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# *A Partnership At Risk*

*By Simon Serfaty*

**I**t is no secret that the transatlantic partnership is at risk. Admittedly, this condition may seem neither new nor unusual. Ever since the United States assumed, on behalf of the West, a leadership it had earned the old-fashioned way—one war at a time—its main European partners have questioned its goals, methods, and even its values. Similarly, ever since the states of postwar Europe began their mutation into a European Union (EU), their ultimate goals, singular methods, and even some of their values have been cause for concern or occasional hostility, not just ambivalence, in the United States—one president and one issue at a time.

Yet, for both the United States and the states of Europe, the crisis is different this time—certainly critical, difficult to contain, and possibly existential.

The difference can be explained in many ways. For one, the crisis is unusually complete, as it combines a full range of overlapping strategic, economic, and political issues that involve the EU and NATO as well as each of their thirty-five members. These issues transcend the personalities of their leaders or the specificities of any one state's

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policy. Even absent Donald Trump, Brexit settled, and Vladimir Putin gone, the EU and NATO, the two main institutional pillars of the transatlantic partnership, would face a consequential agenda: engaging Russia, managing the Greater Middle East, responding to China, controlling the spread of nuclear weapons, ending the wars of 9/11, sustaining a rules-based commercial order, addressing the urgency of climate change, sharing the impact of a growing migrant crisis, regulating the cyber anarchy, digging out of massive imbalances, and more. These highly complex issues are the known knowns of the post-war, post-secular, and post-national agendas of the decade ahead. For many of these issues, the long term is running out of time. This is a time for more unity, not less—if not now, when? As Angela Merkel poignantly reminded Harvard's new graduates in May 2019, "Anything that seems set in stone or inalterable can indeed change," whether for better or for worse.

In short, on both sides of the Atlantic, this is an hour of maximum danger. That is what this moment is all about—a shared risk that it might turn into an era of irreversible ruptures.

**A** singular dimension of the moment is also the fact that a principal Western driver of history's U-turn is the president of the United States, now facing a protracted campaign for re-election. A short year before *his* blind date with *our*



future, the only outcome known for sure is that the election will be pivotal—arguably no less than in 1948 with Truman’s unexpected victory or in 1980 with Carter’s expected defeat. It’s the voters, stupid: since 1992, the election has been won against the pundits’ logical favorite and the prevailing poll du jour: Bill Clinton over Bush H.W. Bush, George W. Bush over Al Gore, Barack Obama over Hillary Clinton (for the Democratic nomination), and Donald Trump over Clinton.

But, even while awaiting the people’s final verdict, this is not the moment for a time out. During this electoral year, it will be the allies’ turn to lead from behind. Doing so will require adhering to three basic principles.

First, don’t indulge but don’t provoke. The Trump narrative about the world is

four-dimensional: The world took advantage—enough! The elite misled—down! The Deep State rules—out! Take America back—first again! However primitive the narrative may be, it sells well—and not only in the United States, where it seems to work even better when openly confrontational and explicitly personal. Make no mistake: expect no growth from Trump in 2020, only regression. As he makes foreign policy the continuation of electoral politics by other means, no one can tell what looms ahead: more tariff war with China, but also with Europe and others perhaps; a flawed deal with the like of North Korea; a real war with the like of Iran; or whatever else might seem politically expedient, however strategically incoherent or dangerous.

*Image: President Donald Trump acknowledges a guest during a signing ceremony in Washington, DC. Reuters/Leah Millis.*

In such a period, it will be best for the states of Europe to avoid confrontation: don't indulge but don't provoke a U.S. president who finds in any slight an offense, any offense a provocation, and any provocation an opportunity for a provocative rebuke. Thus, after Brexit, the best way to respond to Trump's anti-EU strategy is to let it self-destruct, one failed deal and disruptive tweet at a time. The improbable promise of a bilateral trade agreement with Britain on the quick is one example, with its predictably disappointing, and even humiliating, one-way terms, the likely congressional stall prior to a hypothetical ratification, and even the tweeted afterthoughts. Trump's self-serving inconsistency on the way to a deal does not end after the deal has been signed, which is why signing once the talking ends is not always the best option.

Second, think small and go short. Whether Trump ever really mastered "the art of the deal" can be argued one bankruptcy at a time. But however that argument goes, what was mastered, if anything, is the "big" deal. Ignored are the small deals which diplomacy requires for a balanced and durable agreement. For there, in the realm of *les grandes affaires*, the pursuit of an everything-for-everything, now-or-never deal is a non-starter—as shown with the lack of progress in pursuing North Korea's denuclearization, or Iran's non-nuclearization, "the best deal of the century" in the Middle East, and so forth.

And yet, even while some of these crises threaten to erupt into proverbial "October surprises," the European allies can help stay the course to avoid dangerous dead ends while the electoral clock runs out. The role varies—mediator, umpire, point guard,

pivot, or just bench player—but however Europe plays it, it can be quite effective: "deconflictionary" when matters threaten to get out of hand, and "representational" when America's absence threatens to leave the West out. Remember the Anglo-French role in Georgia in the fall of 2008, or the EU Big Three's role to launch U.S.-Iranian negotiations a few years later and, more recently, the French attempt to re-start a dialogue with Iran pending broader talks later. Going short and thinking small is to find and share a way—one issue at a time, one step at a time, during a year of great geopolitical turbulence—towards a compromise.

Third, step up and dig out. No strategic black hole is deeper, wider, and darker than the Middle East. As the subtle geopolitical thinker and baseball-great Yogi Berra would have said, the region is now half about the Arab-Israeli conflict, half about Arab-Arab conflicts, and the remaining half about great and small power conflicts. That leaves plenty of room for everyone to meddle and do harm.

For many years, and preceding Trump, the road to a two-state solution has been closed for major repair amidst growing doubts about U.S. reliability as an honest broker. The resulting vacuum surprisingly restores Europe's position as a main Western rampart against the unwanted ascendancy of self-styled superpowers like Russia, the destructive incompetence of regional bullies like Saudi Arabia, the dangerous provocations of revolutionary powers like Iran, and even, of late, the ineffective assertiveness of newly revisionist powers like Turkey. That the United States is not doing well should not be an alibi for the states of Europe to do less: lacking the will to assert itself as a power in the

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Middle East and bring it the diplomacy it has been lacking in recent years, the risk for Europe is that regional instabilities will continue to spill over dangerously across the Mediterranean.

**I**n 2016, Trump's candidacy was severely underestimated, thereby enabling one of the least suited candidates for the U.S. presidency ever to defeat one of the best prepared ever. At the present moment though, nearly every available indicator points to a one-term limit for the Trump presidency, notwithstanding a statistically robust economy. Assuming the time to be half past Trump, what can be expected next?

Throughout the Cold War and since, every U.S. president has been introduced in opposition to his predecessor. In most cases, there was no new beginning, however, and the expected changes remained short of what had been announced. With Trump making his predecessor the anti-model he did not want to be or become, there has been seemingly little of that past continuity. And yet, don't expect wholesale changes from a new administration. Many of Trump's priorities are likely to endure past his time—getting tough on China, being more demanding on trade, pursuing negotiations with North Korea, saying “no” to a nuclear Iran, seeking a deal over Ukraine as part of a *détente* with Putin's Russia, including a new nuclear balance *à trois* with China, and so forth.

Admittedly, it is premature to anticipate how that legacy will be handled specifically, pending more clarity on Trump's successor. But it is not too early to assume that a key priority of the next U.S. administration will be to restore the credibility of its alliance relationships with a transatlantic *relance* that should respond to three broad strategic guidelines.

First, tell Europe it is wanted—one national capital at a time and as a Union.

Conversely, the United States must also be told it is needed—not only for what it does but also for who it is. On both sides of the Atlantic, in the United States and Europe, an emotional reset is sorely needed.

Soon after the election, the new president should formally reassert America's unequivocal commitment to an ever closer and more capable Europe, as well as a stronger and ever more cohesive NATO. There can be no ambiguity: the EU and NATO are very important U.S. interests, if for no other reason that they are vital interests for its members, America's allies of choice. If not Europe as a Union, how; if not the EU with NATO, with whom?

To share that certainty across the Atlantic and elsewhere, the U.S. president should make the Euro-Atlantic institutions in Brussels the first stop of an early trip to Europe, as George W. Bush did in February 2005, then the earliest such trip after a presidential election. The goal would be to explain and discuss how the new administration intends to redress existing grievances and address the agenda inherited from the past years.

More specifically, and compatible with the positions adopted by most current democratic candidates, the new president should quickly announce his or her intention to restore the pre-Trump consensus on three issues of immediate significance: to re-embrace the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, with the expectation of a broader round of multilateral negotiations with Iran; a return to the Paris Treaty on Climate Change, with shared goals of further progress in many of its specific dimensions; and to negotiate a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Pact for completion and eventual ratification at the earliest possible date.

Second, relaunch a community of overlapping interests, shared goals, and compatible values into a balanced and capable Euro-Atlantic community of complementary action.



The strategic vision improvised by Harry Truman after 1945 was neither American nor European. It was a *Western* strategy for a new transatlantic order in which America's European identity was reset and Europe's geography recast, with defeated Germany in and Soviet Russia out. Thirty years after these goals were met during the Reagan-Bush three-term co-presidency, no new vision is needed. But the goals need to be adapted—keep the United States in, move the EU up, and inch Russia closer. As was the case with Truman, America's alliance policy does not end in Europe—but it does begin there.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the strategic road map for the 2020s demands more from the EU and its members, and more from NATO and its members, including the United States. A new balance between and within both institutions is imperative, but

neither can be nor ever become sufficient because both are necessary for the “smart” use of their members’ complementary power. For Europe, a mere return to its perennial institutional debates will not move the partnership beyond America’s “me, Tarzan” dialoguing with “you, Jane.” Unless the capability gaps across the Atlantic are reduced, defense cooperation will become increasingly difficult, and the security partnership will cease to be operational and, therefore, relevant.

“*Qui fait quoi*,” then-French president Jacques Chirac used to ask. To help address this question, a new transatlantic agenda is long overdue to account for the comprehensive changes of the past twenty-five years. To assume a role commensurate with its interests and capabilities, the EU and its members should be prepared to lead on issues which they are especially well-suited

*Image: A general view shows the hemicycle during a plenary session of the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium.*

*Reuters/Francois Lenoir.*

to address historically and geographically. Admittedly, much can happen in 2020. But with each crisis showing an increasingly short fuse, the case for more EU leadership grows stronger. For a new beginning with Iran, alongside the new U.S. administration, but also for new diplomatic openings with countries whose regimes gambled on Trump and will find it necessary to adjust accordingly. In Eastern Europe, a geopolitical reset with Russia, a country faced with a sputtering economy and a weary leadership, making it ripe for a liquidation of its costly security portfolio—including Ukraine—and, eventually, a smaller, post-Putin grand bargain with the Trump-less West. And a reset too with China, another country with an economy struggling to keep pace, but also increasingly aware of a security environment that is arguably the world's second most dangerous.

And third, post-Brexit, Britain will remain a vital EU partner. And however the Brexit transition evolves, the reset of EU-UK relations is strategically essential to a balanced transatlantic partnership.

Foreign and security policy begins at home, and both the United States and Europe need to put their respective houses in order. Forget Trump and Brexit—the trends of the past thirty years have not been good on either side of the Atlantic. There has been too much politics and not enough policy in the national capitals, but also too much policy and not enough efficiency out of the institutions. Likewise, there has been too much ambition and not enough conviction from the top down, but too much resentment and not enough time from the bottom up. Yet, there is an internal upside to the turbulence of the

Trump and Brexit years: while the latter is still exposing the costs of exiting the EU, the former has shown the added pains of living without allies.

There should be no doubt: absent Britain, the EU is weaker—geographically amputated, historically crippled, and politically betrayed. But the reverse is also true—just wait and watch. End the bickering, therefore: the EU and a few of its members are powers in the world, just like Britain is and will remain even after its exit. But lacking bulk, capabilities, and will, none can be a world power without the others—European countries in need of their Union, the Union in need of Britain, Britain in need of a Union, and the United States in need of both as its most willing, capable, and compatible allies. Don't count on any one, two, or three post-Brexit EU powers to compensate for the loss of Britain.

As the dust settles into the 2020s, it will be important for both sides of the Channel to agree on the terms of their mutual interdependence in ways that also satisfy both sides of the Atlantic. The sad

fact is that there is only one thing the United Kingdom alone can do for the United States better and faster than the EU, and that is to say “Yes” when asked by Washington, with little comparable in return except “Get lost.” Call it Britain's Mexican option. Post-Brexit, direct institutional and operational links with the EU across the board should grant the United Kingdom a presence and an influence compatible with its ability to contribute to the EU's ability to act—no longer a member, to be sure, but a non-member member whose privileges and obligations continue to be significant and potentially indispensable.

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While political theory and electoral arithmetic point to a likely defeat of the incumbent president in November 2020, recent history and electoral geography point to forecasts that failed to account for Trump's uncanny ability to defeat the odds as he did in 2016—the “what if” that was broadly overlooked during the past four presidential elections in the United States, as well as for the June 2016 referendum in the United Kingdom.

It is during their second term in office that U.S. presidents find their way into history, for the better (Harry Truman, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush) or for the worse (Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, and Bill Clinton). Barack Obama was a special case: his election alone made history, for which he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize which should have gone to the American Union. As to one-term presidents like Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush, they have been cast primarily as caretakers—the latter for giving Reagan a virtual third term, and the former for giving his country the timeout it needed after Nixon.

Don't expect that much from a second Trump term. As the former UK ambassador Sir Kim Darroch stated upon leaving his post in Washington, the U.S. president will not “become substantially more normal, less dysfunctional, less unpredictable, less faction riven, less diplomatically clumsy and inept.” With his 2016 electoral triumph confirmed in 2020 after a scorched-earth political battle over impeachment, Trump would be fully unleashed—more personal and confrontational, more unpredictable and unreliable, angrier and more vengeful. But he would also be more unfiltered and insulated and, therefore, more impulsive and freer of any constraints. He will stand permanently at the edge of a constitutional confrontation but comforted by an obedient Republican Party (likely to be still in control of at least the Senate)

and protected by “his” Supreme Court, poised to gain as many as two more conservative Justices.

These thoughts are not reassuring. In 2016, Americans did not get the president they hoped for and deserved: too much controversy surrounded his election. Yet the world may have gotten what it deserved, including the adversaries who cheated too much and even the allies who are said to do too little. With a Trump reelection in 2020, however, the roles would be reversed: Americans who vote for a second mandate would get the president they want and thus deserve. But Europe and even the world would receive more than they can possibly manage, including a populist brand name which will be aggressively promoted at the expense of national leaders the U.S. president might not like, not to mention a more confrontational approach with states and governments that denied him the economic and nuclear deals he had hoped to conclude during his first term. Thus, moving hypothetically into Trump's second presidential term, there are a few priorities to be adopted in such a scenario.

First, let Europe be Europe: as an ever closer and stronger Union whose members think, speak, and act European.

There is more to the making of Europe than the United States, and other U.S. presidents have questioned the idea of a united Europe, although not to the point of declaring the EU “a foe” and NATO “obsolete” and “brain dead.” A second four-year term for Trump would be extremely consequential for the military alliance, and everyone should plan accordingly.

Less NATO calls for more EU, not as a matter of choice but as a matter of necessity. This is not a new condition, as has been seen often since the 1956 Suez Crisis shaped the ratification debates of the Rome Treaties. To each transatlantic crisis its *relance* and for each *relance* its crisis.



Admittedly, there is enough ambivalence and confusion about EU institutions to end this pattern—across the continent, across the channel, and across the Atlantic. But post-Trump, post-Brexit, and closing on post-Putin (but not post-Russia), there is an opportunity for EU members and the growing peloton of Euroskeptics to come to their senses. For while the idea of Europe has lost much of its past clarity and efficacy, it has lost none of its relevance and has regained much of its urgency. For those who have failed to notice, Brexit confirms that there is no credible plan B, for the states of Europe relative to the Union, but also for the United States relative to its alliance.

Second, as Europe struggles to be Europe, it must also learn how to let Trump be Trump, and America be America. A limited liability partnership can do—still intent on U.S.-EU cooperation and EU-NATO complementarity.

Over the past three decades more specifically, Bill Clinton neglected the defeated state, Russia, and most of the former Soviet Republics; George W. Bush mismanaged the wars of 9/11, in Afghanistan and Iraq; and Barack Obama misunderstood the Arab Spring and its consequences without improving his predecessors' unfinished business. As a result, it is not surprising that European states have taken to questioning American leadership with renewed intensity. But still, there is one conclusion at least about which history's verdict is final: America, Europe, and the world are better off when America stays in (1945) than when it stays away (1914, 1939), steps down (1919) or stands aside (1991). Whatever the outcome of the next American presidential election, this verdict will still hold.

*Image: Russian president Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting with members of the Security Council at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow, Russia. Sputnik/Mikhail Klimentyev/Kremlin.*

Without a doubt, Trump's second presidential term would be stressful. It would test Europe's will and America's capacity to salvage whatever it can of the relationship. Intent on his divisive anti-EU strategy, Trump would promote the deceptive benefits of privileged trade relations with other EU exiters-to-be in Eastern and Southern Europe while seeking congressional approval of a trade agreement possibly signed with Britain prior to or shortly after his re-election. Tariffs would remain a weapon of choice, aimed at adversaries and allies alike, and with more consequences on intra-European and global trade patterns—threatening a dangerous “de-integration” of the world's economy. Anticipate, too, an interest in a phase-out from NATO by a date Trump would want to make certain of—meaning no later than 2024 for the end of his mandate and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Washington Treaty. By that time he would have completed his long-awaited bilateral entente with Putin's Russia back into a reconstituted G8. As compensation,

closer bilateral security relations *hors* NATO might be offered to some countries in Europe, in but also *hors* EU. In short, a new geopolitical map for Europe would begin to emerge, closer to what is remembered of the nineteenth century but hardly compatible with what had been expected for the twenty-first—sanctions-driven rather than rules-based, lacking moral clarity, and with little strategic consistency.

And yet... patience, patience—there is more to America than Trump and less to Trump than America. There would remain much room for cooperation in a second Trump term on issues of shared interest to

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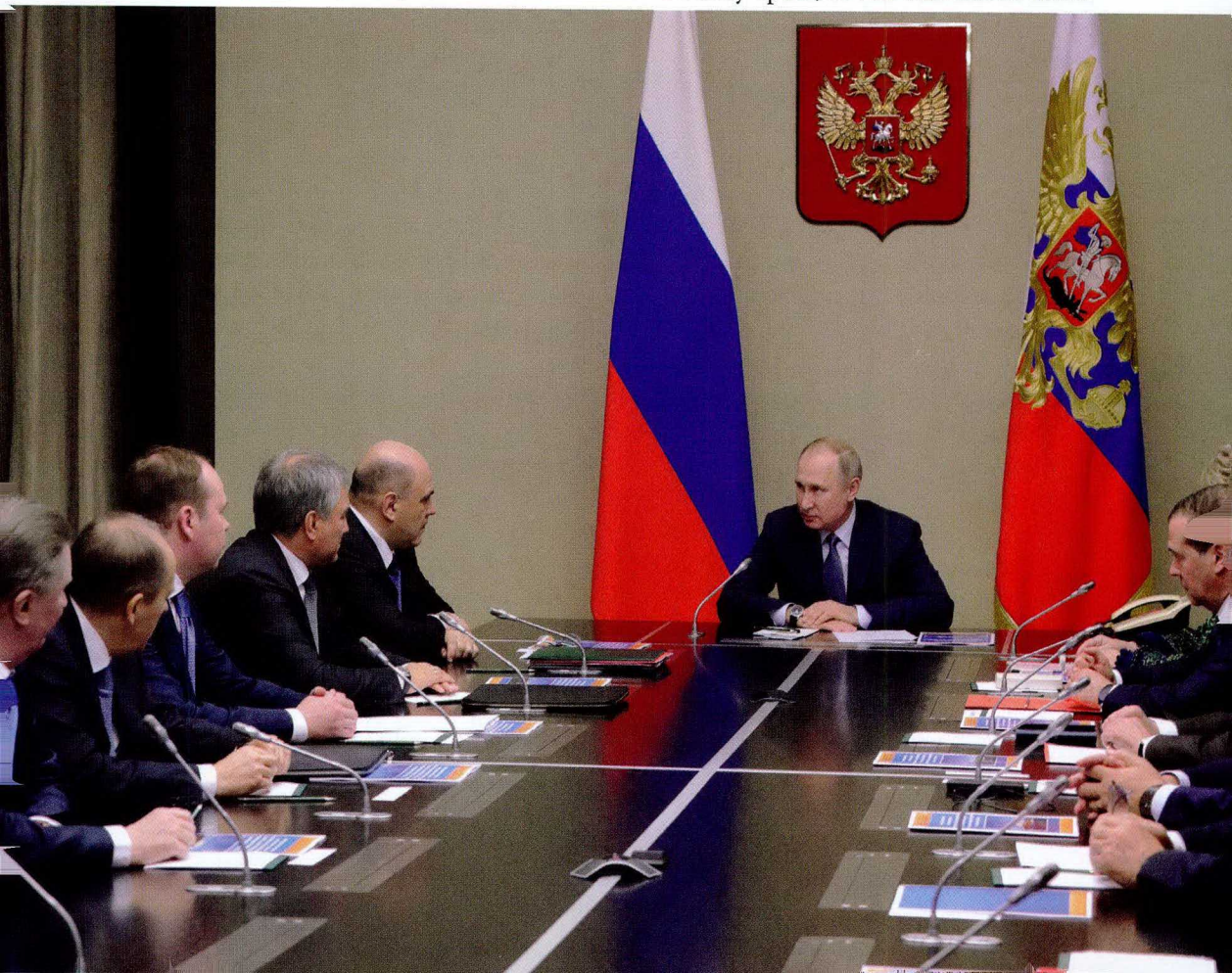
the EU and NATO countries—even when these interests are not evenly shared and responsibility for those interests not evenly assumed by both institutions and all of their members.

Third, don't let Russia be Russia, and Putin, Putin: an integrated *Ostpolitik* that involves NATO, the EU, and their thirty-five members is needed.

This is not about Putin because of Russia with and in spite of Trump, but about Russia with and in spite of Putin. Always a rival, this complex but also complexed power resists the idea of having just foreign countries in its vicinity—they can only be either vassals or enemies. Strategic prudence is how the Cold War was won, with quite a few compromises along the way. With Europe still the strategic centerpiece of its imperial envies, more prudence—meaning also more patience—is needed.

Looking already beyond the end of his current mandate in 2024, Putin is not

merely an opportunist and an improviser: he is also a strategist and a survivor. He chooses his time to pick his fights, but when he does he is prepared to fight the time-tested Russian way: hard, long, and dirty. Don't wait for him, therefore, to change course without trying to preserve or add to previous gains. In Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, but also in regions less known to Russia like the Middle East, Putin manipulates facts and fiction—weapons he does not have, money he cannot spend, allies he cannot get, or time he is lacking. But better than most, Putin can separate the fiction he creates from the facts he knows, which keeps him open to negotiations after he has shown his resolve—don't indulge and don't provoke but do engage. For in the end, history tells us that Russia's attempts to go global neither last long nor end well, and as an exhausted post-Soviet Russia runs out of resources, people, capabilities, and even security space, it will run out of time.



At this point, turning to the West will come naturally—echoes of Gorbachev’s strategic dead end after Brezhnev’s final attempt to challenge the United States for primacy in Europe and for influence in the world.

Fourth, don’t give China a pass, a strategic reset is needed.

Expectations of a quick transformation of a prosperous China into a constructive partner were exaggerated. Feared in Europe, which has forever anticipated a U.S. pivot to Asia, this early experience of economic collusion between the United States and China now comes with fears of a collision between them. At issue, then, is not an overdue economic and military reset with China, but whether the unilateral and improvised methods used to-date are threatening to open a quagmire for all.

Hegemonic upgrades do not come easily—just ask Imperial Germany and Japan about their own bids for power in 1919 and 1941, and check with Soviet Russia in 1991 too. Timing is everything, but don’t overlook the need for sustainable capabilities and competence. Take the United States of America: what made its rise to hegemony especially effective is that its leaders took their time while building up their resources and gaining experience.

Whether China will do as well during the coming decade is, at best, unclear. Indeed, both its capabilities and competence may be exaggerated. Consider its economic miracle: according to researchers at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Chicago, annual growth has been overstated by an average of 1.7 percentage points for at least nine years (2008–2016), leaving the nominal size of the economy at about eighteen percent lower than its official level of \$13.4 trillion at the end of 2018. Other statistical claims of strategic parity or even superiority extend to China’s military

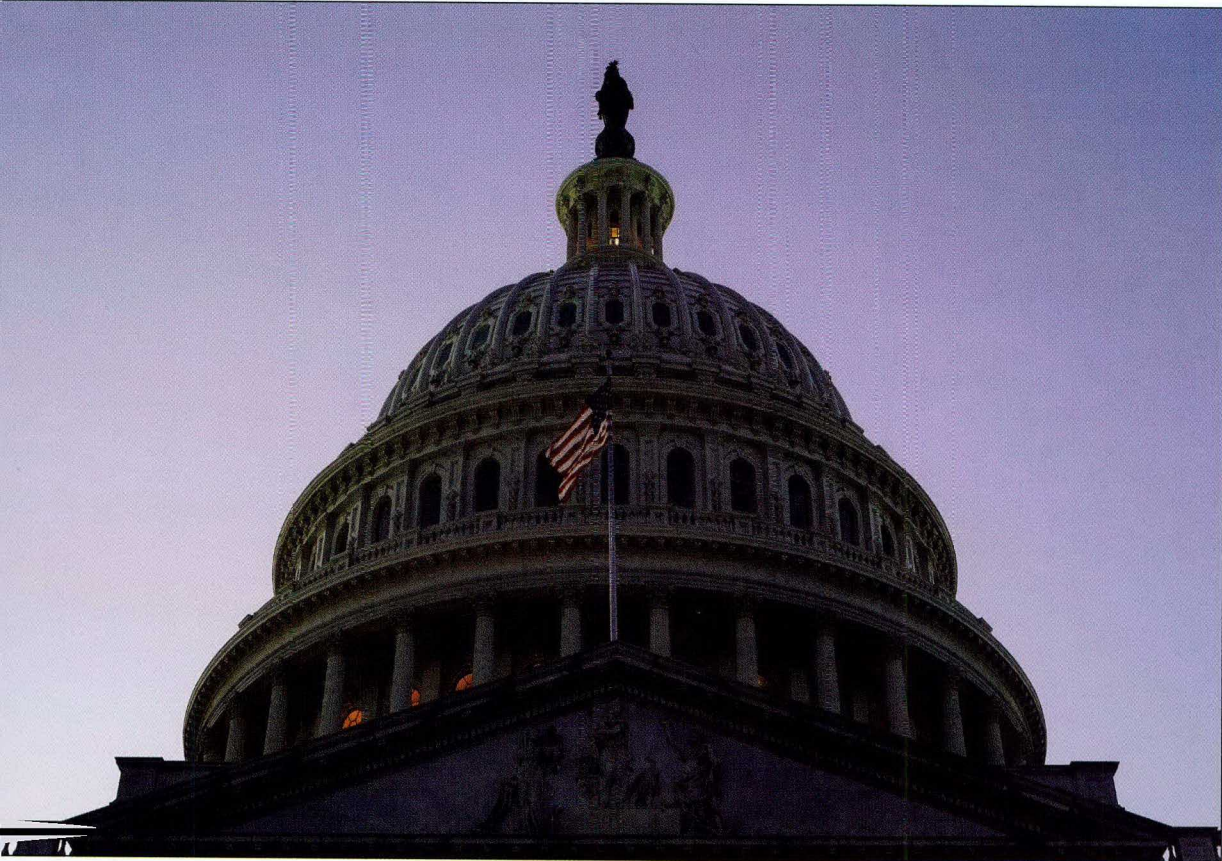
capabilities and technological advances relative to the United States are doubtful and in need of confirmation over time—echoes of the misleading projections of Soviet economic growth in the 1950s and emerging strategic superiority in the 1970s. At issue is not the rise of China to shared primacy but a reminder of the obstacles along the way. In short, China is a power in the world but it is not yet a world power; and even as the foremost power in Asia, it is not Asia’s partner of choice. While the behavior of a rising power cannot be predicted, increasingly tumultuous relations with China will be handled best if the United States and Europe act jointly as powers in Asia, though not Asian powers.

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**W**e are left with a few assumptions about an incomplete and unfinished Europe, still the strategic priority of a revanchist Russia; in an unbalanced Asia, where an ascending China stands as the most serious new bidder for global hegemony; and in the pivotal Greater Middle East, where

the rise of Iran serves the ambitions of eager newcomers like Russia and traditional bystanders like Saudi Arabia. This is not an agenda imposed by Trump on America, by America on Europe, and by the West on the world, but one imposed by the world on all.

First, the transatlantic partnership is and will remain vital for any sort of rules-based order to emerge over the next decade. Yes, America’s leadership has been fading pre- and post-Trump. But even so, the United States and Europe are indispensable partners which remain united by the interests and values they share with each other more evenly than with others. Alternatives—like a so-called “Anglosphere” of democratic states, or an allegedly European “Europe”



stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, or a geostrategic pivot to a Pacific *pas de quatre* choreographed by the United States with Australia, Japan, and India—lack the compatibilities and complementarities of the Euro-Atlantic co-partnership.

Second, the United States is preponderant in most dimensions of power—the world's most *complete* power. For allies and adversaries alike, the facts of its power are not questioned—only how it is employed and why. However, for Europe to be a capable counterpart with enough capacity to act, even as a counterweight, its Union needs to be extended in the political arena lest it proves to be no better than a counterfeit. NATO cannot be turned into a universal social worker any more than the EU can become a global security provider. With each institution relying on the other in the areas it does least or less well, institutional complementarity is about power *and* weaknesses, as America and Europe thus complete each other on behalf of shared interests and common goals.

Third, complementarity of European membership in NATO and the EU also remains desirable. The six countries that signed the Rome Treaties were all NATO members; thirty-five years later, at the end of the Cold War, the European membership of NATO (then fifteen) and the EU (then twelve) was nearly identical. Enlargement since then has affected both institutions almost evenly, with only two of the thirteen new NATO members and five of the sixteen new EU members not becoming members of the other institution. Post-Brexit but also with reference to Turkey, this convergence now looks beyond reach. To avoid more separation, consultation between the total thirty-five members of EU (now twenty-eight) and NATO (now twenty-nine, including twenty-one European countries) should be reinforced to ease Euro-Atlantic consultation before decisions are made by or for either institution, thus making them all partners of choice for joint or complementary action by either institution to which they do not or cannot belong.

*Image: The U.S. flag lies in front of the Capitol dome in Washington, DC. Reuters/Joshua Roberts*

Fourth, the rise of China as a superpower is nearly certain, whatever its place in a region with little settled history and five nuclear powers—including two of them that are highly unstable and potential first users. Unlike the Soviet Union, which could not match, let alone surpass, America's superiority, China can, although the road is getting bumpier and the risks of a hard landing real—with falling growth, growing regional challenges, and little adaptability. As was shown by Reagan after three decades of global rivalry with the Soviet Union, strategic restraint has its limits and hegemonic expansion faces diminishing returns. Seven decades after the West allegedly “lost” China, it is now China which is “losing” the West, as a broad consensus posits that a less strong and even less united China may be a better fit after all.

Fifth, the Cold War is won and gone, but Russia is neither done nor defeated. For the *Rusky Mir*—the Russian world that comprises parts of Kazakhstan and sizeable populations in the Baltic States—there is no modest vision of a natural sphere of influence over its neighbors. Now, only a short

quarter of a century after its most recent defeat, Russia acts like it won the Cold War, as it calls for NATO to be disbanded and the EU to be neutered while blatantly intervening in their members' national elections and spreading new instabilities in areas of vital interest to them. Yet, faced with bad geopolitical conditions all around, economically vulnerable, and with few capable friends, Russia is a *demandeur* state whose future is with but not in the West, including the United States and Europe, and neither in nor with Asia, including China.

Sixth, the Greater Middle East is more fragmented, hostile, dangerous, and unpredictable than ever before. The territorial arrangements made at the expense of the Ottoman Empire one hundred years ago are void and opened to the highest bidders. Gone, too, are the few days of interstate wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors to which the region grew accustomed—the kind of wars Israel could win on the cheap, America end on the quick, and Europe watch from a distance while non-Western states were kept away. What is left are the kinds of endless wars we lose or just cannot win—with



a potential for bigger and worse wars than any in the past. During the Cold War, the statistic that best described the deepening U.S. involvement in the Middle East was zero—zero military casualties up to 1983 (in Beirut, Lebanon) and zero regime change intervention after 1953 (in Iran), but also zero effectiveness in ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and zero results in enhancing human rights. Now, even Yogi Berra's arithmetic cannot measure the current moral and strategic confusion. With the region broken into a multitude of territorial and sectarian pieces, and absent a local will to fix it or even agree over what needs fixing first, there is little the United States and Europe can fix alone and on the quick, if anything.

Seventh, the entire Greater Middle East stands where Europe was during the past century: there can be no order in the world without some order in the region. Turkey, which "lost" the region to an imperial West in 1916, and the imperious rise of Iran, which hopes to regain the region on behalf of its own brand of Islam, are special challenges which neither the United States nor Europe can escape. For the former, the West is losing its appeal, and even while Turkey remains fit for NATO because of its military capabilities, NATO itself is not because of the alliance handicaps it brings. And even if the EU sues Turkey because of the economic advantages it offers, Turkey does not because of its democratic deficits. Don't make of Turkey an orphan, though: NATO must give it the strategic respect it deserves for its contributions and the EU the economic partner it needs for its secular democracy to endure.

Eight, with regard to Iran, the post-1979 tensions are just about to run out of time. As an increasingly defiant regime shows a predilection for war with the United States over the "maximum" economic pressures imposed since Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal; and as Israel—and possibly the United States too—confirms its own

preference for a war with Iran over a nuclear Iran, this is the most immediate threat in the region, with a potential for a serious military clash matched nowhere else. Make no mistake: however and whenever a war starts with Iran, unless it is ended quickly, the horrific risk is to have it end into a catastrophic nuclear escalation.

Ninth, wild cards and small events, by definition unknown and unpredictable, demonstrate best the need for transatlantic strategic interdependence. There are numerous pressing concerns: terrorism, economic instability, populist uprisings, rapidly developing technological changes, and more. With all these issues moving at variable speeds and in opposite directions, no power alone, however peerless, can stay on top for long without capable allies. And no single dimension of power, however superior, can suffice to resolve any one issue, however significant.

Tenth, in a moment infused with a certain air of destiny, divisions between the United States and Europe, as well as among the states of Europe, are serious because many of these issues are existential. These divisions are placing the transatlantic partnership in jeopardy at a time when unity is essential—not because, absent their alliance, the United States and Europe would be denied a future, but because that future would be less promising, more dangerous, and less comfortable. Post-Trump and post-Brexit, then, let's be sure to undo the damage done to the EU and NATO. As Winston Churchill reflected in 1919, many futures ago, "The true nature of nations is what they do when they are tired." Our Western democracies have rarely been as tired as they are now. But whatever their reasons, this is no time for them to walk away from the achievements of the past seventy years, including a Western alliance that defeated history in Europe and kept the West firmly in place elsewhere. It won't require thaumaturgy to revive it, but practical accomplishments. □

*Image: People hold their mobile phones and Chinese flags as military aircraft fly in formation during the military parade marking the seventieth founding anniversary of People's Republic of China. Reuters/Tingshu Wang.*

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