right to a habitable planet. Such areas for development present significant opportunities for collaboration with the EU on a range of issues from climate change to the Middle East peace process. While the world will be waiting to see the impact of Biden's presidency on the transatlantic relationship, observers will also be watching out for the ways in which the EU materializes its policy of strategic autonomy. Whether the EU will pursue closer relations with its transatlantic neighbor or increase its autonomy through bilateral agreements with China or through a more individualized security strategy remains to be seen. For now, sights can be set on the next NATO summit which will be a much-anticipated opportunity for hearing the definitive plans of the bloc and the United States on how they will jointly address the important issues of the times.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Lauren Speranza, "An Agenda for NATO's Next Generation," *Center for European Policy Analysis* (blog), November 9, 2020, <https://cepa.org/an-agenda-for-natos-next-generation/>.

⁷¹ Frank Langfitt, "Can Biden's Appreciation Of NATO Turn Back The Clock To Pre-Trump Era?" NPR Morning Edition, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/25/938763547/can-bidens-appreciation-of-nato-turn-back-the-clock-to-pre-trump-era>; Speranza, "An Agenda for NATO's Next Generation."

⁷² Lauren Speranza, Franklin D. Kramer, and Conor Rodihan, "Inbox: NATO Needs Continuous Responses in Cyberspace | CEPA," *Center for European Policy Analysis* (blog), December 9, 2020, <https://cepa.org/inbox-nato-needs-continuous-responses-in-cyberspace/>.

⁷³ NATO, "NATO Secretary General Congratulates President Joe Biden on His Inauguration," January 20, 2021, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180766.htm.



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