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HOSTILE ALLY
The Trump challenge and
Europe's inadequate response

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two and a half years into the Trump administration, an odd calm appears to have settled over the trans-Atlantic relationship. The United States has not started a war against Iran or North Korea. It has not left the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the World Trade Organization (WTO), nor has it taken its troops out of Syria or Afghanistan. Washington has not yet acted on its threat of a trade war with the European Union (EU). Various sanctions have been discussed, but not actually imposed. Almost any of these events, had they occurred, would have had a significant negative impact on Europe's prosperity and security. The European Union, for its part, has not been engulfed by a tsunami of uncontrolled immigration, nor has it been torched by populists. It has not imploded or been abandoned by its member states. Even Britain is still in the EU — for now.

But that the absence of disasters should be cause for relief is no small measure of how bad the relationship has become. And beneath the surface, things are not well at all. The United States might act on its manifold threats. Europe might buckle under a new crisis. But even barring a cataclysmic event, global levels of friction and risk have undeniably risen. The U.S. president and his administration have made their distaste for the European Union and particular European allies plain. The feeling appears to be reciprocated in many European quarters. The calm, in other words, is deceptive and unlikely to last.

This essay examines how American and European trans-Atlantic strategy and policy have fared in the new paradigm of great power competition. It concludes that so far the record is one of failure on both sides. It postulates that despite the Trump administration's emphasis on national sovereignty and its dislike of free trade and multilateralism, its hostility toward Europe is an act of self-harm. For Europe, meanwhile, the challenges presented by the shift in its strategic landscape are huge; but while they are exacerbated by the current U.S. administration's policies, they are not caused by them. The truth is that Trump holds up a mirror to Europe. We Europeans may not like what we see in it, and indeed we should not. But we are well advised to take note, and act on what we see.

INTRODUCTION

For a major anniversary of the world's most powerful, successful, and long-lasting military alliance, the festivities were somewhat subdued. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, turned 70 this past April 4. But the dignitaries that assembled for a one-day meeting in Washington, DC, where the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949, were foreign ministers rather than heads of state. No one wanted a repeat of the nerve-racking Brussels Summit of the previous summer, when U.S. President Donald Trump harangued allies for not spending enough on defense and intimated that America might leave the alliance and strike out on its own.

Worries that President Trump might crash the party or unleash a tweetstorm over the proceedings proved unfounded. NATO's top official Jens Stoltenberg gave a forceful, warm, and personal speech to a packed joint session of Congress that drew nearly two dozen standing ovations. Even for those who had heard their share of national security boilerplate rhetoric, it was a moving experience.

This was the first time a secretary general of the alliance had been invited to speak on one of Washington's most high-profile stages — an unmistakable warning to the White House by concerned lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle. Stoltenberg did not criticize the president. But he got one last thundering round of applause when, nearing the end of his speech, he made a meaningful pause and then said simply: "It is good to have friends."¹

A few hours later, Vice President Mike Pence cast a pall over a think tank event with an awkward address in which he singled out Germany and Turkey for harsh criticism.² But Secretary of State Mike Pompeo rescued the mood at the end of the day with a vigorous endorsement of "this amazing, important NATO alliance."³ The sense of relief among the diplomats and policymakers in the room was palpable.

In the fall of 2019, and two and a half years into the Trump administration, a queasy calm appears to have settled over the trans-Atlantic relationship. The United States is not embroiled in a war with the regimes in Iran or North Korea. It has not left NATO or the WTO, nor has it taken U.S. troops out of Syria or Afghanistan in significant numbers (yet). Washington has not moved on its threats of a full-on trade war with the European Union. Various sanctions that might have a direct or indirect impact on Europe have been drafted or discussed, but (so far) not actually imposed. Almost any of these events, had they occurred, would have had a significant negative impact on Europe's prosperity and security.

The European Union, for its part, has neither been engulfed by a tsunami of uncontrolled immigration nor torched by populists. It has not imploded or been abandoned by its member states. Even Britain is still in the EU, although its new prime minister Boris Johnson appears fiercely determined to take it out on October 31. European leaders have learned not to attempt a Twitter war with a president who — in the words of France's former ambassador to Washington Gérard Araud — has "escalation dominance."⁴ State visits from Europe have become fewer, but the president's peers still talk to him regularly over the phone.⁵

Yet beneath the surface, strong forces are roiling. The United States might act on its manifold threats at any given moment. Europe might buckle under a renewed onslaught of crises. On both sides of the Atlantic, polarized domestic politics constrain the ability

of leaders to shape events. The Trump administration and the president himself have made their distaste for the European Union (and particular European allies) plain. The feeling appears to be reciprocated in many European quarters. Even in the absence of a single cataclysmic event, global levels of friction, risk, and mistrust have undeniably risen. Europe's strategic environment has darkened. The calm, in other words, is deceptive. And it seems unlikely to last.

This essay examines how U.S. and European trans-Atlantic strategy and policy have fared in the context of the administration's new paradigm of great power competition. It examines U.S. policy and its effects on Europe. It then reviews Europe's responses and concludes with a list of suggestions for re-framing the trans-Atlantic relationship.

“AMERICA FIRST” UNFOLDS

For Europeans (and for the rest of the world), the third year of the Trump presidency has provided confusion and clarity alike. Both are reason for new, deep concerns about this administration's relationship with its allies on the other side of the Atlantic.

Personnel: Trump unbound

The administration's December 2017 National Security Strategy laid out a new overarching paradigm of great power competition as the “primary concern in U.S. national security.”⁶ Europeans were dismayed by its narrowly transactional take on alliances. But they had every reason to welcome their American partner's shift in focus from counterterrorism to the challenges and threats posed by Russia and China, both of whom had by that point become assertive actors in Europe's neighborhoods, and indeed within the European Union. The subsequent National Defense Strategy (authored by the Department of Defense under its Secretary James Mattis) reassured them with a much firmer emphasis on the importance of alliances as providers of leverage and legitimacy for U.S. purposes. At the same time, it was obvious that there was a permanent tension between the president's disruptive instincts and a group of key senior policy officials (Mattis, Chief of Staff John Kelly, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats) around him who were doing everything they could to execute the new strategy, while normalizing or constraining Trump's impulses.

A year and a half later, almost all the normalizers are gone, forced out by the president. They have either been replaced with hardliners like National Security Adviser John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, or with acting officials who do not measure up to the stature and experience of their predecessors. As a result, the president has (mostly) established his dominance over foreign and security policy, and is pursuing an “America First” strategy that in key aspects is radically different from that laid out in his own national security strategy — not least in his constant deemphasizing of the security challenges represented by Russia and his willingness to offer “deals” to the leaders of adversaries like China, North Korea, and even Iran.

Efforts by the administration's top advisers to provide a public articulation of the presidential foreign policy agenda have tended to skirt substance, while expanding at length on sonorous banalities.⁷ The political scientist Kiron Skinner, brought on by Pompeo as head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, repeatedly described Trumpism as a “series of hunches and instincts” being translated by her office into five “pillars”: national sovereignty, national interest, reciprocity in trade, burden-sharing

in defense, and “new partnerships” for specific crises.⁸ (Skinner was let go from her position in early August.) Former senior official Michael Anton, who has staked out a line as a Trump explainer since his essay “The Flight 93 Election,”⁹ recently marshalled a mashup of Aristotle, Xenophon, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Solzhenitsyn, and the Israeli historian Yoram Hazony to summarize the administration’s take on strategy: “Let’s all put our own countries first, [...] putting our interests first will make us all safer and more prosperous. If there is a Trump Doctrine, that’s it.”¹⁰ My colleague Thomas Wright’s crisp summation is rather more accurate:

“This policy consists of a narrow, transactional relationship with other nations, a preference for authoritarian governments over other democracies, a mercantilist approach to international economic policy, a general disregard for human rights and the rule of law, and the promotion of nationalism and unilateralism at the expense of multilateralism.”¹¹

However, as Ross Douthat¹² and others have pointed out, Trump unbound is not Trump unopposed. Bolton and Pompeo have both presented themselves as loyal enablers of the president’s agenda, but they do not share their commander-in-chief’s strong aversion to the actual use of (as opposed to threats of) kinetic power. Trump’s own intelligence chiefs issued a national intelligence assessment that disagrees pointedly with the president’s threat perceptions: it warns that Russia will continue to interfere in the United States, that North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear weapons, and that the Islamic State (IS) remains unvanquished.¹³ Since the 2018 midterms, the president also has a Democratic House of Representatives to contend with. He has broad executive power and discretion in setting the parameters of foreign and security policy, of course, but the Democrats and indeed many Republicans seem determined to make it understood



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that they will use all means available to them resist his worst impulses. Hence the invitation to Stoltenberg.¹⁴

But the question of policy depth or coherence — which legions of analysts would have obsessed over in a pre-Trump era — is probably moot. Because at this

point, the Trump Doctrine is visibly having trouble surviving contact with reality on all fronts, whether on foreign and security policy, or on economic policy.

Security: high-risk brinksmanship

For a president who campaigned on a vow of ending America’s “endless wars” and bringing back the troops, the Trump administration is currently engaging in a startling number of high-stakes, high-risk confrontations across several continents simultaneously. So far, it does not seem to be winning any of them. If anything, the inherent incompatibility of the president’s belligerence and his deal-making instincts has become more and more obvious.¹⁵

In Asia, North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un shows no signs of acceding to the White House’s efforts to make him give up his country’s nuclear weapons. According to a recent *New Yorker* profile by Dexter Filkins, Bolton — a longstanding advocate of military strikes to destroy Pyongyang’s nuclear capability — remains convinced that a successful strike is possible.¹⁶ But when the president traveled to the Demilitarized Zone to meet with Kim and took the historically unprecedented step of crossing the border into North

Korea, Fox News host Tucker Carlson, a skeptic of military intervention, accompanied him. Bolton, meanwhile, was in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar. Trump persists in asserting that he wants a deal, and the White House is trying to restart nuclear talks. But Pyongyang is making talks conditional on a lifting of sanctions, and firing short-range missiles, with the acquiescence of the president.¹⁷ By mid-August, huge democracy protests in Hong Kong were raising fears of a brutal crackdown by the Chinese government, with potentially global repercussions. Yet President Trump has told Xi Jin Ping that he would not condemn a Chinese intervention. On August 1, he told the press that the issue was “between Hong Kong and ... between China, because Hong Kong is a part of China.”¹⁸

In the Middle East, the president’s announcement on Twitter of his intention to pull American forces out of Syria (followed by a second declaration that 50% of U.S. troops in Afghanistan would also be withdrawn) resulted in the resignation of Secretary of Defense James Mattis but was walked back after a rare rebuke from Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, one of the president’s key allies. Nonetheless, Trump imposed a drastic reduction of U.S. forces in Syria. Brett McGurk, the senior U.S. official overseeing the coalition effort to counter IS, resigned over this decision. In his scathing verdict, “Trump forfeited U.S. leadership at a decisive moment in the campaign, to the benefit of Iran, Russia, and Turkey.” Yet McGurk is equally critical of the national security advisor, writing that “Bolton’s declaration that U.S. troops would stay in Syria until all the Iranians left was never realistic.”¹⁹ In Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the elusive leader of the supposedly vanquished Islamic State, appeared in a video for the first time in half a decade, claiming his followers had carried out the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka that claimed nearly 300 lives.

The U.S.-Iran standoff is growing more hostile apace as the Trump administration pursues a policy of “maximum pressure” designed to bring down the regime. In May 2018, shortly after Trump’s announcement of the United States’ withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), Secretary of State Pompeo laid out a dozen or so demands that amounted to terms of surrender.²⁰ One year later, the U.S. re-imposed harsh sanctions, demanded that allies cease doing business with Tehran, and declared the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps a terrorist organization. Simultaneously, a U.S. carrier group was steaming to the Gulf. The deployment had already been planned, but it was accompanied by belligerent statements from Bolton, and reports that the administration was revising its military plans.²¹ Iran has countered by announcing a partial JCPOA withdrawal of its own, saying that it would resume nuclear fuel production unless Europeans acted to undercut U.S. sanctions. Both Pompeo and Bolton are longstanding and unequivocal advocates of regime change in Tehran.²²

However, their greatest obstacle in this may be the president, who wants the same outcome, but is firmly opposed to more wars. By late May, Trump was contradicting his national security adviser in public while on a state visit to Japan, saying that he did not want regime change in Iran.²³ On a visit to France in early June, he seemed to be offering talks. On June 21, the president finally ordered air strikes on Iran — and immediately reversed himself, reportedly at the urging of Tucker Carlson.²⁴ His team then imposed tough new sanctions. By mid-July, Iran and Britain were seizing each other’s ships, and Washington and its European allies were fighting over whether to send their navies to the Gulf to protect shipping lanes.

Jared Kushner's much-heralded Middle East peace plan had aroused skepticism even within the administration — with the secretary of state suggesting it might be “un-executable”²⁵ — even before the presentation in late June of the “Peace to Prosperity” plan at a workshop in Manama. The report promises \$50 billion worth of investments but left for an unspecified later date any explanation of how to resolve the region's toxic politics. Meanwhile, tensions and violence between Israel and Hamas in Gaza are on the rise, with the first Israeli civilian deaths since 2014. In Libya, the president abruptly reversed U.S. policy and endorsed a strongman, General Khalifa Haftar, who was marching on Tripoli to depose the U.N.-backed government, following conversations with several Arab leaders.²⁶ Yet the stalemate between government and rebels remains, while the misery of ordinary Libyans deepens.

In Latin America, finally, the Trump administration has taken vocal sides in the Venezuelan conflict by endorsing Juan Guaidó, the opponent of dictator Nicolás Maduro, with Bolton, Pompeo, and Vice President Mike Pence all offering various threats and blandishments. But an attempt in late April by Guaidó to push Maduro out of power failed. The White House tightened sanctions on Cuba — which it accuses of supporting Maduro — in response. Despite reports that the Kremlin stopped Maduro from leaving the country, and assertions from Pompeo that the Russian presence in Venezuela amounted to an invasion, Trump claimed after a 90-minute phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin that Moscow was “not looking at all to get involved in Venezuela.”²⁷ Meanwhile, Bolton insists that the Monroe Doctrine, which states the Washington's prerogative to police Latin America against foreign interference, is “alive and well.”²⁸ Yet the president appears to have lost interest in the topic.²⁹

Few, in Europe or elsewhere, would disagree with the Trump administration about the reprehensible nature of the regimes in North Korea, Iran, or Venezuela. Conceivably, its disruptive and confrontational approach might shock America's adversaries into submission. The visible cross-currents between the president and his senior advisers might even contribute to this effect. For example, the administration's bravado probably drove the North Koreans to the negotiating table in March 2018.

However, the administration's simultaneous brinkmanship in hotspots around the world reveals a problematic pattern. Key officials like Bolton or Pompeo initially take “an aggressive, maximalist position without a clear plan to carry it through.”³⁰ If the president responds to his senior advisors' bellicosity with irritated public rebukes, they invariably double down.³¹ (That said, there are clear tensions between the more intransigent Bolton and the more flexible Pompeo.) But if there is one lesson of the summer of 2019,



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it is that the president, when pressed by his advisers to back escalation, offers talks to his adversaries.³² Iran is a case in point: Bolton and Pompeo were against talks. The president overruled them — and Pompeo was put in the humiliating position of having to offer an unconditional return to the table,

pulverizing any leverage gained by the previous bullying. As the 2020 election campaign gears up, Trump's need for quick, showy “deals” is, if anything, likely to increase.

Surely the incoherence of the administration's foreign policy, and the inconsistency of its execution, increases the risk of misinterpretation and miscalculation by its rivals. It empowers hardliners like Iran's Revolutionary Guard. It drives civil societies into supporting their countries' regimes, all while impoverishing them and isolating them from international networks. It exacerbates regional instability and tension. It creates vacuums that competing powers like Russia and China actively exploit. In fact, if there are any winners of America's brinksmanship so far, they are its adversaries.

This is how uncontrolled escalation and accidental wars happen. And Washington's repeated overtures towards Kim Jong Un make a powerful case that possession of nuclear weapons is the best defense against U.S. pressure.

All this puts America's regional allies at immediate risk — and none more than the Europeans. For them, instability in the Middle East and North Africa is the most pressing concern, because this region is closest to Europe geographically. Uncontrolled migration outflows from wars and conflicts there have already caused domestic political havoc in Europe. Yet even clashes that take place much farther away — say a U.S. conflict with North Korea or even a sharpening of tensions in the Pacific region — could likewise have a massive negative impact on European trade and investment. Finally, any impression of Washington accepting Russian or Chinese meddling in the Middle East, Africa, or Latin America, or acquiescing in their claims to spheres of influence at a point when both those powers are aggressive players in Europe, also serves to undermine the continent's stability.

Trade: weaponizing economic interdependence

The hallmark of the Trump administration's foreign policy, however, has been its marked appetite for economic coercion — the president's preferred substitute for the application of military force. Coercive economic measures are a longstanding tool of U.S. policy in the pursuit of diplomatic and security goals. And other countries use them too, including the European Union. But previous U.S. administrations combined wielding the economic stick with a mostly enlightened and generous stewardship of an international economic order based on free trade. Trumpian economic policy, in contrast, is executed against a backdrop of great power competition, suspicion of multilateralism and trade agreements, as well as economic nationalism and a hostility to globalization. And it leans more heavily on tariffs, sanctions, and most recently export controls, than any previous administration.

"Trade wars are good, and easy to win" was the battle cry under which President Trump pulled out of a multilateral trade agreement for the Pacific and out of negotiations for a similar trans-Atlantic trade treaty (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or TTIP).³³ Tariffs of 10% on aluminum and 25% on steel imports from the EU (as well as from Canada and Mexico), imposed in early 2018 invoking a "national security threat" exemption under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules against America's allies, remain in place. The EU responded with a raft of retaliatory measures, which in turn led to the United States deliberating over a 20-25% tariff on imported automobiles and auto parts. Yet the threat of a full-blown trans-Atlantic trade fight eased after a mid-2018 summit agreement to enter into preparatory talks for negotiations — and by the administration's swerve later that year toward a trade confrontation with China. By August 2019, with the president's announcement of massive additional tariffs on Chinese-made consumer goods, matters were escalating into a trade war and rattling global stock markets.³⁴

U.S.-EU conversations about launching trade talks have also been fraught with tension, however, with each side making demands that are unacceptable to the other side.³⁵ The threat of another trade war, beginning with tariffs on Europe's \$60 billion car and car part exports to America as well as similar tariffs on Japan, was deferred for up to six months in mid-May.³⁶ But for Europeans, that only means the issue has been suspended — much like a guillotine blade left hanging in mid-air. A Fox News interview with the president in which he said that EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager “hates the United States perhaps worse than any person I've ever met” may well set the tone for the fall.³⁷

At least for now, tariffs are subject to international rules and adjudication procedures. Sanctions are not, and indications are they are becoming Washington's preferred tool of economic coercion.

The beginning of the inflationary use of sanctions certainly predates the current administration. But the number of sanctions programs administered by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has grown from 17 in 2004 to 30 in 2019, and they have transitioned from broad country embargoes to much sharper individual and company-specific sanctions. Moreover, the U.S. has pursued violations far more harshly in recent years, and been much more willing to deploy secondary sanctions.³⁸ The Trump administration has now added harsh and extensive new sanctions on North Korea, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela. It has also announced secondary sanctions on third countries — regardless of whether they are American allies — who continue to do business with the targeted actors. A draft bill sanctioning European companies involved in Nord Stream 2, the pipeline project to export gas from Russia to Europe, is likely to pass in the fall.

After the breakdown of U.S.-China trade talks in mid-May, the Trump administration expanded its trade conflict with China, focused so far on limiting imports, to a new front: Citing national security concerns, it imposed export controls on U.S. goods that are vital components for Huawei Technologies.³⁹ The order, which followed a months-long campaign to stop U.S. allies from using Huawei gear, had been expected, and elicited swift compliance. Google and Arm (a U.K. semiconductor company) said they would limit supplies to the Chinese telecoms giant. U.K. and Japanese carriers said they would not offer its phones. Nonetheless, the move was the administration's most extreme and escalatory move so far, and it shook stock markets — until the Commerce Department declared a partial 90-day reprieve.⁴⁰ At the Osaka G-20 summit in late June, Trump reversed his decision to blacklist Huawei, but the tariffs threatened for September may well obviate that pledge.

The Europeans, who had hoped for a reprieve as long as the administration was focused on China, are now caught squarely in the middle of this new conflict between the United States and China because Huawei has captured more than a quarter of the smartphone market in Europe and has been campaigning aggressively (and to some degree successfully) to supply the continent's new 5G mobile telephone networks.⁴¹

From a European point of view, the administration makes some entirely reasonable points on international economic governance. The multilateral trade agreements Trump terminated had flaws. So do the WTO and the body of global trade rules it was created to adjudicate.

As for the trans-Atlantic trade relationship, Washington's complaint about unfair imbalances is valid — although the EU also has legitimate grievances about U.S. tariffs.⁴² Trump's early suggestion that trade relations among the G-7 countries should become a trade barrier-free zone was a good idea, albeit unlikely to materialize given protectionist impulses all around.

But Europeans are also asking themselves whether the Trump administration's critique of the EU is really just about steel, automobiles, or trade imbalances. Trade, the regulation of a huge market for physical goods as well as data, is the one aspect in which a united EU wields a power comparable to America's, and where it is a legitimate peer competitor within the great power competition paradigm. An EU weakened or divided by trade coercion is not. It would, as Jean Pisani-Ferry has remarked, "have no choice but to rally behind the U.S." in a struggle for trade supremacy with China.⁴³

With regard to the trade conflict with China, Europeans allies share many of the Washington's concerns about China gaming the system, its defiance of global trade rules, and its aggressive economic practices — many of which appear to be politically and strategically motivated. Increasingly, they also worry about the role played by Huawei and other state-owned Chinese companies. For all these reasons, Europeans argued in Washington that the United States and the EU should tackle China's unfair trade practices together. But they were rebuffed.

U.S. unilateral sanctions raise a host of thorny and complex issues for Europe, even in cases where they might agree on the rationale. On Iran, for example, the EU and most of its member states fully recognize the threat of the Tehran regime's quest for regional hegemony and its support for terrorism. However, they — and this includes even the United Kingdom — also deplore the Washington's abrogation of the JCPOA and continue to attempt to uphold it. Yet their efforts to protect themselves against secondary sanctions with special trading mechanisms (so-called "special purpose vehicles" or SPVs) have had humiliatingly little success. Most European companies are pulling out of trade with Iran or have already done so.

As for sanctions on Russia: under the Obama administration, Western leverage vis-à-vis Moscow was based on a carefully crafted trans-Atlantic consensus on the need to punish the Kremlin for its aggression against Ukraine — with Berlin mainly holding together the intra-

European consensus. But today, there are two Russia policies in Washington: Congress' and the president's. The latter gives the impression of seeking rapprochement with Moscow at every possible opportunity, with Congress ever more fiercely determined to counter such efforts. That creates a potential escalatory sanctioning dynamic. This in turn undermines the trans-Atlantic consensus, which is essential for the sanctions to work, since Russia is much more dependent on the European than on the American market.⁴⁴ It doesn't help that the European countries most popular with the White House, like Italy or Hungary, oppose the Russia sanctions and are trying hard to undermine it themselves.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Germany, the country that arguably has the most to lose from this unraveling, undermines its own credibility by its support for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.⁴⁶

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On Turkey — under threat of sanctions because of its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system — there seems again to be not one but two positions in Washington. Lawmakers are pressing hard for punishment, while the president is prevaricating. Europeans share the concern about Erdoğan's flirtation with Moscow and are deeply worried about the country's descent into authoritarian rule and instability. But they are keenly aware that Turkey plays a crucial role within NATO in maintaining security in the Eastern Mediterranean, and is essential in managing and containing migration flows to Europe. An agreement brokered between Erdoğan and Chancellor Angela Merkel in March 2016 was key to ending the refugee crisis in Germany. For those European countries that host large Turkish diasporas (above all Germany and the Netherlands), there is a domestic security nexus involved as well. In 2018, U.S. sanctions over the detention of American hostages had already badly shaken the Turkish economy, raising fears of economic and political contagion.⁴⁷

The Trump administration's recent move on Huawei, however, has the potential to eclipse all previous trans-Atlantic differences on tariffs and sanctions. It welds together commerce and national security. And it is widely seen as only the opening salvo to further bans that will dramatically broaden the scope of the U.S.-China economic conflict from trade in aluminum and steel or traditional manufactured goods like dishwashers and cars to a full-blown war for technological dominance with lasting repercussions around the globe.

In sum, the Trump administration's economic coercion policies appear to be designed much like its foreign policy: break down multilateral fora, bilateralize relationships with partners and challengers, and then use America's overwhelming power and resources to pummel them into submission. And there is a rather obvious irony in the fact that an administration that holds that globalization is a nefarious phenomenon exploited by others to cheat America is able to use coercion so liberally precisely because of the United States' worldwide integration. In other words, globalization is what lets Trump weaponize economic interdependence in the first place.

But here too, success — or victory — appears elusive. For one, the contradictory tensions between the president and his senior advisers are becoming increasingly obvious. The former is bent on quick gains that can be translated into votes. The latter are pursuing strategic concerns — even if the actual strategy behind them is debatable. Robert Lighthizer, the U.S. trade representative, appears to be in free trade enforcement warrior mode, refighting the 1980s trade wars with Japan. Peter Navarro, the president's director of trade and manufacturing policy and an economic nationalist, seems above all else to want to decouple the U.S. economy from global trade flows by repatriating manufacturing jobs to America — creating, in the words of former Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, an “economic iron curtain.”⁴⁸ For the China hawks in the administration, the trade conflict is only one element in an epochal struggle for dominance and technological supremacy.⁴⁹ Trump, meanwhile, toggles impulsively between tweeting threats and dangling deals. He has called Huawei “very dangerous, from a security standpoint.” But he also keeps hinting that the company might be part of a larger trade deal with China (and there is a precedent in the form of his May 2018 decision to reverse a ban on the Chinese hardware firm ZTE).

From an American point of view — presumably even from that of an ardent American nationalist — the severest critique to be leveled at the Trump administration's economic coercion policies is that they fail more often than not and undercut the effectiveness

and legitimacy of U.S. power at home and abroad, in the short and long runs. For now, neither the EU nor China (or for that matter Russia, Iran, or Turkey) are making serious concessions; if anything, they are digging in. No free trade agreement has been completed so far except for an update to an existing bilateral agreement with South Korea; the renegotiated USMCA agreement with Mexico and Canada is stalled because of Democratic opposition in Congress. Meanwhile, the tariffs are an immediate regressive tax on American consumers, hitting hardest those segments of society with the least purchasing power and economic resilience.⁵⁰ Even Larry Kudlow, director of the National Economic Council, has admitted as much.⁵¹ So far, there is little evidence that U.S. companies are repatriating production or supply chains.

An escalation and widening of trade wars with China and Europe — as appears likely now — could have a considerable impact not just on the domestic economy but on the 2020 elections.⁵² Given the deep integration of the trans-Atlantic economic space (with trade flows of more than \$3 billion a day), a renewed trade war with the EU would also harm American jobs and direct investment in Europe. As for the Huawei ban, the U.S.-based Semiconductor Industry Association has complained bitterly that it risks undermining America's competitive edge and "leadership in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and next-generation telecommunications."⁵³ Because of complex global tech supply chains, its impact is already rippling far beyond the United States and China.⁵⁴

In the longer run, over-reliance on tools of economic coercion by the United States — particularly when these are designed to punish an adversary rather than to change its behavior or imposed in pursuit of maximalist (and therefore low-probability) goals like regime change or humiliating concessions — will prove immensely costly above all for their user. It breeds resentment and resistance, and risks adversaries and allies alike developing workarounds to the dollar and to the U.S. financial system.⁵⁵ And, as Harrell and Rosenberg have pointed out, "coercive measures against large, globally important economies, such as China's or the European Union's, have the potential to drive much more important systemic changes."⁵⁶ Such shifts are likely to be hastened by impending disruptive developments in digital trade and financial technology.

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Ideology: framing competition as a clash of civilizations

Three years into this administration, it has become clear that the 45th president will be remembered not just for the blows he has inflicted on America's stewardship of an international order based on peace and free trade. Granted, few administrations in recent memory have been so ineffectual at executing their ideas and achieving their goals. But other presidents (including his three predecessors) have attempted retrenchment, engaged in illegitimate wars, or employed economic coercion. Arguably, the difference in the content and impact of its security or economic policy is — while considerable — still one of degrees.

The truly singular distinction of the Trump presidency compared to all its postwar forerunners, however, resides in the realm of ideology. No previous U.S. administration has seen its most senior figures, from the president on downwards, so openly affirm disregard for the notion of a rules-based international order that is anchored by shared beliefs in fundamental values of liberal constitutionalism practiced at home: democracy, the separation of powers, rule of law, and the protection of minorities. Or, put even more plainly: that the common good requires that there be restraints on the power of the state, and on the will of majorities. And in no other administration have top officials so often framed their policies with deliberate references to culture-war tropes stemming from the intellectual universe of the far right. Notably, their notion of a shared “West” is not so much based on values and rules as on a common “civilization” rooted in Judeo-Christian religion — with an emphasis on the Old Testament. This alternative vision of



This alternative vision of the West is no longer the magnetic pole of liberal internationalism, but a culture engaged in a secular battle for survival.

the West is no longer the magnetic pole or transformational model of liberal internationalism, but a culture engaged in a secular battle for survival.⁵⁷

On June 6, 2017, the president gave a speech in Warsaw that finally acknowledged a commitment to the trans-Atlantic

alliance’s mutual defense clause, to the immense relief of European allies. But he also painted a darkly tribal and pessimistic picture of a West under threat from the “South or the East” and added: “The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive.”⁵⁸

Trump has been noticeably evasive on the subject of the hard right in America, commenting that there were “good people on both sides” at the “Unite the Right” march in August 2017 in Charlottesville, at which a protester was murdered by an alt-right sympathizer. But he has seen no need at all to equivocate about his support of insurgent hard-right movements and illiberal authoritarian leaders abroad. In fact, it is one of the rare points on which he has never reversed himself, from his fawning admiration of Russian President Vladimir Putin, China’s leader Xi Jinping, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, and North Korean strongman Kim Jong Un, to his praise of the coalition of the far right Lega and the populist Five Star Movement in Italy and Hungary’s strongman Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, to whom he granted the privilege of a White House visit in mid-May 2019.

At the State Department, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo too has taken some trouble to lay out his worldview — unlike his predecessor Rex Tillerson, who was not given to public musings about theories of international relations. In December 2018, Pompeo gave a speech on Europe in Brussels.⁵⁹ It was his first, and eagerly awaited. His address turned out, as a *Politico* reporter observed, to be “remarkably undiplomatic.”⁶⁰ Pompeo extolled the virtues of nationalism. He criticized a host of international organizations from the World Trade Organization to the United Nations and the EU as antithetical to national sovereignty. He said that Brexit was a “political wakeup call” to the European Union, and added, “Is the EU ensuring that the interests of countries and their citizens are placed before those of bureaucrats here in Brussels?” Finally, he told his alarmed European audience that “international bodies” that constrain national sovereignty “must be reformed or eliminated.” By any measure, this was the most hostile speech an American secretary of state had ever given in Brussels.

This past May, the secretary of state went to the Claremont Institute in California — a conservative think tank noted for its early espousal of the Trump candidacy — to deliver what Walter Russell Mead called “his most comprehensive attempt yet to expound the core themes informing the Trump administration’s foreign policy,” and “likely to shape the Republican Party’s approach to statecraft for years to come.”⁶¹ Much of Pompeo’s talk was a straightforward and fairly traditional explication of the 2017 National Security Strategy’s key theme of the need for American strength in a strategic paradigm of great power competition: “America can compete and win against our adversaries on security and any economic issue.” He excoriated Russia, China, Cuba, and Iran, defended the president against his critics, and pointedly added (perhaps at the direction of the national security advisor), “he has no aspiration to use force to spread the American model.”

But Pompeo then devoted several minutes to America’s alliances. He cited George Washington’s “Farewell Address,” warning against “permanent alliances” and saying, “that same speech praised connections with nations based on ‘policy, humanity, and interest.’” The secretary of state went on to list examples: Israel, Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea. In conspicuous contrast to his remarks at the April anniversary celebration of the trans-Atlantic alliance, he did not mention either NATO or Europe.

Pompeo’s address also featured a variety of right-wing nationalist tropes, contrasting “free nations” and “empires,” and hinting that he saw the EU as an example of the latter. In a suggestive passage that wove together the terms “Western Civilization” and “identity,” he said,

Countries all over the world are rediscovering their national identities[...] The wave of electoral surprises has swept from Britain to the United States and all the way to Brazil.[...] If democratic leaders are not responsive to the jolts of patriotism which are sweeping the world, they won’t be leaders for long. [...] President Trump has helped put the world back on a nation-first trajectory, and I am confident that this reawakening will last well beyond his presidency.

Mead, a sympathetic observer of the Trump administration, labels this vision “conservative internationalism,” adding that “it’s hard to see any plausible competing vision on the horizon.” But that is at best a polite euphemism for a stark rupture with the three key foreign policy traditions of the Republican Party of the past three-quarters of a century. It sets a nationalist, tribalist, and ruthlessly interventionist Trumpian foreign policy against the internationalists’ American stewardship of a liberal world order, the neoconservatives’ human rights universalism, and the realists’ prudent restraint.

The president and his secretary of state are not the only senior figures in the Trump administration to have articulated ideas that anchor them if not within, then exceedingly close to, the world of the hard right. Pompeo’s recently-dismissed policy planning director Kiron Skinner caused consternation at a think tank forum in Washington in late April, when she argued that the Cold War’s U.S.-Soviet standoff was “a fight within the Western family,” whereas the impending U.S.-China rivalry would be especially bitter because “it’s the first time that we will have a great-power competitor that is not Caucasian.”⁶² (Apart from injecting a disturbingly racial tone into the conversation, this was also factually wrong, given that the U.S. fought Japan in World War II.)

John Bolton, meanwhile, is well known for taking a dim view of international agreements in general and the European Union in particular, discussing both in his autobiography, “Surrender is Not An Option.”⁶³ He is less well known for his chairmanship of the Gatestone

Institute (which he resigned when he became national security adviser), a New York-based advocacy group that has spread conspiracy theories about Muslim refugees in Europe. It has warned of a “jihadist takeover of Europe” leading to a “Great White Death,” and its content has been repurposed regularly by Russian troll factories.⁶⁴

It is instructive in this context to look at the recent writings of Yoram Hazony, an Israeli political theorist, whose book “The Virtue of Nationalism”⁶⁵ was awarded the Conservative Book of the Year 2019 award, and has received enthusiastic accolades from Trump interpreters like Michael Anton.⁶⁶ Hazony’s ideas have an odd way of reverberating in Mike Pompeo’s speeches. Indeed, A. Wess Mitchell, until February 2019 the State Department’s top Europe policy appointee, had told German diplomats that they need look no farther than Hazony’s book for a blueprint for the secretary of state’s December 2018 speech in Brussels.

In his book, Hazony posits nationalism as the virtuous opposite of empires — more specifically, “liberal imperialism.” The two main offending empires he has in mind are post-Cold War liberal America, and the European Union. The latter, he writes, is a “German-dominated ... imperial order” that “will work to delegitimize and undermine the independence of all remaining national states.”⁶⁷ Leaving aside the fact that this is only one of a host of misreadings of European history and politics in Hazony’s book, this passage raises interesting unanswered questions. To what high point of nationalism exactly ought Europe’s clock be set back? 1989? 1945? 1918? 1914? The Peace of Westphalia in 1648? And ought America merely offer sympathy to European nationalist movements — or something more?

This definition of nationalism has nothing to do with the American tradition of inclusive, civic nationalism, which posits that it is the voluntary act of subscribing to certain foundational values that transforms an immigrant into an American. On the contrary, it bases nationalism on “families” and “tribes” — a theory of domestic power premised on the rule of a majority tribe “whose cultural dominance is plain and unquestioned, and against which resistance appears to be futile.”⁶⁸ This is perhaps more properly called ethno-chauvinism, and it is entirely compatible with the thinking of the American hard right — and its counterparts in Europe, Russia, and elsewhere.

A day after NATO’s 70th anniversary, the *Wall Street Journal* published an essay written by Hazony together with Ofir Haivry, his colleague at the Herzl Institute, a think tank in Jerusalem, on the topic of America’s alliances. Rather than supporting “fair-weather friends and free-riding dependencies,” the authors argued, America should look to a “revitalized alliance of democratic nations.” The candidates they recommended are India, Japan, Australia, Israel, and the U.K., together with “frontline Eastern European nations.” “Real allies” are “countries that share its [America’s] commitment to a world of independent nations, pursue democratic self-determination (although not necessarily liberalism) at home, and are willing to pay the price for freedom [...]”⁶⁹

The rest of Europe, Hazony and Haivry wrote, has unfortunately been “corrupted by its dependence on the U.S.” — and not just that. They deplore that European “transnationalist fantasies” are “exported to the U.S. and the rest of the world via international bodies [...] Having subsidized the creation of a decadent socialist paradise in Europe, the U.S. now has to watch as the EU’s influence washes over America and other nations.” This Spenglerian declinist narrative, too, turns trans-Atlantic history on its head: rather than postwar America exporting international law and multilateralism to the rest of the West and beyond, it has Europe weaponizing cultural interdependence by flooding the world with dangerous and toxic ideas.

But fact-checking the policy statements of senior members of the Trump administration, their explainers (like Skinner and Anton), or their philosophical whisperers (like Hazony), is rarely a productive exercise. The *New Yorker* writer Masha Gessen, listening to a conversation between Kiron Skinner and Anne-Marie Slaughter, president of the New America Foundation (and director of policy planning under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton), found herself reminded of the emptying-out of political rhetoric in her native Russia under Putinism, and of a senior Russian official describing his work as carrying out “emanations.” Her description of the discussion is worth citing in full — not least because it astutely picks up on a floating unease that has become a familiar feature of so many debates in Washington:

It was conducted in the moderately accessible policy jargon that is typical of such conversations. Except this time the familiar language took on the opposite of its usual sticky, overburdened quality: it was hollow now, like the words meant nothing. Not literally nothing, of course — words always convey some meaning, and the meaning inevitably changes depending on the speaker and the context — but here the chasm between what the words might have meant to one interlocutor and what they meant when spoken by the other was so vast that it was as though the words were no longer part of a recognizable language.⁷⁰

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss these “emanations” as not worth taking seriously.⁷¹ What Trump, Pompeo, Bolton, and others have been laying out for many years now is a belief system that may be inconsistent in some respects and crude in others; but that is beside the point. As the U.S. and other elections have showed, it is a profoundly seductive narrative. It welds together the paradigm of great power competition and the essentialism of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations.” In other words, culture and identity determine whether great power relations can be cooperative or are doomed to end in conflict.⁷² If the latter is the case, as Skinner’s comments in particular suggested, then diplomacy, containment, managing competition, or other attempts at peaceful coexistence are increasingly pointless — and bullying, coercion, or brute force become useful, even necessary.

This reworking of the great power competition paradigm has troubling corollaries. It uncritically accepts a longstanding Asian tradition of cultural essentialism (think the Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s advocacy of “Asian Values” in the 1990s) that strives to deny the relevance of human rights for Asians and protect regional autocracies.⁷³ That plays into Beijing’s assertion that China’s civilizational superiority entitles it to dominance — a sphere of influence — in the Pacific region.⁷⁴

Skinner’s framing reinforces and legitimizes the tendency visible elsewhere in the administration to minimize the Russian challenge in comparison to China. The president has repeatedly called for a grand bargain with Russia. Anton calls into question that Russia is even a threat.⁷⁵ Skinner’s assertion that the Cold War was “a fight within the Western family” is one that even Huntington disputed — but it underpins the case for Putin’s Russia as an ally in the culture wars.

Framing America’s coming conflicts as cultural clashes, for which freedom-seeking nations need to free themselves from the shackles of empire, logically forces a more

Framing America’s coming conflicts as cultural clashes logically forces a more general reconsideration of America’s alliances.



general reconsideration of America's alliances. It also gives new meaning and urgency to the administration's embrace of anti-liberal authoritarians, like the president's warm reception of Hungary's Viktor Orbán in the White House, or Pompeo's inclusion of Brazil under President Jair Bolsonaro in his list of allies. What Trumpian foreign policy seems to be constructing here is nothing less than an alternative West: a coalition founded on nationalist and nativist ideology, and quite indifferent to the constitutional values of what Anton dismissively calls the "Present at the Creation" era.

This has stark consequences for Europe. The administration's skepticism with regard to NATO and its hostility to the European Union is well-documented — but it is not merely grounded in anger about delinquent defense investments or an aversion against the EU as a powerful peer competitor in the trade and regulatory space. The EU offends because it "represents a direct affront to nationalism."⁷⁶ Using this logic, attacking German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her refugee policy or undermining the EU is not undermining allies or an act of competition, but a blow for the freedom of nations against an oppressive empire. As for the administration's official support of NATO and deterrence against Russia in Eastern Europe, welcome as it is, it stands in strange contrast to its fondness for governments that are as unabashedly pro-Russian as Viktor Orbán's Hungary.

Of course, it's not that easy to be one of this administration's preferred European allies. Former British Prime Minister Theresa May, constantly criticized by Trump for not pushing Brexit hard enough, learned that lesson the painful way.⁷⁷

EUROPE PERPLEXED AND DIVIDED

On May 30, German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a feisty and energetic Harvard commencement address, telling the graduating class to reject isolationism and nationalism, and never "describe lies as truth and truth as lies." To repeated waves of applause and standing ovations, she criticized protectionism and trade conflicts, noted that wars and terrorism lead to forced migration, affirmed the global threat of climate change, and urged graduates not to take democracy for granted.⁷⁸ She never mentioned the president by name, but it was obvious whom she had in mind. A few months earlier, she had given a similarly punchy performance at the Munich Security Conference, drawing laughter and applause for a speech that was sharply critical of the Trump administration's policies.⁷⁹ Merkel, a committed trans-Atlanticist throughout her life, had clearly decided to stop pretending that all was well in U.S.-European relations.

It's hard to dispute the German chancellor's diagnosis or not sympathize with her frustration. Both seem to be shared by a growing number of European leaders, not to mention large swathes of European public opinion. The problem is the absence of prescriptions or the leadership to implement them at a crucial point for the future of Europe. Three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which led to the enlargement of NATO and the EU and a historically prosperous and safe "Europe whole and free," it seems that the miracle of 1989 may be coming to an end in the context of a major cyclical downturn in global politics — and in a moment when Europe is least prepared for it.

Since the global financial crisis in 2008, Europe has been shaken by a series of political and economic calamities: the eurozone crisis, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the migration crisis in 2015, and a groundswell of anti-establishment populism. Its

periphery — from North Africa via the Levant and Turkey to the Balkans and Ukraine, where Russia is still waging a proxy war — is increasingly unstable and subject to geopolitical contestation. The spectacle of Brexit appears to have quelled any further movements to exit the Union; surveys suggest it may even have created an entirely new appreciation of the advantages of membership. Nonetheless, member states disagree profoundly with each other about the reasons why the European project is in disarray, and how to save it.

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The last weekend in May saw elections for the European Parliament (EP), the EU's legislature, which plays a key role in European regulation and has a voice in the formation of the European Commission, the Union's executive body. A turnout of more than 50% (the highest in decades) signaled the salience of this vote, but the results were mixed.⁸⁰ The greatest gains were made by the Liberals, with 39 additional seats. The far right gained 37, but this was mainly due to the surge of the Italian Lega (from 6 to 23 seats); next, the Greens gained 22 seats. The other populists did not achieve the surge they had boasted about, but were able only to consolidate their positions, winning pluralities in France, Italy, Poland, and the United Kingdom. Establishment center-right and center-left parties did badly, continuing a trend of decline. The overall impact was to deepen political fragmentation, which will complicate the formation of the next EU government as well as the formulation of Europe-wide policies.

On the national level, the leaders of Europe's Big Three countries are weakened as well: France's President Emmanuel Macron is on the defensive against political extremists on the left and the right, and the U.K. is consumed by Brexit and leadership battles. In Germany, a Green surge to second place in the EP elections and historically bad results for the two governing parties have forced out the leader of the Social Democrats, rocked the coalition, and increased the likelihood of new elections before the end of Merkel's term in 2021. Three regional elections in September and October 2019 in states where the extreme right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is trending in second or even first place will test the resilience of her government and of the German party system.

All this will make Europe even more inward-looking and diminished at a time when it has once more become the battleground of great power competition — a competition that now apparently includes the United States. For Europe, decoupling from globalization is not an option; it is existentially dependent on global economic integration, which has been the source of its postwar growth in prosperity and security. But Russia and China both have learned to turn the material and immaterial aspects of connectivity (from transport routes and ports to the digital realm) back against the EU. Both are now players in the European arena, ruthlessly effective at identifying and exploiting European weaknesses.

Arguably, the health of the trans-Atlantic relationship — and Europe's ability to rely on America — has never been so crucial for Europe. Yet Europeans appear speech- and powerless before the Trump administration's global brinksmanship, its bullying of Europe, and its enabling of Europe's internal and external adversaries. Moreover, the president may feel a need to emphasize his toughness in the 2020 election season, increasing his brinksmanship and propensity to strike bad deals.

Some in the European Union may be betting on a change of government in Washington in the 2020 elections. Based on the current health of the U.S. economy (a key element in the president's pitch to his voters), the eviscerated state of the Republican Party, and the lack of an obvious Democratic frontrunner, that hope may be ill-advised. Europeans would do well to be prepared to face a second Trump term, in which case, as Wright warns, "the bullets Trump never fired in his first term — such as withdrawal from NATO and the World Trade Organization — may be put back into the chamber."⁸¹ But they



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should also be prepared to contemplate a Democrat with Trumpian leanings on, say, trade protectionism an even deeper reluctance to use military force.

The challenge Europe faces now is historic. In the simplest terms, the choice before it is to remain a subject of international relations in the 21st century — or to become their object. This dilemma is exacerbated by current American policies, but it is not caused by them. The truth is that Trump holds up a mirror to Europe that accurately reflects its vulnerabilities. It is up to Europe to act on the insights it offers.

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WHAT IS AT STAKE

As Europe's politicians and citizens ponder this situation, it may be useful to return to a seminal essay by the Harvard political philosopher Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear."⁸² Shklar — a Jewish refugee from wartime Riga — argued that representative, "limited" constitutional government, together with political pluralism, is the only sure protection against what she called the *summum malum* (the absolute evil): "that evil is cruelty, and the fear it inspires, and the very fear of fear itself." The French defense intellectual Thérèse Delpech, twenty years Shklar's junior, wrote in her book *Savage Century*: "The most significant regression of the twentieth century was savage indifference to human beings."⁸³ Later on, she criticized Europe's sleepwalking lack of awareness of the security challenges homing in on it, suggesting that:

Its democracy has become abstract, like its values, unable to exercise the kind of influence in the world that the world needs. In a period of great international stability, this might have no consequences. In an era of profound transformations and exasperated passions, this exhaustion is charged with danger.⁸⁴

Time, then, for Europeans (and Americans) to recognize the danger of sleepwalking into a conflagration, and to understand the extent of what is at stake today: Not just the future of a rules-based international order, of the trans-Atlantic alliance, free trade, the European project, or the nation-state, but the future of the system of self-governance that is best designed to protect the dignity of the individual against a return to savagery. The standoff between those who are committed to preserving this achievement and those who are its declared enemies is the deepest, most consequential fault-line running through Europe, America, and the West.

This backdrop puts a number of otherwise seemingly intractable questions and problems into their proper place.

First, it highlights the importance of Europeans and Americans alike putting their own houses in order: their national democratic institutions, market economies, and social contracts. There can be no opposing the authoritarians at home or abroad without functioning and legitimate constitutional governance at home. The recent election has made clear that Europeans want to keep the EU *and* their nation-states. The EU mitigates power differences between the larger and smaller states and gives the smaller ones far more leverage than they would have on their own, but it must do more to overcome the multiple deep divides between Europeans over security, economic, and social policy.

Second, Europeans ought to recognize that, regardless of the continuing vitality of nation-states, geography and interdependence dictate that they are each others' destiny – and at each others' mercy, whether they are large or small, powerful or relatively powerless. That interdependence and mutual vulnerability is a powerful argument for the existence of the European Union. It also engenders a duty of care that does not end at national borders, and it ought to be a compelling reason to sacrifice short-term, narrowly defined national self-interest for the sake of building trust. The more powerful the nation, the greater the obligation to forge genuine compromise and to forgo actions or policies that undermine trust. That is certainly true for the U.S. superpower, but in Europe it is also true for Germany. German economic policy and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project must be re-evaluated in this context.

Third, key border-transcending problems that affect all of Europe (migration, eurozone management, defense, climate change) will remain sources of division and conflict unless Europeans approach them in a spirit of solidarity and pragmatism. Maximalist demands or fundamentalist opposition will only produce failure.

Fourth, a Europe that defines itself as liberal, open, and interdependent has an existential interest in the survival of a liberal, open, and interdependent international order. This is even more urgently true should America decide to retreat from that role. "Alliances of multilateralists" and new trade deals (such as the spate of new EU trade deals with Canada, Japan, and Mexico) are an excellent idea. But to make them work, Europe (and Germany) need to understand that great power competition is here to stay, and that the challenge of the age is to manage it under conditions of deepening global interdependence. That means investing far more than Europe does now in resilience and managing competition. It includes protecting strategic infrastructure and economic assets, spending far more on defense, and strengthening a European security architecture rendered newly vulnerable by the demise of the INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) Treaty. It also means understanding that sea lines of transport and communication are the lifelines of the continent's prosperity. Europe can no longer free-ride on the liberal world order created, maintained, and protected by America, nor should it hope to surf the waves of chaos as others sink. It must develop a vision of its own for what a free and peaceful 21st century order should look like and join forces with others to make it.

Fifth, "strategic autonomy" is fine to the extent that it incentivizes Europe to aim for greater agency and to take on greater responsibility for its security on the continent and in its neighborhood. Yet if it is intended as a strategic paradigm for a complete decoupling from America, it is a dangerous delusion and must be resisted.⁸⁵ It will only give Putin's Russia or Xi Jinping's China additional leverage over Europe. They are no substitute for the Western alliance except in the most narrowly transactional sense.

Sixth, in a world of great power competition and weaponized interdependence, Europe can compete in equal terms only on the basis of its global trade and regulatory power, yet that power is uniquely vulnerable to security shocks. It needs America and the trans-Atlantic alliance for protection. This task is beyond even an imaginary beefed-up, prosperous, and united Europe. That means becoming a more equal partner in terms of burden-sharing. There are few options against a bullying America that are not also likely to be acts of self-harm: counter-tariffs, counter-sanctions, a European SWIFT. However, a more equal partner has greater weight and more options.

Seventh, improbable as it may seem to some in the current U.S. administration, America does need Europe. The trans-Atlantic economic space and global supply chains are deeply integrated. Europe contributes meaningfully to American prosperity. America's forward presence in Eastern Europe and the Middle East is greatly facilitated (including in financial terms) by its bases in Europe. American diplomacy and development aid are greatly leveraged when backed by European diplomacy and development. America's legitimacy in the world — the decent opinion of mankind — is greatly increased when backed by 30-odd nations in Europe. Some members of the Trump administration may feel that the famous message from the Athenian invaders to the neutral rulers of Melos — part of the so-called Melian Dialogue in Thucydides' "History of the Peloponnesian War" — applies to the situation of Europe: "the strong do what they can, and the weak do what they must." They might consider re-reading another work about the same war: Aristophanes' "Lysistrata."⁸⁶ There may come a day when America calls upon Europe for help and Europe refuses.

Eighth, those who wish to preserve liberal democracy in Europe (and America) must learn to defend it by calling out violations of its basic principles. Elections or referenda based on the falsification of facts and manipulation of public debate are not an expression of democracy; they are its deformation. Stacking the courts, curtailing the rights of universities, prohibiting NGOs: these are not legitimate adaptations of representative democracy to specific cultural preferences — they are undertaken with the intent of destroying it. Yet, legal recourses or political condemnation find their natural limits where free majorities choose authoritarianism. In that case, Europe — in the form of the European Union, but surely also NATO — stands before a choice it has never had to make before: whether to sever cooperation with countries that have chosen illiberalism freely. Neither the Treaty on European Union nor the North Atlantic Treaty provide for an expulsion of members. At this point, it is no longer inconceivable, at least in the long run, that the liberal democracies might leave and establish a new alliance.

Ninth, in the current moment, historic responsibility rests with leaders. But citizens too might consider the price of enjoying the freedoms of liberal democracy and ask what more they can do to defend them.

These are hard choices, and none come without costs. But the cost of not making them is likely to be far more consequential for the future of Europe and the West.

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