



## Biden's World? Views from the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union

*Sven Biscop & Alexey Gromyko (Editors)*

The COVID-19 pandemic prevented the annual joint seminars that since a few years the *Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences* and the *Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations* organise in Moscow and Brussels. But the coronavirus cannot interrupt academic exchange; a dialogue that is more than ever necessary in a world of increasing tensions between the great powers. We continue our collaboration through this joint publication, therefore, for which we have invited prominent scholars from Russia and the European Union as well as China and the United States to share their analysis of the impact of Joe Biden's victory in the US presidential elections on international politics.

### **SCARCITY AND STRATEGY: THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION** **BARRY R. POSEN**

Bernard Brodie, one of the progenitors of post-cold war strategic studies used to say that “strategy wears a dollar sign”. States have many

foreign and security policy goals from which to choose. But resources of every kind are always scarce. It is the task of strategy to set priorities for the allocation of scarce resources. Though policy analysts across the world are trying to guess what will be the contours of the Biden Administration's grand strategy, statements alone do not get us very far. A fundamental question is whether he and his advisors perceive resource scarcity or resource plenty. Below I make some guesses based on the assumption that they see a world of scarcity.

What kinds of scarcity does the Administration face? First is a scarcity of extant military resources. With a defence budget of \$700 billion per year one wonders how such resources could be scarce. But they are. Modern military power is enormously costly to purchase and to operate. A casual reading of the US military press suggests that the US force has been worked too hard in the last two decades. It is for this reason that one now hears that the Pentagon plans to focus anew on great power wars. The implication is that turning away from nation-building and counter-insurgency will free resources to contain Russia and China. But Russia and China are not minor

military competitors. And though it seems possible that Russia will have a difficult time sustaining its recent military improvements, China has barely scratched the surface of what it can do. Extant military resources are already scarce.

Second, the Administration faces a scarcity of money. Though there are certainly western economists who claim that advanced economies can continue to borrow vast sums not only to fight and recover from the pandemic, but to address climate change and income inequality, there are others who would say that this cannot go on forever. Even if the Democrats take the Senate, it is unlikely that they will be comfortable simply adding to the deficit both to fix the US, and to continue to defend all the extended ramparts of the “US-led liberal world order”. Biden has won the Presidency largely on Donald Trump’s failure to look after the US public. Fighting the pandemic, and then fixing the economy will be job No. 1 for Biden.

Third, despite the President’s convincing double victories in the popular and the electoral votes, he nevertheless faces a scarcity of political capital. The American politics pundits agree: his coattails were short. There was no blue wave to bring him deep political reserves of support in the House and Senate and in the State legislatures. Donald Trump’s total popular vote was the second greatest in US history, Biden’s total the first. President Biden will need to husband his political capital. He will spend it on the issues that will yield him the greatest political support, and those are domestic.

If President elect Biden and his advisors see these constraints, how might it affect what they actually do? Even a casual reading of Biden’s March 2020 *Foreign Affairs* article “Why America Must Lead Again”, suggests that US internal problems loom

large: fixing up the US polity, society, and economy consumes the first half of the article. And anyone who paid much attention to the recent presidential campaign would have noticed that foreign policy played a minor role. The principal discussion was about which candidate would be harder on China. This gives us a hint as to where the major overseas priority of the Administration will be – Asia, because the candidates vied with one another expressing a hard line. Polling data (if such can be quoted with a straight face in the US, after the predictive failures of the last two presidential campaigns) suggests that the public is quite concerned about China, though some have economic concerns while others have security concerns. Containing China is popular in both the Democratic and Republican parties. As Biden wants to work with Republicans, the containment of China may be the path of least resistance to some bipartisan policy successes. China’s rise would be a serious security matter even if the American public were not interested. A focus on China in US foreign and security policy, to include trade and technology, is thus almost inevitable. And given the size of the China challenge, and the scarcity of security resources, there is not going to be much left for anything else.

The rest of America’s allies should take some comfort from a return to normalcy at least in terms of the US foreign policy process. But allies in Europe and the Middle East should take note. Sure, the Biden administration will work multilaterally on problems of collective concern, such as nuclear proliferation, climate change, and even trade. But it may not be long before those who hope for a return to the old days find themselves disappointed. President elect Biden says many nice things about the Transatlantic Alliance. But if scarcity is real, he will be looking for a better bargain. All agree that a European-US partnership to address the neo-mercantilist

aspects of Chinese foreign policy would be of great help. The European Union would loom large in such a partnership, though Americans frankly do not quite understand the Union and how it works. But saying this does not make it so. Europeans will need to organize their own China strategy, and find areas of overlap with the US. Europe depends far more on international trade than does the US. It is likely that Europeans will need to make some hard choices about how hard-nosed they wish to be on China, and these choices may not overlap with those of the US. Similarly, Europeans will notice, if they have not already noticed, that Asia is a magnet for US military resources. US interest in military burden-sharing antedates President Trump, even if it was expressed more artfully. The situation is getting worse. The European members of NATO are, due to distance, inefficient contributors to the military containment of China. They are, however, potentially very efficient contributors to the containment of Russia. Expect continuing pressure to do more.

Finally, what shall we expect of policy for the greater Middle East? Israel will be fine, but not the Palestinians. It is simply not worth the political cost for a US President to pressure Israel to do much of anything. As we move eastward, however, things get interesting. President elect Biden and his advisors seem to take climate change quite seriously. So do European statespersons. Sooner or later the fundamental question will arise: why should the US continue to commit blood and treasure to the Persian Gulf to defend a low price for the oil that we now know to be poisonous to the planet? And given an aroused progressive wing of the Democratic Party, why defend profoundly illiberal regimes that show no sign of reform whatsoever? Why defend a cartel that periodically fixes the price of oil in order to bankrupt US domestic producers, and put their employees out of work? There will

be cross cutting pressures of course. Iran simply has no friends in the US and has no way to get any. Oil prices and supply will matter to prosperity in the west for perhaps another decade. The Arab petro-states effectively use the main tool at their disposal – money – to garner influence in Washington. But the gravitational pull of petroleum on policy is beginning to wane and US policy-makers will focus their attention elsewhere.

These projections depend on Biden and his advisors' perceptions of scarce resources. But perhaps resources will prove more plentiful than I imagine. The shortages of military, financial, and political capital discussed above could be evanescent. The US economy is quite resilient and innovative. Our opponents may prove less strong than they appear at present. The American public might at heart be as outward looking and internationalist as some pollsters contend, and never again support Trumpian transactionalism. The clever and well-resourced US military may come up with another wave of technological innovations that leave their opponents' heads spinning. If these emerge quickly as the actual facts of the case, then US allies in Europe can return to the happy days of the late 1990s, when security was a free good provided by a benevolent hegemon at the helm of the liberal world order. But I would not bet on it.

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## BIDEN'S GEOPOLITICAL FALLOUT FOR CHINA

*FENG ZHONGPING & HUANG JING*

No one will be surprised to learn that Beijing has been following the American election closely. Who is in the White House means a lot not only for Sino-US relations, but also for US policies toward Europe, Russia, and China's neighbours.

### *A Silver Lining for Sino-US Relations?*

Chinese decision-makers and think-tankers have been distressed by the unpredictability that Donald Trump brought to US foreign policy in the past four years. President-elect Joe Biden, who is a former US Vice-President and a foreign policy veteran, is deemed to be more predictable. Many of his advisers used to serve in the Barack Obama administration, while Biden himself has had numerous encounters with the Chinese leadership during his political career.

But Beijing knows very well that President Biden will not stop the US from seeing China as a competitor. It is after all Barack Obama, the President that Biden served as Vice-President, who "pivoted to Asia". Obama even claimed recently that "if we hadn't been going through a financial crisis, my posture toward China would have been more explicitly contentious around trade issues".

The US will not change its strategic focus: dealing with the rise of China. The change will be in the approach. Trump's key word is decoupling. What will be Biden's? Biden will not go as far as decoupling. Nor will he go back to the old engagement policy.

Presumably, Biden's approach will be a moderated containment. He will work with allies, which will make his dealings with China easier, but also less blunt. He will not support the idea

of an economic cut-off, but might seek decoupling in certain fields, such as technology, instead. He might rekindle the cooperation with Beijing on climate change and on regional hotspots such as North Korea, Iran, and Afghanistan.

### *A Transatlantic Reset?*

Biden has received overwhelmed support across the Atlantic. Europeans are much more enthusiastic than China about the new president. Transatlantic policy might turn out to be one of the biggest policy changes after the power reshuffle in Washington.

No doubt, Biden will try to strengthen transatlantic bonds once he is in office. His proposal of a Democracy Summit has already aroused much enthusiasm among US allies. His choice of Antony Blinken, whose ties to Europe are said to be lifelong, deep and personal, as his Secretary of State sends a strong signal. According to a think-tank speech in July, Blinken said: "China sees alliances as a core source of strength for the United States, something they don't share and enjoy".<sup>1</sup>

Judging from Biden's speeches during the campaign trail, the next US president will return to the Paris Agreement on climate change, a European pet project, and re-enter the US in many multilateral institutions that Trump has, or has threatened to, quit. Biden probably will listen to his European counterparts on the Iran nuclear deal, another European diplomatic feat that has been destroyed by Trump, and might even find ways to make a new one.

Of course, Europe understands that Biden cannot change everything. The US presidential race was so close that although he has won the election, he represents only half of a divided nation. Not to mention that Biden will be

hindered by partisan gridlock in Congress. Besides, Biden's focus will be on domestic issues and China, not on Europe. In a word, Trumpism will somehow continue without Trump.

Therefore, the Europeans hold steadfast to the ideal of strategic autonomy, a concept predating but much focused on during the Trump years. The geopolitical upheaval has left the Europeans with few choices at hand. Politicians in Brussels and in European capitals have vowed that Europe should not be reduced to a "playground" or a "colony". Toward the end of Trump's term, strategic autonomy became the loudest answer to the new geopolitical contingency.

Though German officials might be a little bit less interested than their French friends in the concept of autonomy, as the recent spat between German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and French President Emmanuel Macron on the American security umbrella has revealed,<sup>2</sup> such schisms should not be overplayed. The Europeans will find no difficulty to get past this difference about the meaning of words. As Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, put on his blog: "a capable and strategically aware Europe is the best partner for the US – and also what Europe itself needs".<sup>3</sup>

In his call to Biden in November 23, European Council President Charles Michel identified the following fields to cooperate: the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recovery, climate change, security, and multilateralism.<sup>4</sup> But observers from the rest of the world might be more interested to see how the two sides solve their trade and digital disputes as a start.

### ***New thinking on China's neighbourhood?***

After the election, Biden's first official call to foreigners was made to the Canadian Prime

Minister, on 9 November. The next day, he called the UK, Ireland, Germany, and France. The day after, he called Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Such an order might say something about Biden's regional priorities in terms of alliances.

The Obama administration used to woo Asian-Pacific countries with a free trade zone, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). Nevertheless, Trump withdrew from TPP within the first week of taking office, and the remaining TPP members have tried to save the agreement as CPTPP, or Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Biden might consider going back to a revised CPTPP.

His interest might increase when considering the announcement of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) on 15 November by 15 Asian-Pacific countries, as well as Chinese president Xi Jinping's subsequent publicly declared interest in joining CPTPP. "The RCEP deal shows quite conclusively that the Trump Administration's strategy to isolate China and to cut it off from global value chains has failed", as a European observer aptly put.<sup>5</sup>

If Biden meets with domestic resistance against joining a trade agreement with the region, he will have to think hard about how to assure US allies such as Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Japan, who are concerned about China's rising influence, but meanwhile also continue to work for closer economic ties with the powerhouse.

For Biden, it is easier to deal with another Trump legacy in the region, namely, the Indo-Pacific Strategy, with an increasingly active security Quad (comprising the US, Japan, India, and Australia) at its centre.

India is a very important neighbour of China. In

2017, India joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a sign of its good relationship with China and Russia. But 2020 has seen the outbreak of clashes on the Sino-Indian border, and waves of clamping down on Chinese apps on the Indian market. Things could have been better without the Quad or the US' global campaign against Chinese technology, some Chinese strategists think.

Compared to Trump, Biden might be a little bit more critical toward India. Actually, he called the Indian leader five days later than his calls with Japan and Australia. Though Biden will carry ahead the Indo-Pacific Strategy, his more balanced approach toward India might help China and India to better navigate their disputes.

### ***A Bitter Russia?***

Four years ago, Russia was among the happiest to see Donald Trump elected. Russia hoped that an anti-establishment US president would change Russia's post-Cold War strategic impasse. Nevertheless, due to the deeply entrenched animosity toward Russia in the US establishment, Trump was not able to visit Russia or to receive the Russian leader on American soil even once, let alone to change US policy on Russia – the ongoing sanctions because of Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014 are a useful reminder. For Russia, Trump is a lost opportunity.

It seems that the Kremlin is very reluctant to congratulate Biden with his victory. The Democrats have long held a negative perception of Russia. The recent revision of the Russian constitution and the turbulence in Belarus might perpetuate this perception.

### ***Two Blocs?***

Will a more cooperative US president draw US allies together against another bloc led by China? First, such a prospect seems not on Biden's wish

list. Second, it simply does not work.

In the past four years, US allies already tried to cooperate on issues related to China, sometimes along with the US, sometimes not. For example, Europe and Canada have a very good cooperation record on climate change; Europe and Japan have worked consistently on WTO reform; France and Germany have resorted to Australia on their Indo-Pacific strategies. But the cooperation has been case-by-case.

US allies have their own interests. Some European think-tankers urge the EU to “learn from Japan's adept economic diplomacy”. Japan has navigated successfully between China and the US, striking trade deals with both as well as with the EU, they argue.<sup>6</sup>

Europe will not do everything on US terms. In terms of the economy, Europe and the US are competitors. The common challenge of the China Model might push Europe and the US closer on economic issues. However, Europe does not just see China as a strategic rival. The EU's definition of China is a more complicated one, mixing partner, competitor, and rival. Europe will continue to engage China.

Furthermore, global issues such as climate change and the pandemic might lead to wide cooperation among China, the US, Europe, and many others. China's pledge of net-zero emission by 2060 has already cleared a path for a good start.

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## THIRTEEN POINTS ON JOE BIDEN AND RUSSIA

**ANDREY KORTUNOV**

### *1. Narratives*

Russian leadership tried hard to avoid any statements that would indicate its preference for Donald Trump. Still, it is clear that the election of Joe Biden does not quite fit into the official Russian narrative on the contemporary international system. Biden's predecessor in the White House with his explicit nationalistic, unilateralist, and transactional approach to foreign policy, was regarded in Moscow as a graphic manifestation of prevailing global trends away from globalization, value-based politics, and Western hegemony. If Biden is at least partially successful in his attempts to restore multilateralism and Western solidarity and to promote a global shift to a new cycle of globalization, his success will be a blow to the image of the world that the Russian leadership likes to present. A new consolidation of the West, no matter how temporary, is at odds with the official Kremlin narrative about the inexorable movement of the international system toward a polycentric world order. Worse still, it might give the collective West new confidence. In addition, a new reconciliation between the US and its traditional Western allies will be a major blow to the various Western populists and nationalists for whom Trump is a role model, and will tip the political scales against them. It will also hurt some of the Kremlin's political partners abroad. A Biden victory can inject new life into proponents of the Western liberal values that Vladimir Putin has already written off as hopelessly obsolete.

### *2. Priorities*

When the Democratic President finally gets down to his foreign policy agenda, it is not likely that the Russian portfolio will sit on top of it. The new US President is not obsessed with Moscow

to the same extent as some Republicans were (e.g. late Senator John McCain). Joe Biden is more likely to focus on the transatlantic relations that were seriously damaged by his predecessor. Another burning matter is a trade agreement with China: it will not end the US-Chinese economic or technological competition, but can at least help to prevent a full-fledged trade war between Washington and Beijing. In sum, Biden can allow himself to put most of the Russia files on a back burner, with the possible exception of the pending strategic arms control question. It implies that we will not see an early US-Russian summit in 2021; at best, the two leaders could meet on the margins of a multilateral event, like the G20 or APEC, to compare notes on issues of common interest.

### *3. Attitude*

Donald Trump never drew a line between Vladimir Putin and Russia. He always argued that Putin was a very strong, skilled, and efficient leader, doing his best to advance Russia's national interests. Joe Biden does not share this admiration for the Russian President; on the contrary, he seems to believe that Putin is a major contributor to the historic decline of Russia as a state and as a society. In the eyes of Biden, Putin's kleptocracy, political authoritarianism, the so-called "vertical of power", and other specific features of his system constitute a major obstacle for Russia's social and economic modernization. In Biden's view, to be anti-Putin does not mean to be anti-Russian; on the contrary, fighting against Putin in the end is the best assistance to the Russian people that the US could possibly offer.

### *4. Domestic Constraints*

The good news for US-Russian relations is the fact that so far US authorities have detected no significant Russian involvement in the election of 2020. This does not necessarily mean that this

matter will disappear completely from Biden's radar screen, but it is not likely to affect the American domestic political agenda of 2021 as much as it did back in 2017. On the other hand, with Republicans in control of the Senate, Joe Biden will be significantly constrained in what he can do in foreign policy, the Russian dimension included. Capitol Hill will be in a position to play an active role in sanctions policy toward Russia, in the modernization of US nuclear forces, in limiting White House autonomy in matters like the JCPOA or in decisions related to the US military presence abroad. The influence of the legislative power on US-Russian relations is likely to be mostly negative, especially if Russia remains in some way an issue in US partisan politics.

### ***5. Human Rights***

The "bad side" of Biden for Russia will start manifesting itself in much harder and uncompromising rhetoric targeting the Russian leadership. Since Joe Biden, unlike Donald Trump, is not a fan of Vladimir Putin, the former will not be shy to express his uncomplimentary views on the Russian leader. Moreover, Biden will pay more attention to human rights problems in Russia; he will extend more support to political opposition in Russia as well as to politicized civil society institutions. He will also demonstrate more sympathy for democratic states in the Russian neighbourhood, from Ukraine to Georgia (that might also include more active support for the democratic opposition in Belarus). US support of Kyiv is likely to grow, including various forms of military assistance.

### ***6. Sanctions***

Anti-Russian sanctions will undoubtedly remain one of the prime US policy instruments in dealing with Moscow. We will see more of them and the only question is whether the Biden Administration preserves the overall approach of the Trump Administration, or whether it will

rather try to bring these sanctions to a new, much higher level. No doubt, there will be temptations to suffocate the Russian economy by imposing a comprehensive set of sanctions on Russia's energy and financial sectors, and by treating Moscow the same way the US treated Tehran during the four Trump years. However, bringing sanctions to a new level would create too many risks for the global economic system in general and for the US economy in particular. It is not likely that the Biden Administration will be ready to take such risks, especially when it has to deal with so many other economic and financial challenges.

### ***7. Arms Control***

The Biden Administration is likely to be generally better than the Trump Administration. The President elect has never supported the irresponsible attitude of his predecessor to arms control at large or to bilateral US-Russian arms control in particular. He might well try to rescue the New START and to abide informally by the provisions of the INF, which the United States withdrew from in the summer of 2019. He is likely to pay more attention to the NPT, the CTBT, and other multilateral nuclear arms agreements that Trump did not consider of top importance for the US. However, this does not mean that bilateral US-Russian arms control has a bright future under Biden – any agreements beyond the New START will be very difficult to negotiate and to get ratified by the US side. Many fundamental disagreements between Moscow and Washington, on such issues as tactical nuclear weapons, ballistic missile defence, engaging China and other nuclear powers, etc., will not disappear under the new administration. It is also clear that the Biden Administration will have to start reviewing and revising the old paradigm of strategic arms control, in order to catch up with the latest technological developments (space, cyber, AI, autonomous



lethal systems, prompt strike, etc.).

### **8. Regional Problems**

Another change in US foreign policy under Biden is that Russia can benefit from is the potential softening of the US position on Iran, and a more balanced US approach to the Middle East peace process. The Kremlin would undoubtedly welcome the US getting back to the JCPOA, or putting more emphasis on multilateral approaches to an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Unlike some of his colleagues in the Barack Obama administration, Joe Biden has always been quite sceptical about US military interventions abroad, and he actively opposed US engagement in Libya back in 2011. However, it is unlikely that the Biden Administration will actively seek collaboration with Moscow on Libya ten years later, or that it will seek more US-Russian interaction in and around Syria. One can predict that Biden will be more persistent than Trump in accusing Russia of destabilizing actions in fragile states, primarily in Africa. It is also possible that the Biden Administration will exercise more pressure on Russia's illiberal allies in Latin America (Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua).

### **9. Global Commons**

The decision of Biden to get the US back to the Paris agreements on climate change might open new opportunities for limited US-Russian cooperation in this domain. However, it remains unclear to what extent the Kremlin is ready to commit itself in a serious way to the global climate change agenda. Another area for cooperation on global commons is the Arctic region. In the spring of 2021, Russia takes the leadership of the Arctic Council and both sides are interested to keep this institution separated from the geopolitical competition in other regions of the world. This task does not look impossible to achieve, though there are risks of

the Council turning into yet another podium for US-Russian political infighting.

### **10. European Dimension**

A likely change in transatlantic relations will also have an impact on Russia's foreign policy. Of course, the numerous political, economic, and strategic differences between Washington and Brussels will not just disappear, and certainly, there will be no return to the good old days of Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. Still, Biden, with his foreign policy experience and his inclination to compromise, will work diligently to restore transatlantic relations. Under Biden, we will likely see more flexibility from Washington on trade talks with the EU, more readiness to consider the EU's opinion on US approaches to global problems, and increased attention to European positions on regional crises. A change of administration in the White House will likely reduce, though not eliminate, the EU's interest in normalizing relations with Russia. Having agreed a truce on the western front, Brussels will be more than capable of swiftly transferring its forces to the eastern front, taking a harder line towards the Kremlin. A Democratic US President will likely applaud such a strategic move, seeing the standoff with Russia as a way of cementing the transatlantic partnership. In all likelihood, a Biden victory will severely limit Russia's room for manoeuvre in its EU policy, and perhaps in its broader foreign policy too. A more united West might consolidate itself not only on an anti-Russian platform, but also, to a lesser degree, against China.

### **11. Chinese Dimension**

The incoming Biden Administration might try to tear apart the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership by trying to cut a deal with either Russia or China and to focus on the remaining opponent. Biden can follow Donald Trump, who called for accommodating Moscow and

confronting Beijing. Still, it is highly unlikely that Joe Biden can be more successful in pursuing this goal than his predecessor was. The US simply has nothing to offer to President Putin to make him reconsider his current close friendship with Chairman Xi Jinping – be it in the economic, political or strategic domain. Biden can play on the opposite side of the stage, seek an acceptable accommodation with the stronger Beijing, and put the squeeze on the weaker Moscow. However, in this case the Biden Administration will have to abandon its claim to global American leadership. Certainly, neither Biden nor his entourage are ready to do that, and Washington-Beijing relations will remain complicated and tense. Even more importantly, just as Donald Trump saw repeatedly throughout the four years of his presidency that it was impossible to tear Russia away from China, Joe Biden will repeatedly see that China cannot be torn away from Russia. Beijing needs Moscow regardless of the current state of and prospects for China-US relations. Under the current circumstances a version of “dual containment” appears to be the most likely approach of this Administration towards Beijing and Moscow, with China being treated more as a peer competitor and Russia as a global rogue state. To cut the costs of dual containment, Biden will try to mobilize the US’ Western allies in Europe and in East Asia. It will also try to keep Eurasia divided by forging stronger ties to Chinese adversaries in Asia – above all, to India.

### ***12. Diplomacy***

Biden may decide to stop the ongoing “diplomatic war” with Russia – he arguably values professional diplomacy much more than Trump did, and he is not likely to keep the Russian Embassy in Washington (and the US Embassy in Moscow) in the state of a besieged fortress. In general, Biden will delegate more authority and more power to foreign policy

experts and professionals (“Deep State”) including those of them who will hold the Russia portfolio; therefore, US policy toward Russia is likely to be more consistent, realistic, and predictable. Some of the now frozen diplomatic, military, and expert communication lines between the two countries are likely to be reactivated, which will also mitigate risks of an uncontrolled confrontation. However, this does not mean that the relationship will get much better.

### ***13. Beyond Biden***

Today we can only guess whether President Biden will serve his full first term in office or whether we may see him succeeded by Vice-President Kamala Harris. It also remains to be seen what she has to contribute to US foreign policy in general and to US-Russia relations in particular. Still, any “re-set” in these relations looks very unlikely under either Biden or Harris. At best, one can foresee a very limited détente and a better management of the very difficult and mostly adversarial relationship. A real shift in this relationship might take place after the Presidential election of 2024, when new generations of political leaders replace the “old guard” in both countries. These new generations are destined to have very different views of the world and of their respective country’s role in global affairs.

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**EUROPE AFTER THE US ELECTIONS:  
BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE UNKNOWN**  
*ALEXEY GROMYKO*

Brussels, the established centre of the EU, Berlin, Paris, and other Member State capitals met the victory of Joseph Biden in a mood of uplift and cheering. The last four years with Donald Trump turned into the most difficult challenge transatlantic solidarity ever encountered. Trump became the personification, and a very rough one at that, of the US policy of strategic decoupling from the European allies of the last decades. For a long time this policy was an undeclared one, more an undercurrent than the waves raging on the surface. Before it was like grass growing slowly and quietly; with Trump it was thrown into stark relief.

There were times when West Europeans themselves were musing on the virtues of going it alone. Then, before 2003 and immediately after, when the words “strategic autonomy” were not yet coined, Berlin, Paris, and numbers of influential British intellectuals urged their countries to acquire more foreign policy actorness, questioning the tradition of following the leader on the other shore of the pond no matter what. The intervention in Iraq and its aftermath were so surreal, indefensible, and bloody that many Europeans were prepared to decouple by themselves. However, the factor of Barack Obama stalled this process and streamlined the geopolitical moods in Europe. Still, for the unbiased observer the fundamentals did not change — the US kept drifting away from the Old World.

In the years of the Obama presidency this drift got its name — “pivot to Asia”. In Russia it is called a “turn to the East”. No matter how we identify this geopolitical shift, in essence it reflects the objective process of the last 30 years — the ascendancy of Asia, first of all China, to

the status of a new centre of power and a new axis of world politics.

There is little for Europe to complain about. The euro-centrism of international relations became a thing of the past as far back as 1945. Some European empires were buried by the First World War, some by the Second, or they collapsed in its aftermath. Afterwards, for a long time Western Europe was in the shadow of two superpowers — the Soviet Union and the United States. Today world politics, the structure of which is not any more bipolar but polycentric, increasingly is revolving around interaction between China and the US.

In spite of the ordeal for the US-European bonds of the Trump years, the traditional part of the Euro-Atlantic establishment, the Atlanticists, have preserved strong positions. They adhere to a vision of international affairs as defined by the West, understood as an alliance of (neo)liberal democracies led by the US.

In parallel, in the last years another current in the EU political elites has been gaining strength — autonomists. These are those, mainly West European, who think that it is an urgent necessity to promote the vision of a more politically autonomous and independent European Union. The ideas of a common strategic culture have been spreading intensively, especially since 2016, and the structures of the Common Security and Defence Policy have solidified. The autonomists’ vision of international affairs is based on the principle of strategic autonomy, which implies, beside other things, the double autonomy from the US and from China, although with natural asymmetry in favour of the American ally.

The competition between these two parts of the European political establishment has been growing for a long time, but recently it has

sharpened. The personal factor of the outgoing American president played its significant role, but was not the fundamental reason. There is also a third prominent category of the European political class — Eurosceptics of all sorts, but this issue is not a topic of the present piece.

The Atlanticists hold that under Joe Biden US-EU relations should return, figuratively speaking, to the times of Barack Obama. The autonomists agree that the Biden administration will be much more friendly to the EU and NATO, but they think that this is not a compelling argument to jettison the goal of strategic autonomy. They ask a reasonable question: “Fine, under the President elect transatlantic ties will regain some strength. But what may happen in four years’ time when Trump or somebody else like him returns to the White House? Let’s become more independent whoever is at the helm of power in the US”.

Apparently, a staunch supporter of this approach is French President Emmanuel Macron. Paris has been exerting its efforts to look and sound strategic and to acquire the mantle of the European political leadership from Germany. Berlin follows an ambitious approach, seemingly awaiting the moment when sympathetic rhetoric from Biden and his team towards the European allies will take the shape of some concrete deeds. This caution is well founded, as in 2021 Angela Merkel is vacating the post of Chancellor and Germany will have elections. Moreover, for Berlin the change of the host in the White House does not mean that the problem with the final stage of construction of Nord Stream 2 will somehow ease. This project was the apple of discord between Germany and the US under Trump, but Biden is also its ardent opponent.

Rome and Madrid are watching the behaviour of Paris and Berlin preferring to wait and see. There are states in Europe where the victory of Biden

was met not only with relief but also with mixed feelings, even if on the side. Among them the UK, Poland, and Hungary. Their ruling forces have extracted sufficient profits from Trump’s policies. Different variations of Euroscepticism have used Trumpism (which is not the same as its figure-head) for domestic purposes or as a buttress in quarrels inside the EU. Now this leverage is not there anymore.

Obviously, a part of Trump’s legacy will be dismantled. A question is: to what extent, and what is going to replace it? In general, whichever European country we take, there are no overwhelming illusions that Biden’s presidency can deeply overhaul US strategy, which has solidified in the past four years.

Firstly, putting aside the peculiarities of Trump’s character and his eccentricity, a lot in US behaviour has been quite familiar. It would be wrong to say that he is a non-systemic politician, as he represents the views and psychology of half of the US population, and moreover a significant part of the business, political, and military elites. Few people disagree that Trump would have won the election if not for the pandemic. US policy towards the Middle East, excluding Iran, and towards China, Russia, and the EU were to a large extent a continuation of the previous political trends. In a number of cases Trump was over the top, but on the whole he was within the broad framework of modern US foreign policy.

Secondly, in view of Trumpism’s popularity it would be ill-advised to prophesise what kind of a political character will move into the White House in four years’ time and to insist unreservedly that the outgoing presidency was a historical aberration. Is there not a chance that the presidency of Biden will turn out to be a pause before Trumpism and the Republicans, who continue to control the Senate, are back in the White House?

Thirdly, indeed for Europeans Biden will be a more convenient counterpart than his predecessor, but not necessarily in everything. For example, the president elect is an ideologically driven politician to a much bigger extent than Trump. Therefore, the overall relationship between the US and China will not significantly improve, and can even deteriorate further. Intensifying Washington — Beijing confrontation will make the situation for the EU even more difficult than before, placing it between a rock and a hard place. Of course, the matter is not just Biden's ideological preferences, but the fact that China continues to emerge as the main competitor of the US; the pandemic has made this trend only more pronounced.

Nor are there writings on the wall about any positive shifts in relations between Washington and Ankara. On the contrary, the president elect and his most ardent European allies may close ranks against Ankara, not just on the basis of geopolitics but on the issues of human rights and authoritarianism. In this case, the state of interaction between Turkey and the EU, and the situation in NATO, may go from bad to worse.

Clearly, the continuity between the previous and the new administration is far from comprehensive. If Hillary Clinton or Biden had been the American president in the last four years, the US would not have abandoned the Paris climate accord, ruined the nuclear deal with Iran, blocked the functioning of the World Trade Organisation, and withdrawn payments to the World Health Organisation. On these issues Washington will revamp its policies, which will be welcomed in the world.

The niche in which Biden's victory is expected to improve the present realities in Russia-Western relations is the sphere of arms control. On the one hand, the chain of events which brought the destruction of the Intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty, was launched by the George W. Bush

Administration and was followed by Obama. The ABM treaty was also scrapped by Bush, and deployment of the US/NATO Aegis-Ashore missile defence systems has been a constant of the American policy. On the other hand, chances are higher that under Biden the New START (Strategic arms reduction treaty) may be prolonged for the maximum period of five years, instead of one year if Trump had survived the elections.

Also there is a hope that after 20 January 2021 the new presidency will be conducive to the preservation of the Open Skies treaty, which the US left on 22 November. They did not just abandon it, but started to press those allies who still abide by the agreement de facto to sabotage it. In Russia there is an overwhelming consensus that the preservation of both the New START and the Open Skies treaty is in the national interest of the country.

Apart from that, a possibility exists that starting from 2021 Russia and the US might find enough political will to tackle an awful situation in the sphere of conventional arms control in Europe, where Russia and NATO military forces face one another. Given the tensions in NATO-Russia contact zones, regional stabilising measures should be considered. Re-establishing security dialogue and military contacts are urgently needed. There are many specialists and former or current state officials in Russia, Europe, and the US who adhere to this position. One of the fresh products of this thinking process are the "Recommendations of the Participants of the Expert Dialogue on NATO–Russia Military Risk Reduction in Europe", a document published on 7 December 2020 and supported by more than 130 well-known signatories.

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**EU-US RELATIONS****STEVEN BLOCKMANS*****Damaged...***

President Donald Trump's unabashed unilateralism has hurt EU-US relations. He has called the European Union a “foe” and “worse than China, just smaller”. He celebrated Brexit and has encouraged other member states to leave the bloc. He has bullied democratic leaders such as Angela Merkel and embraced autocrats like Viktor Orbán. The latter has not helped the EU institutions in their search for supranational mechanisms to enforce compliance with rule of law conditions for membership.

Not only did the 45th US President not re-engage with the transatlantic trade and investment agenda which Barack Obama abandoned; he imposed “national security” tariffs on steel and aluminium imports from European allies, and threatened that more might follow. He also subjected European businesses to American extra-territorial jurisdiction more enthusiastically than any of his predecessors, in particular over his withdrawal of the US from the Iran nuclear deal.

Trump's retreat from the Paris climate deal, the INF treaty, the Open Skies agreement, and the WHO as well as his attacks on the WTO have rocked many Europeans' belief that they share common ground with their most important ally. In fact, Trump has been disdainful of European priorities, from climate change or efforts to improve global health, to human rights and development assistance.

As a result, US relations with the EU have become largely dysfunctional, and this at a time when unprecedented global health, economic, and security challenges demand robust transatlantic leadership.

To be sure, transatlantic disarray is not due solely to Trump. After more than a decade of crisis management, the EU has seemed as likely to fall apart as to come together over the COVID-19 pandemic. The coronavirus crisis has ravaged societies and economies. Whereas EU Member States reached a political agreement on a historic recovery package and a seven-year budget, those debates have also revealed ongoing differences on rule of law conditionality in the disbursement of funding that could widen once the worst of the pandemic is over.

***...but not beyond repair***

A second term for Trump would have probably meant a further erosion of US democracy and the post-war liberal order. The EU would have no longer been able to put off facing the consequences of having an illiberal, anti-trade partner across the pond.

With the victory of Joe Biden, there are four years to revive an alliance of democracies, face up to authoritarian powers and closed economies that exploit the openness on which American and European societies are built, and shape those parts of multilateralism that serve transatlantic interests.

During the campaign, candidate Biden emphasised that “Europe is the cornerstone of our engagement with the world” and “our catalyst for global cooperation”. As a passionate Transatlanticist and multilateralist, Biden's first instinct will be to turn to the EU as America's indispensable partner of first resort when it comes to addressing international challenges.

***America, heal thyself before you attend to others***

But the President elect's most immediate challenge is likely to be an unenviable confluence of crises at home: the ongoing pandemic, deep

social tensions, continued recession, and astronomical levels of government debt. Joe Biden will also have to contend with a much stronger radical conservative opposition than Barack Obama ever did. This is likely to slow down the implementation of his ambitious policy agenda.

America's partners should not be surprised, and should in fact welcome, the likelihood that Biden's initial focus will necessarily be on domestic challenges. After all, the US is unlikely to be the type of consistent, outward-looking partner that Europeans need and want if it does not beat COVID-19, generate economic growth, and work to heal its deep domestic divisions.

### ***Reinvent transatlantic relations***

Even if the US re-joins the WHO, the Paris climate accords, the Iran nuclear deal, and works to strengthen the WTO, Biden's foreign policy will be more assertive and transactional in response to popular domestic demand. Europeans should not kid themselves into believing that transatlantic relations will return to the status quo ante. In all but name, the rallying cry of "America First" is here to stay. As a presidential candidate, Biden has vowed to prioritise investment in US green energy, childcare, education, and infrastructure over any new trade deals. He has also called for expanded "Buy American" provisions in federal procurement, which has long been an irritant in trade relations with the EU. Also, the EU will likely be forced to muster all the political will and resources at its disposal to carve a third way between the US and China, an issue on which there exists strong bipartisan support.

The greatest danger to a vital transatlantic bond will be Europe's temptation to believe that the relationship can go back to "business as usual". That would be a mistake. The EU-US alliance as

we have known it is dead. A Biden administration will not want to "restore" the transatlantic partnership; it will want to reinvent it for a world full of economic, climate, and health challenges, more diffuse power, rapid technological changes, greater insecurities, and intensified global competition.

A reinvented transatlantic partnership will demand more, not less, of Europe. The European Commission and the EU's High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy have understood this. In a call on the US to seize a "once-in-a-generation" opportunity to forge a new global alliance, they have made a detailed pitch to bury the hatchet on the sources of tension of the Trump era, and meet the "strategic challenge" posed by China. The idea is to revitalise the transatlantic partnership by cooperating on everything, from fighting cybercrime and shaping the digital regulatory environment, to screening sensitive foreign investments and fighting deforestation. An EU-US Summit in the first half of 2021 could be the moment to launch the new transatlantic agenda.

Coming up with a common approach will hinge significantly on the two economies' ability to bridge existing divides over tech policy. Using their combined influence, a transatlantic technology space could indeed form the backbone of a wider coalition of like-minded democracies.

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## BIDEN'S VICTORY AND EUROPE'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

**SVEN BISCOP**

The president of the United States making a deal with the president of Russia behind Europe's back: that is just one example of something that, thanks to Joe Biden's victory, the European Union will not have to worry about for a while.

For a while, for "Trumpism" has been defeated but far from destroyed – not with Donald Trump winning over 47% of the popular vote. More than 73 out of 150 million American voters either agree with enough of Trump's views to vote for him, or, even if they don't, somehow find the prospect of a Democratic president so abhorrent that they pinch their noses and vote for him anyway. If the Republican party stays in the hands of people like attorney general William Barr and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who believe that the president is above the law in the US, and that he can set the law outside the US, another authoritarian populist could very well be voted into the White House in a next election. Any such future "Trumpist" is likely to be far more dangerous than Trump himself ever was, if he translates Trump's political instincts into method and strategy instead of whims and tweets.

It would be very short-sighted therefore for the EU to give up on its objective of strategic autonomy. The EU Global Strategy formally introduced this objective in June 2016, when everybody still thought that Hillary Clinton would comfortably win the elections. It was not adopted in reaction to Trump's victory and should not be abandoned because of his defeat. Strategic autonomy is a European project for the coming decades, not for the next American presidential term.

### *Yes, Strategic Autonomy*

Strategic autonomy, strategic sovereignty, a pole of the multipolar world, a great power: it all amounts to the same aspiration – the EU has to be an independent global player on a par with the US, China, and Russia. Why? Because (1) the EU cannot count on any other player to defend the European interest in its place, not even on the US. After four years of Trump even the staunchest Atlanticist should have understood that even the US acts against the European interest at times. And because (2) in a world of continent-sized great powers, the only way for the Europeans to defend their own interests is to integrate and achieve the same scale, and that is only possible through the EU.

Strategic autonomy does not mean that the EU seeks to decouple from the US. The only people using that term in earnest are those in the US who want to decouple the American economy from China. Which is exactly what the EU wants to avoid, for such a decoupling could only lead to a rivalry without end, an even deeper economic recession than the COVID-19 pandemic has already caused, and the end of multilateral cooperation to solve global problems and prevent great power rivalry from escalating. Instead, the EU wants to work with all great powers to keep multilateralism alive and reform it, to maintain a global level economic playing field, and to prevent the world from falling apart in exclusive spheres of interests and rival blocs.

Rather than put that agenda on ice because Biden has been elected, the EU should grasp the chance to convince him of it. The EU must pursue its own grand strategy regardless of who occupies the White House. But a Democratic incumbent is an opportunity to do so without causing unnecessary friction, first of all, and hopefully in far closer cooperation with the US again, so that much more can be achieved – before "Trumpism"



surges again. Europeans certainly welcomed Biden's announcement that he will re-join the Paris climate agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, and the World Health Organisation. But will the new administration embrace a broader agenda of reviving multilateralism? Will it continue confronting China for the mere reason that it is a peer competitor of the US, or will it define more specific strategic objectives that leave open the possibility of an accommodation with China, provided it observes certain rules?

A lot depends indeed on China's future behaviour. Strategic autonomy was never about equidistance: the EU prefers to defend its interest together with the US, and is obviously much closer to it than to China. If China turns into an aggressive power, the EU must ally with the US to halt any expansionist designs. But even authoritarian China does have legitimate international interests, and the right to pursue those in a legitimate way; its success at that must be an incentive to do better ourselves, not to excoriate China. Will Beijing understand that Biden's victory is a chance for it too? Give those in the EU and the US who still believe cooperation is possible something to work with, and workable great power relations could yet be preserved. Persist in obstinately refusing effective reciprocity in economic relations, and see the camp that clamours for confrontation grow ever stronger.

### ***Ambition not Nostalgia***

Atlanticists tend to decry European strategic autonomy as unrealistic. But that is circular reasoning: Europe is weak and dependent on the US, therefore it is not allowed to express any serious ambition, and so it remains forever weak and dependent on the US. Will the US forever accept that? Again, Trump should have taught Europeans otherwise. One may be nostalgic for the transatlantic harmony of the past (and it is probably more harmonious with hindsight than it looked at the time). One must be grateful for the American contribution to liberating Europe from Nazism and

for safeguarding western Europe from Stalinism afterwards. But past merit does not excuse today's mistakes, nor does it warrant blind confidence in the future. Likewise, the hopeful aim of future Chinese good behaviour does not warrant condoning today's transgressions. Strategy is a rational business: one must judge each action in its own right, in light of one's interests.

Reason shows, that the EU cannot achieve the same degree of strategic autonomy in all areas at once. The EU is a global economic power, and it is learning how to get better at geo-economics and translate economic power into political leverage. Europe's military power is lagging behind. Not mainly, however, because it does not spend enough: in 2019, the EU-27 spent \$214.8 billion on defence, more than China (\$181 billion) and much more than Russia (\$48.2 billion). The only reason why the EU is not a military power on a par with its economic power is because, against reason, its Member States so far refuse to apply to defence the same key to achieve power: integration. If they would integrate their militaries, they could build up an EU pillar of NATO that in conventional military terms could stand tall on its own. That balance, and not perennial subservience, is the key to NATO's continued relevance on both sides of the Atlantic.

The EU must actively engage the US as an equal, therefore. Europeans can count themselves lucky that Joe Biden won. They should not spoil their luck and waste the opportunity to advance their agenda on specific niches.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>6</sup> Uri Dadush & Abdulelah Darandary, op. cit.



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