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THE BIDEN DOCTRINE AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE: RENEWED TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS OR REATLANTISATION BETWEEN A STRATEGIC AND A SITUATIONAL PARTNERSHIP?

Abstract. The war in Ukraine is the most significant threat to the peace of the Euro-Atlantic area in decades. After 4 years of Trump's weakening of transatlantic relations, Biden's presumed foreign policy doctrine includes their quick renewal, or re-Atlantisation. The article problematises the 'new' strategy of containment given Russia's aggression, the state of transatlantic relations, and the current global order's configuration, whereby the transatlantic bond is being strengthened and the formation of Biden's foreign policy doctrine is being followed by a 'grand-strategic' shift. Four different models of transatlantic relations (mutual autonomy, strategic autonomy, strategic partnership, situational partnership) are discussed where variables include the approach taken by the USA to transatlantic relations, and the approach of Europe's EU and NATO members to transatlantic relations are addressed. The main argument is that transatlantic relations during Biden's mandate have constantly oscillated between a strategic partnership, especially related to common goals of democracy promotion and containment and situational partnership. Situations like the war in Ukraine have simultaneously acted to strengthen the American-European partnership based on the shared security and political interests.

Keywords: *transatlantic relations, reatlantisation, USA, Europe, Biden doctrine, war in Ukraine, strategic partnership, situational partnership*

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Introduction

Unlike the Cold War which remained an unarmed conflict in Europe for its duration between 1946 and 1989/91, three decades after its end, armed conflict between two sovereign states is again underway in Europe. Exactly 1 month after the Russian Federation launched its military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, i.e., “a special military operation” in its own parlance, in Brussels the North Atlantic Council (NAC) held an extraordinary meeting on the level of NATO heads of state. This meeting assembled the leaders of 30 NATO members who together expressed strong condemnation of Russia’s attack on Ukraine. They called for an immediate cease-fire and respect of humanitarian law, while supporting Ukraine’s right to defend itself and labelling Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision a strategic mistake that would bring severe consequences for Russia and its people¹. Although NATO is a political and military alliance of 30 countries, the Brussels meeting highlighted the leading position held by its largest and most powerful member in a military sense: the United States of America. At a NATO summit just a few months later in Madrid in June 2022, Sweden and Finland were invited to join the Alliance after they abandoned their neutral status amid Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Also at this summit, the New Strategic Concept of NATO was adopted, defining a “fundamental shift in deterrence and defence”². Since the end of the Cold War, NATO had struggled to define its purpose, justifying its existence by the alleged growth of political tensions and leading to French President Emmanuel Macron at one point accusing the organisation of having become “brain-dead”. Following the strategic failures experienced in Afghanistan and Libya, the New Strategic Concept defined Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area” (Arnold, 2022). Moreover, this happened amid the first major threat not only to European but also world security since Joe Biden had become the new US president in January 2021. From the moment he took over the helm from his predecessor Donald Trump, i.e., after the outset of implementing the new Administration’s foreign policy, Joe Biden has emphasised the crucial need to renew the USA’s partnership with its European allies in NATO. Four years of Trump’s policy of weakening transatlantic relations and relativising partnerships with the European NATO members, this was viewed by the Biden Administration as a brief exception in the more than 70 years of the US-European political and military strategic alliance.

¹ Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government, Brussels 24 March 2022. Accessible at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_193719.htm, 10. 5. 2022.

² NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, adopted at the Madrid Summit, 29–30 June 2022. Accessible at <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>, 10. 7. 2022.

This alliance was formed, strengthened and institutionalised when the Cold War began in the second half of the 1940s as an extension of the Second World War, gathering the former allies in the fight against the fascist Triple Alliance. On one hand, transatlanticism connected the USA as the victor of the Second World War and a new superpower in a completely different configuration of international relations and, on the other, most European states that had suffered the destruction and occupation of fascist forces. The Cold War as a political-ideological conflict between two newly formed blocs – the US-led Western Democracy and the USSR-led Eastern Autocratic (Communist) bloc – shaped the logic of transatlanticism as a mutual political, military and economic orientation of the American and European North Atlantic parties in the context of new, divided Europe (Kershaw, 2018: 576). As the Cold War bipolar division of the world ended in 1991 when NATO's rival bloc the Warsaw Pact was disbanded and the USSR ceased to exist as a state, the justification for maintaining the previously established transatlantic relations was permanently questioned in terms of both its political conditionality and the institutional mechanisms of collective security established through NATO. Further, Russia's invasion of Ukraine led the Brussels meeting's participants to issue an agreed statement in which NATO was described as "strong and united as it has ever been"³.

When analysing the new tightening of relations between the West and Russia, the period between the end of the Cold War and the commencement of the outright Russian-Ukrainian war seems an exception in the long-term West-Russia rivalry established after the Second World War with the return of the USA's leadership in Europe (Alcaro, 2022: 5). At the same time, the transatlantic relations between the USA and its European allies could in the long run gain justification and dynamics due to the war that erupted in early 2022 in the territory of the former USSR having led to a rebalancing of regional powers and a new level of cooperation in NATO (Mossalanejad, 2022: 41). Moreover, this conflict is becoming critical in formulating the Biden doctrine according to which the incumbent US president has defined the foreign policy priorities for his term in office and the ways to achieve these objectives.

The article addresses the following research questions: Did the election of Joe Biden as US president trigger a key change in the transatlantic relations between the USA and its European allies? Which type of partnership has it produced? Have the new threats to global security like the current war in Ukraine strengthened the transatlantic partnership and, if so, in which way/s? We argue that one of Biden's priorities of the USA maintaining relations with its European allies in NATO and the European Union has constantly oscillated between a strategic and a situational partnership. The

³ *Ibid.*

strategic partnership is the outcome of multi-decade transatlantic relations based on mutual political and security interests, while the situational partnership depends on individual crises capable of seeing the foreign policy goals of the USA and European countries being formulated in divergent ways. While the war in Ukraine has united the USA and its European allies in an almost unprecedented way in the post-Cold War period, it affects them differently. Having depended on Russian energy for years, Europe finds it far more difficult to break its economic cooperation with Russia. In addition, the proximity of the battlefield along with the impacts of the economic sanctions and millions of Ukrainian refugees have made the war a daily reality for Europeans. By being immediately threatened by the war and its consequences, the partners in Europe are strategically interested in a political and security partnership with the USA. Strategic partnership implies the considerable involvement of both the American and European sides in the American-European alliance (e.g., the present war in Ukraine and the attitude to democracy around the world). On the other hand, the situational partnership relies on the degree of the USA's involvement: although the European partners are ready for high involvement, America's involvement depends on a particular situation such as political, energy, trade and environmental topics (e.g., the relationship with China, environmental protection, regulating the work of multinational companies). Over the last 2 years, the USA has again been interested in this type of partnership with the aim of 'containing' Russia's autocratic regime. Given that the war in Ukraine could produce quite significant changes in international relations, the renewed transatlantic relations or reatlantisation of the American-European partnership these days could also de-emphasise the issue of Europe's need for strategic autonomy. Still, the USA might return to a lower level of engagement in Europe depending on both the outcome of the 2024 presidential election and any strengthening of its tensions with China.

Before Russia attacked Ukraine, according to analyses Biden's presumed doctrine included several primary US foreign policy goals to be accomplished by 2025 when Joe Biden's current term comes to an end. Like recent research (Nehra, 2021) suggests, such goals certainly included: (1) continuing with the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, a global health and security problem since early 2020; (2) maintaining the American economy's primacy in the world, especially relative to the Chinese economy; the relationship with China viewed not only as an economic but also a political and military rival in international relations; and (3) revitalising the mentioned transatlantic relations. This revitalisation would harmonise the American 'Grand Strategy' as "the use of power to secure the state" (Hooker, 2014: 1) in the 21st century and the European 'Strategic Autonomy' because the EU's endeavours "to develop the requisite capabilities and will to forge a more

independent path in the international arena when necessary “(Martin and Sinkkonen, 2021: 3)⁴. President Donald Trump was overshadowed by the ‘America First’ policy that not only acted as his election slogan, but underpinned the true success of his domestic and foreign policy. Determined for America to resume participating in the established alliances, Joe Biden is perceived by most American partners in Europe as a politician who will guarantee the implementation of common political and security goals and values with “strengthening US participation in and support for NATO as one of Biden’s objectives” (D’Urso, 2021: 9).

Yet, for Biden and most of his European colleagues the fundamental value of the transatlantic bloc is democracy as a free and fair way of electing governments and guaranteeing the widest range of human and civil rights. It is precisely the guarantee and protection of democratic principles that could be a new or still another difference relative to the bloc of countries in which different forms of autocratic power can be found and, also to varying degrees, pose a threat to regional and global security. The historical Cold War was a principally an ideological conflict in which one bloc, based on a monopoly of communist ideology, sought to expand both politically and territorially. In this sense, in 1947 the American foreign policy strategy of ‘containment’ emerged to prevent the spread of the opposing bloc and its ideology. It was a “specific policy of surrounding the Soviet Union... and of promoting a liberal economic and political world order outside of Soviet sphere and influence” (Nye and Welch, 2013: 143). The new ‘containment’ strategy is becoming possible in the circumstances of Joe Biden’s presidency and the current erosion of international security. It is worth noting that this time the ‘containment’ policy is supposed to target autocratic regimes of diverse ideological backgrounds – ranging from left communist to right nationalist. The transatlantic partnership undoubtedly shares the same democratic set of values and institutions and will be further defined by the potential and real threats to that set, in turn revealing the potential to develop a strategic partnership during the Biden presidency as a key element of that partnership and the common new containment policy.

Renewed transatlanticism in reconfigured international relations

US President Joe Biden took office in January 2021, having been the US vice president between 2009 and 2017 during the term of the 44th US President Barack Obama. Biden’s vice-presidential years were hence seen in Europe as a personal guarantee of a clear break from Trump’s policy of manoeuvring

⁴ This polycentric grid of American interests in the world certainly requires a multilateral approach, or at least an allied one.

between a kind of para-isolationist policy and intensifying relations exclusively with the most powerful players in international relations. The fact that during President Donald Trump's term transatlantic relations reached their lowest level since the 1940s was completely annulled by Biden's victory at the 2020 presidential election, notably by the escalation of international security in the 1.5 years of his term in office. In Biden's vision of the (re)configuration of international relations, the transatlantic bond is being restrengthened and Donald Trump's 4 years at the White House simply an exception to the long-term strategic alliance of the partners on both sides of the North Atlantic. Although it seemed that in the early 1990s, after almost half a century of bipolar international relations, the world would become unipolar due to America and the West's Cold War dominance and America's post-Cold War global leadership in action (Vukadinović, 2001: 376), the start of the 21st century showed that international relations were still far from becoming stable. The terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001; the USA's military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq; the economic and military strengthening of the BRICS countries, primarily China and the Russian Federation; energy production as a new lever in defining security; NATO and the European Union's enlargement to Eastern Europe and the confirmation that the former Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991 was an unfinished process regarding the borders of certain newly established states – all of these issues raised new, important questions. After entering the 21st century, the world had become multipolar, at least asymmetrically multipolar, albeit along with the possibility emerging that a new, less predictable bipolarity would be stabilised. Further, in this new configuration of international relations the USA and its European allies are again on the same end of the spectrum even though their positions depend on the internal circumstances of an individual state, especially the USA. After the short-lived tripolarity on the eve of the Second World War, that war first led to war bipolarity and then to post-war, ideological bipolarity.

The asymmetric multipolarity⁵ that immediately began to be configured in the 21st century implies several globally and regionally dominant forces of varying political, military and economic potential, from the Cold War superpower (USA) to the new great power (China) and the renewed superpower (Russia) to the increasingly influential subjects of international relations as either individual states (United Kingdom, India, Brazil) or supranational bodies (the EU under the actual leadership of Germany and France). In this type of multipolarity, alliances and rivalries are established easier and more often, and international security does not depend solely on one spe-

⁵ *The last time the world was multipolar was before and after the First World War with several great powers whose political, military and economic power determined the content and dynamics of international relations.*

cific political/ideological rift. Nevertheless, events at the start of the third decade of the 21st century show that (a)symmetric multipolarity, as perhaps the most desirable configuration of international relations, is still governed by the doctrine of realism with the state as the protector of security through power politics and can very quickly turn into situational bipolarity. The sharp division in relations between the West and Russia after Russia invaded Ukraine reminds us of the situation of generating tensions that last prevailed in the early 1960s at the height of the Cold War. At the same time, the rest of the world has been unable to avoid siding with one of the conflicting parties because even declaring of one's non-interference in the conflict has been perceived as supporting one of the parties in the conflict. Even when the war in Ukraine ends, its long-term consequences will strain the harmony of relations between the West and Russia, and most likely China, while a new bipolarity might easily be established at the crossroads of democratic and autocratic regimes with several hybrid regimes in between. However, in both cases – either asymmetric multipolarity and in (neo)bipolarity – the position held by the USA⁶ and most European countries will be determined by transatlantic political and security connections, i.e., this kind of foreign policy orientation. In this grid, the North Atlantic will become/remain the “mare nostrum” or “oceanum nostrum”. This explains why the renewed transatlanticism that Joe Biden and his colleagues in NATO and the EU are striving for may be viewed as looking to the past on one side, and to the future on the other. In some situations, elements of a strategic partnership are shown, whereas in others a situational one is apparent.

Ever since early 2021, the renewed transatlantic relations have been influenced by two changes. The first of these refers to the change in American policy and the second to the security change in Europe following Russia's military attack on Ukraine. The arrival of Joe Biden as US president brought about a considerable degree of involvement of the American side in transatlantic relations. This change also strengthened that part of European politics that sees the USA as a strategic partner, and both side's interests were aligned by the war in Ukraine. In this way, the renewed strategic partnership in transatlantic relations has led to the synchronous action of the USA and its European allies with a view to promoting their common principles; namely: a rejection of war as a means for achieving foreign policy goals, respect for the territorial integrity of sovereign states that are victims of aggression, and the protection of democracy as a form of government. Biden's leadership has thereby renewed the strategic partnership that existed during President Barack Obama's term in office. The Obama Administration also had to

⁶ Carment and Belo (2021) in their recent research paper suggest that America's power has increasingly been operationalised through unilateralism and competitive multilateralism.

stabilise transatlantic relations in the early years after President George W. Bush's two terms because some of the USA's key allies, notably France and Germany, had not actively engaged in implementation of Bush's Doctrine of Interventionism in the Middle East, specifically in Iraq. The arrival of Obama and Biden at the helm of the USA was perceived in Europe, especially in the EU and NATO, as American support for multilateralism in international relations and respect for the position held by the European allies in formulating and achieving common interests. Therefore, during Bush's presidency transatlantic relations assumed the contours of a situational partnership, and during Donald Trump's term in office, for the first time since the Second World War, a tendency arose towards mutual autonomy on both the American and European sides. Here, one may assume the existence of four models of transatlantic relations depending on combinations of these two variables. The first is the USA's approach to transatlantic relations, and the second one is the approach taken by the EU members and Europe's NATO members to transatlantic relations. These four models give four main forms of cooperation or conflicts among the leading actors in international relations (Table 1):

Table 1: MODELS OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

	Approach of the USA to transatlantic relations	Approach of EU members and Europe's NATO members to transatlantic relations	Main form of cooperation or conflicts among the leading actors in international relations
Model 1 Mutual autonomy	Low involvement	Low involvement	Both transatlantic partners primarily pursue their own foreign policy interests, and in the event of an escalation of conflicts in the world they lose opportunities for a synergistic influence
Model 2 Situational partnership	Low involvement	High involvement	The USA chiefly pursues its own foreign policy interests and cooperates with European partners on issues of common interest, especially in situations of conflict
Model 3 Strategic autonomy	High involvement	Low involvement	European partners largely pursue their own foreign policy interests, while the USA strengthens its relations with some European partners as its closest allies in the circumstances of cooperation and conflict in the world
Model 4 Strategic partnership	High involvement	High involvement	Both transatlantic partners act synchronously in international relations, achieving the maximum influence in international relations, notably during crises and conflicts in the world

Source: Own analysis.

Transatlanticism as part of the Biden doctrine

The formulation and implementation of the common foreign and security interests of the USA and most European countries has been a constant over the last 75 years both in the majority of American presidents' doctrines and as far as individual European countries gathered in continental (EU) or transcontinental country integrations (NATO) are concerned. While the 46th President of the USA Joe Biden still does not have a precisely defined foreign policy doctrine like some of his predecessors in the 20th or 21st centuries, such as Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower or recently George W. Bush with his "democracy promotion" (Colucci, 2018: 135) in the context of the USA's military intervention in the post-Cold War world (von Hippel, 2000), Biden's doctrine could easily become, especially given the events in Eastern Europe, the 'new containment' doctrine. The historical 'containment'⁷ is part of Truman's doctrine proclaimed in March 1947 through the President's address to the US Congress when, on the model of Greece and Turkey, the USA pledged to help all states in the context of the expanding Soviet political influence and communist ideology. Seventy-five years later, Biden's presumed doctrine identifies autocratic regimes as the biggest source of danger to world peace and stability, and the USA itself is no longer a Cold War-style impeder of communism, but an impeder of undemocratic order and influence. By marking a clear turn away from Donald Trump's foreign policy, Joe Biden seeks to position the USA as a world leader among democratic countries that perceive the USA as their ally and a trustworthy leader.

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine – the worst European war of the 21st century – and the destabilisation of relations established in 1975 by the Helsinki Summit through the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), relations in Europe have been greatly reconfigured and the US-European alliance has taken on a new substantial form. Thus, the 'new containment' doctrine, instead of historical communism, refers to contemporary autocracies, especially those that threaten regional and global peace by choosing armed conflict as a mode of action. Although held 2.5 months before the start of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, the *Summit for Democracy* is tangible confirmation of the core of Biden's foreign policy in his current term in office. The meeting was held virtually on 9 and 10 December 2021, bringing together representatives of 111 countries, conspicuously excluding a broad range of those the USA considers autocratic, ranging from the Russian Federation and Belarus, through Turkey,

⁷ Originally, the doctrine of containment was proposed in 1946 by the American diplomat George F. Kennan in his "Long Telegram".

Iran and Venezuela to China and North Korea. Among EU, only Hungary did not attend the summit, whereas among NATO members only Hungary and Turkey. According to the US organisers, the goal of the summit was “to renew democracy at home and confront autocracies abroad”, while, in addition to autocratic regimes and their spread around the world, corruption and human rights violations were acknowledged as modern threats to democracy.

Democratic values have hence become the denominator of a new, longer-term alliance of the USA and its European partners and other states that consider and implement democratic elections of government and protect human rights based on their constitutional and legal framework towards “a new Atlanticism” (Krastev and Leonard, 2021: 21). Both within and outside the European Union, the EU is perceived as a community of states with the highest standards of democracy and human rights, as once again underscored during the peak of the European migrant crisis in 2015 when millions of migrants from the Middle East, Northern Africa and Central Asia European flowed into the most developed European countries, notably Germany. The setting of a struggle to preserve democracy and the cohesion and resilience of the democratic community (Brands, 2021) and prevent autocracy from becoming a broader model of political systems testifies to a reversible process underway since the end of the Cold War. This process has been marked by the third wave of democratisation of autocratic regimes, as labelled by the theorist Samuel P. Huntington while describing the democratic transition of some 30 autocratic political orders at the very end of the 20th century. Huntington (1993) defined these changes as a group of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period and that significantly outnumber transitions in opposite directions during that period. This third wave most fundamentally transformed in political terms the former communist regimes in Central, Eastern and South-east Europe. While most of these countries have consolidated their democracy in the past three decades, in some former autocratic orders the reverse process of autocratic transition started to develop (at a faster or slower rate) after the beginning of the democratic transition, i.e., according to Huntington’s taxonomy, the third reversal, which implies the return of democratic regimes to autocratic models of government and their repressive maintenance. This most systematically commenced in the territory of the former Soviet Union⁸. For example, democracy was a mere ‘episode’ in both Belarus and Azerbaijan, while since 2000 and former Prime Minister Vladimir Putin’s first victory, Russia, the biggest former Soviet republic has

⁸ Especially in its Central Asian part, where a new autocratic government was established after the first and most often the only democratic multi-party election.

gradually, institutionally and practically transformed from an unfinished democratic transition to a hybrid regime, which is growing into an open autocracy without the *de facto* limitation of the political power held by the head of state.

The original transatlanticism as a model of cooperative security (Posen and Ross, 1997: 3), born in the context of impeding the penetration of communist ideology around Europe and the world at the start of the Cold War, was politically aimed at preventing Huntington's reversal to autocratic regimes becoming stronger in post-war Europe. Although the USA and the EU share democratic values, both partners, just like individual countries within the European Union, will always have and pursue certain national foreign policy interests. In this case, the protection of democracy as a link between the political systems of the USA and European countries becomes the primary political goal with its internal and external components, while secondary foreign policy goals that depend on specific interests should be aligned with the primary one. This is shown by the current war in Ukraine in which the EU has had to revise its energy policy largely based on the supply of energy from Russia according to the protection of the principles of democracy and peace on which the Union is based. Simultaneously, the EU in the mandate of the European Commission, whose work began after the 2019 European election, started to implement the mentioned strategic autonomy as the ability of a state to pursue its national interests and adopt its preferred foreign policy regardless of other foreign states (Lippert, von Ondarza and Perthes, 2019: 13). This approach was adopted during the Donald Trump presidency when the USA moved away from the unconditional promotion of transatlanticism in its relations with its European partners.

While European strategic autonomy was not initiated by Trump's foreign policy, it had been considered before. In no way does strategic autonomy call into question transatlantic relations with the USA. It recognises the Union's need to define specific European interests and their pursuit on a range of issues in international political and economic relations, from participation in multilateral agreements to the relationship with China and other countries outside of Europe to their taking part in resolving or preventing conflicts, either in the case these conflicts directly affect Europe or global peace generally. The original transatlantic relations of US-European cooperation were established for the purpose of ensuring peace on the European continent after the Second World War and the retention of Soviet influence in its military-political bloc. Current transatlanticism is once again becoming a doctrine recognising the direct threat to European security as the part of world politics and in the context of the EU's "pooled sovereignty" (Saurugger, 2013: 231). After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, all of

Ukraine's neighbouring EU and NATO member states, as well as some of successors to the USSR, expect a clear American stance on protecting peace and security in Europe. For example, the USA played a key role in managing conflicts in former Yugoslavia both diplomatically and as the strongest military member of NATO and systematically called for NATO's expansion into South-east Europe as part of promoting Euro-Atlantic integration (Rebegea, Michnik and Vejvoda, 2021: 5). In the first 2 years of Biden's presidency, transatlantic relations have been marked by the issue of preventing the outbreak or spread of war in Europe for the first time since the culmination of the détente of the two opposing Cold War blocs. The war in Ukraine led has to the greatest homogenisation of the political West not only following the end of the Cold War, but also if viewed from a further historical perspective.

Today's political West has absorbed a large part of the former European political East and Biden "will stand up for these countries' sovereignty and defence" (Åslund, 2021: 52). In this sense, Europe is still a divided continent, except that the new border of political division has been moved to the east, and its stabilisation will depend on the course and outcome of the war in Ukraine. Along with this political division, Europe has for some time been divided into EU members which have sufficient capacity to deal with occasional financial and economic crises and other members that rely mostly on the help of wealthier EU members, thereby creating an informal dualism of Europe of 'first and second speeds'. In addition, a kind of 'Third Europe' has been established on the EU's periphery as a group of countries holding candidate and potential candidate status in terms of their Union membership. All of these countries are recognised as the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo, the latter only recognised only by some members of the international community) and as a critical case for European security (Petersen, 2011: 5) that essentially needs Europeanisation⁹ (Caratan, 2009: 171–172). These countries, together with Turkey, form the south-eastern bridge to the continent towards the zones of open armed conflict in the Middle East and Middle Asia, as especially evident during the 2015/16 European migrant crisis. The escalation of the war in Ukraine has also led to 'reatlantisation', to a new 'transatlantisation', because readiness for NATO membership has been confirmed by particular countries that were neutral during the Cold War and thereafter (Finland and Sweden). In this way, the overlapping of memberships in the EU and NATO would be further strengthened since, up until Russia's war in Ukraine, only Finland, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Cyprus, and

⁹ The term "Europeanisation has different meanings, yet it primarily refers to the concept of "the national adaption to the EU level, implying changes in national policy making mechanisms, policies, values and identity" (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 142).

Malta had been members of the EU outside NATO. At the start of the third decade of the 21st century, the transatlantic partners have become more oriented than at any other point in the last half a century to implementing their own strategy or reacting to external shocks.

State of the transatlantic partnership after the ‘special operation’ began in Ukraine

Putin’s invasion “has suspended the 2022 version of America’s endless argument over its purpose in the world” (Kagan, 2022: 10). In trying to explain Russia’s decision to invade Ukraine, one must consider the “historical and geopolitical context in which the United States has played and still plays the principal role in the world affairs, as well as the position of Russian President Vladimir Putin who has cemented his rule at home and doggedly advanced Russian interests abroad” (Woods, 2022: 24).

There are those who want to diminish the USA’s power by claiming that “the best way for the United States to cope with the latest events is to retrench its position in the world and serve as a distant offshore balancer” (Kagan, 2022: 10). Yet, by so doing, the USA would be denying its role and true nature of a global power, which envisages attraction to those “seeking security, prosperity, freedom and autonomy” (ibid: 12). Although the USA did not aspire to be a dominant power in relation to Eastern Europe, “newly liberated countries, including Ukraine, turned to the United States and its European allies because they believed that joining the transatlantic community is the key to independence and democracy” (ibid.). Namely, after the end of the Cold War countries from Central and Eastern Europe found NATO as the alliance that would position them in the West and provide them not only with security guarantees, but democratic transition and economic prosperity as well. At the outset of the process, US President Bill Clinton did not show great enthusiasm, which led to Germany take over the process of creating responding mechanisms for the aspiring states. One of these attempts led to the creation of the Partnership for Peace, even though it was perceived “as a forever waiting room for NATO membership and as a gigantic talk shop” by some critics. Soon the USA embraced the NATO enlargement process, taking the leading role in drafting the Study of NATO Enlargement in 1995. Still, after the Cold War the USA was not “aggressively expanding its influence in Europe, the end of the Soviet Union enhanced its and its democratic allies’ attractive pull” (ibid: 14). If the USA had recognised its power position and interest in preserving the liberal world order, according to Kagan (2022: 19) “this would have meant doing everything possible to integrate Russia into the liberal order politically and economically” and deterring it from reordering its backyard by using military force. Others

claimed that “the United States and its allies had not collectively resisted Russian expansion after the end of the Cold War which would have made Putin constantly unable to invade neighbouring countries” (ibid.).

Starting with President Clinton, the relationship with Russia has become more dynamic. Unlike previous presidents who perceived the relations between the two countries through the prose of the two opposing powers, Clinton shaped politics towards Russia by acknowledging its turbulent domestic politics. In 1995, for example, Russia’s importance for the construction of the European security architecture was explicitly recognised in the Study on NATO Enlargement, which stated that NATO–Russia relations should reflect the importance of Russia in European security and be based on reciprocity, mutual trust and respect, without sudden decisions by either side. Putin has for years enjoyed a reputation among numerous Western politicians as the one who has the ability to command. Moreover, the power he has enjoyed may have led him to believe he is “too strong to be constrained by any rules” and “stronger than he actually is”. While Putin underestimated how “his invasion of Ukraine would rankle the world”, the USA and its allies “would be mistaken to assume that other countries will simply fall in line behind them” (Woods, 2022: 31). For example, many developing countries were wary of joining the ‘coalition of the willing’, as shown by 24 countries voting against and 58 abstaining from the vote to expel Russia from the UN Human Rights Council (ibid.).

For three decades, “U.S. foreign policy has turned on inertia and called it strategy” (Wertheim, 2022). Following the end of the Cold War, the absence of a major threat did not change the USA’s international role. However, a growing chorus of Americans was pushing for isolationism, seeing it as a natural appeal for their country. Isolationists claim they “believe in defending vital national interests beyond the physical security of the United States” (Krauthammer, 1990: 28). Krauthammer sees isolationism as an expression of the “American desire to return to tend its vineyards” (ibid.). Yet, realism, which is another foreign policy school, claims American foreign policy “should be guided solely on narrow national interests” (ibid.). Just as President Biden was been trying to prioritise security in Asia, like it was embedded during the mandates of both Obama and Trump, while turning to the USA’s recovery from the pandemic and its consequences, the crisis in Ukraine has “led to raising voices for building up US military presence in Europe to contain the assertive Russia” (Wartheim, 2022).

Advocates of the USA’s unipolar role are now calling for a ‘grand-strategic’ shift. Several options in this regard are promoted by a range of leading foreign-policy thinkers seen in the framework of mutual autonomy, strategic autonomy, strategic partnership or situational partnership. Stephen Walt (2022) believes that thinks “Europe can handle a future Russian threat on its

own”, calling for a new division of labour between the USA and its European allies – the former should focus on Asia, while the latter should gradually take more responsibility for defending themselves. Shannon O’Neil (2022) asserts that, should the USA prevail in the Ukraine crisis, that would “fundamentally reframe the grand strategy, nature of alliances and the great-power hierarchy” (ibid.), ending with the USA being able to reassert its reasserting its dominance. According to Toshihiro Nakayama (2022), the USA cannot afford to commit itself fully to the two spheres of Europe and Asia the long term. However, “the geopolitical reality demands that Washington commit to both” (ibid.). Raja Mohan (2022) predicts that the “shared security burdens and empowered alliances with the United States in Asia and Europe will reinforce the enduring goal of the U.S. grand strategy, which is to prevent the domination of either region by a single great power”. When the Ukraine crisis started, many supporters of the USA’s primacy in international relations called for an enduring ‘grand-strategic’ shift. Still, although we must address the elephant in the room that U.S. security interests are not at stake in Ukraine, the Biden Administration has increased troop numbers in Europe to levels not seen in decades. Some view the USA’s grand strategy as meaning that the only long-term solution is for Europe to turn a more significant geopolitical actor, one that is more resilient and less reliant on the USA’s military protection (Wertheim, 2022).

In the meantime, Germany, the EU’s leading economic power, has left behind a form of special and unique restraint in foreign and security policy embedded in scepticism of the value of hard power. Yet, Russia’s attack on Ukraine changed everything as the new centre-left government in Berlin had never intended to abandon Merkel’s foreign policy approach of balancing security needs with commercial interests. Halting the certification of Nord Stream 2 and sending lethal weapons to Ukraine are just two of this government’s policy reversals, being quite significant since a recurring theme of German foreign policy was to include Russia by ensuring its economic independence. Even after Putin’s aggressive speech made at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 and Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, Berlin still offered to build Nord Stream 2 in 2015. The change in German foreign policy will especially come at the expense of the country’s import-dependent energy sector. Germany now plans to build two ports for liquefied natural gas and further accelerate the production of renewable energy. Alongside announcing a one-off investment of EUR 100 billion in German military and its intention to make defence spending exceed 2% percent of overall GDP, Germany announced that it would to “turn its military into one of the most capable, powerful and best equipped armed forces on the continent” (David-Wilp and Kleine-Brockhoff, 2022). In a remarkable choice of words, Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged “to defend

every square meter of NATO territory together with their allies” (ibid.) in reference to Biden’s vow to defend every inch of NATO. Within just 1 week, Germany had put the transatlantic partnership with the USA on a new footing. The mentioned decision also allows Germany to repair its relations with the Baltic states and other NATO allies on its eastern flank. This ‘new Germany will wield Europe’s largest defence budget by far, a fact welcomed and encouraged by all its immediate neighbours (ibid). The same goes for France, which confirmed its transatlantic position by re-electing Emmanuel Macron as a president who became a significant promotor of a stronger NATO and is taking a leading position in the European Union. However, dissonant voices can also be heard among allies, particularly while sanctions and energy dependency on Russia are being discussed. These policies may all be located along the mutual autonomy, strategic autonomy, strategic partnership or situational partnership spectrum.

Apart from being a major geopolitical issue, the Russian-Ukrainian war is a geoeconomic turning point with the USA and its allies having promoted several rounds of sanctions on Russia targeting its banking sector, high-tech components, the assets of its wealthy oligarchs, oil sales, foreign investments, trade treaties and much more. Washington has engaged in oil diplomacy with Iran and Venezuela in an attempt to stop oil prices growing. Nevertheless, European countries are much more energy dependent on Russia, with economies having a trade-reliant and export-focused growth strategy in place that is not very convenient amid the prolonged sanctions imposed on Russia. According to Mudler (2022), “one way to absorb this shock is to increase EU-wide renewable energy investment and expanding public control in the energy sector”. The energy dilemma is a fact the European allies have since been dealing with these days, unable to agree on imposing even harsher sanctions in energy domains and thinking of finding the alternative sources of oil and gas distribution. This has led to a redrawing of the dividing lines already found among the EU member states, as tested several times in recent years during the migrant crisis and waves of the pandemic. The existing dividing lines depict the possibility of transatlantic relations ending more on the spectrum of situational partnership, which is strongly influenced by the internal situations within the EU and the USA, respectively.

Conclusion

Today, while the transatlantic community overall finds itself more united than it has been for some time, the question is how long this impact will last. The most visible impact of the war in Ukraine on transatlantic relations has been in the security sphere. NATO has experiencing a revived sense of unity

and urgency based on a clear confirmation of its core mission: the collective territorial defence in Europe. This is seen in many ways like opening its door to the neutral Finland and Sweden, strengthening its eastern flank and reinstating its security guarantees to member states in the neighbourhood of Russia, which has again reinstated its long-term rivalry with the West. Second, the war has made it clear that the USA is central as a security pillar of Europe, which has been questioned by the USA's pivot to Asia strategy and the European debates surrounding strategic autonomy. The reluctance of certain European countries to take on a bigger share of the security burden has gone quiet for now with the war leading to substantial progress being made in resolving the tensions between the two sides in Europe over needing to assume greater share of the security burden for the continent's defence. Third, the war also confirms the decision of most Central and Eastern European countries to put their trust in maintaining defence ties with Washington.

Despite 'reatlantisation' now being very much alive, one should consider the different models of transatlantic relations in current international circumstances. Mutual autonomy envisages the USA and its European allies pursuing their own interests, not cooperating adequately, even on issues of mutual interest. This tendency towards mutual autonomy on the American and European sides was mostly seen during Trump's presidency. In this period, a strategic autonomy model of transatlantic relations was at the top of the European allies' agenda with several states opting for Europe's strategic autonomy while others were pursuing their vital interests in partnership with the USA. On the other end of the spectrum, there is a strategic partnership with both sides strongly involved in international relations and cooperating in building a common agenda. The Biden presidency has renewed the strategic partnership built on respecting international norms and rules and promoting democracy as a form of government. Moreover, the situational partnership model seems also to fit with the circumstances of Russia's war against Ukraine. The USA, although raising its presence in Europe and backing its European partners by helping to open NATO's door to Finland and Sweden's membership, is namely largely driven by its own foreign policy interests. These interests include being present in Asia and balancing the raising dominance of China by using hard and soft power tools. Simultaneously, Washington is investing in Europe developing strategic autonomy by asking its NATO European allies to spend more on defence. These examples show that Biden's transatlantic policy lies between the strategic partnership and the situational partnership model.

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