



# **Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the (Soft) Transactional Approach to NATO**

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## Summary

→ National interests of the United States and European NATO members are diverging. The transatlantic relationship can no longer be sustained by visions of mutual friendship or shared values, as those are undermined by geopolitical as well as generational shifts. A transactional turn in the transatlantic relationship is inevitable.

→ The new normal within NATO must be a recognition that the global interests of the United States will transform (they will focus on China), limit (less capability and willingness to engage with peripheral matters) and shift to Asia. Problems of European NATO members will have to compete for American attention with competition from China and other issues. As a result, Europe can no longer take American support in the region for granted.

→ Europeans will have to choose whether to perform security and defence tasks in the European area and its neighborhood by themselves or whether they will be willing to find suitable reciprocal service to sustain American willingness to prosecute them on their behalf.

## Recommendations

→ NATO members need to steer the transactional turn in a productive direction and allow for transformation of NATO instead of attempts to salvage the status quo which is increasingly dissatisfying to both sides of the Atlantic.

→ A destination for allies to steer NATO to could be soft-transactionalism, which would make NATO a more pragmatic alliance with clear expectations that generate more predictability and limit the risk of fatal transatlantic fracture.

→ European members of NATO should focus on maintaining the U.S. role in conventional deterrence on the eastern flank in exchange for alignment with the United States on China. At the same time, they need to build independent capability to maintain stability in their neighbourhood.



## Introduction

NATO and the health of the transatlantic relationship remain as hotly debated as ever thanks to president Trump's many remarks focusing predominantly on the perceived financial costs it incurs for the United States. Both the burden-sharing debate and the American view that European allies' willing dependence on Washington's security guarantee limits their incentive to invest in defense are as old as the alliance.<sup>1</sup> While Trump's latest populist offensive is generally in line with American security burden-sharing policy, his remarks treating relations with allies as an economic venture are seen in Europe as counter-productive, ill-advised and as destroying the trust, respect, and goodwill upon which the transatlantic alliance rests.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the United States under Trump's presidency is increasingly asking European allies for closer alignment to its foreign policy agenda, especially vis-à-vis China. This might push the limits of the alliance's political unity, which is necessary for its inner processes to continue to work, especially given the unpopularity of some of Trump's policies in Europe. With increasing divergence of interests and threat perceptions regarding many global issues (including those of China, Russia, Iran and Israel to name but a few), greater transatlantic political unity might prove to be a challenging goal. Today, allies' agreement on disagreement manifests through the "360 degree approach," a slogan that thinly masks discord about whether the most important threats are to the east, south, or in some other direction.<sup>3</sup>

It is our view that the debate about the future of NATO and specifically transatlantic relations, embodied by NATO, seems to be in need of novel ideas, as the existing ones appear to be sufficient vehicles neither for overcoming contemporary nor future challenges. We propose for consideration what we call a soft-transactionalist approach to NATO. This approach is based upon the clear and open formulation of national interests and the role of NATO in achieving them, enabling a more transparent debate about the relative mutual contributions of members towards reaching common as well as each other's goals. The proposal is intentionally provocative and does not presume a single outcome, as there is, as we argue further later in this piece, a lack of clarity on what various states actually expect from NATO and each other.

It should be reiterated that this is in no way a proposal for the 'soft-abolition' of NATO. We maintain that recent disagreements notwithstanding, the United States and Europe need each other today more than at any time since the end of the Cold War. European strategic autonomy seems to be as distant as ever and the U.S. will need their alliances to counter rising and assertive (if not aggressive) China. But that is, in our view, the greatest argument for searching for how to make NATO and transatlantic relations work better in current and future conditions.

The policy paper is divided into four parts, this introduction being the first. The second part of the paper goes into more depth on the current ailments of transatlantic relations and NATO more broadly, discussing why historically significant understandings of relations within NATO are losing their power and

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<sup>1</sup> Almost nobody today remembers that in the 1950's one of NATO's founding fathers, NATO's SACEUR and later president Eisenhower, wanted to withdraw all US troops from Europe - an extreme and provocative position by today's standards. See **Seth Johnson**, "From 'Obsolete' to 'Brain Dead': Crises in the Transatlantic Alliance and the Future of European Defence", 12. february, 2020, [https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#\\_ftn4](https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#_ftn4).

<sup>2</sup> The president's impulsive decision to remove 12 thousand US troops from Germany highlights how strained is the critical transatlantic link between Washington and Berlin as the latest example.

<sup>3</sup> **Seth Johnson**, "From 'Obsolete' to 'Brain Dead': Crises in the Transatlantic Alliance and the Future of European Defence", 12. february, 2020, [https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#\\_ftn4](https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#_ftn4).



consequently their ability to hold the alliance together. The second part concludes with an introduction of the concept of soft-transactionalism. The third part follows the logic of the proposed concept by reviewing current expectations from and interests in NATO on both sides of the Atlantic. The last part then builds on this by outlining how a new balancing deal within NATO could look, and drawing some tentative recommendations.

## NATO's crisis

The debate about the future of NATO, postponed for a time while Trump occupies the White House, is slowly starting to kick off in the form of the Reflection process.<sup>4</sup> While there might be some hope for this process, the fact is that there is a need for new thinking regarding transatlantic relations, if NATO is to have a bright future on a par with its past.

Trump's transactionalist attacks on NATO allies were so alarming not because they would articulate some previously unknown American concerns over burden-sharing. The attacks were shocking because they directly attacked two narratives surrounding more mundane horsetrading going behind the curtain. While risking gross oversimplification, the two (mutually compatible) narratives can be identified as the idealist narrative and the narrative of friendship.

The **idealist narrative** is built around the image of unity of values across the Atlantic, marrying at the same time those values to national interests stemming from them. If Europe and the U.S. share values, they also share an interest in protecting and promoting them. The U.S. should lead this values based alliance as the 'the leader of the free world' and European partners should follow the lead. Any disagreements are then to be seen as petty squabbling in comparison with overarching unity in values.

The **friendship narrative** is then less focused on values and more on the common history. It views transatlantic relations as friendship of states and friendship of peoples, tested by common history, culminating with the American interventions in both World Wars, protection of western Europe during the Cold War and finally by European allies answering the call of the U.S. in response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Mutual relations are therefore less about immediate political and security interests and more about honouring this long standing friendship and maintaining trust built over the years.

Trump's rhetoric on NATO went directly against both of these narratives. The increasing anxiety with which those attacks are being met (be the originator Donald Trump, Emmanuel Macron or anyone else) is a worrying sign about the degree to which these narratives are seen, on the one hand, as bedrocks of NATO's existence and effectiveness, and as increasingly fragile on the other. In order to successfully navigate the transatlantic relationship in the future, we believe it might be time to look beyond those two narratives for future policy making. While both narratives still hold a lot of truth and are undeniably useful on a rhetorical level, they might also be getting dangerously detached from the current reality of transatlantic relations.

The validity of both narratives is questionable on many grounds. Liberal backsliding on both sides of the Atlantic makes the value-based narrative ever harder to maintain without the risk of appearing hypocritical to other international actors. The backsliding still cannot be compared with outright authoritarian states being members of NATO, as during the Cold War. But at the same time, there is no clear common threat that would play a unifying role in place of a common democratic identity as it did during the Cold War. Intensifying great power competition, irrespective of its emerging ideological dimension, is pushing the United states to

<sup>4</sup> NATO, Secretary General appoints group as part of NATO reflection process, 31. March 2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_174756.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174756.htm).



focus on its immediate national interests at the expense of more long-term maintenance of friendships or values based policies. Plummeting American soft-power under the Trump presidency makes it hard if not impossible to align European states and their publics on significant international issues.

The liberal world order, which was to a large degree built after World War II by and for the benefit of the United States, comes under attack both within the U.S and by the U.S administration, calling into question the long established shared interest of America and Europe to maintain this order. The shared history of friendship is becoming a distant memory, while many recent cases of mutual help are interpreted differently by different actors.<sup>5</sup> The defence of NATO's eastern flank against Russia will less and less be viewed as a core US interest and more as a "service" to European countries. Many of those are not especially enthusiastic about defending the Eastern allies anyway so they don't necessarily see this as a reason to feel particularly "indebted".<sup>6</sup> Finally, other more fundamental shared interests, which allowed both above mentioned narratives to flourish, are no longer certain. As the locus of international politics shifts to Asia, not only are Europe and the United States not standing together against the common main threat (Soviet Union) but they are each facing distinct and significant threats, unlike in much of the post-Cold War era. We therefore view those narratives as of dubious validity today and with bleak prospects for the future. Beyond being unhelpful, they may be seen as obstacles for openly recognizing and resolving the central issues plaguing NATO today (and allowing NATO to adapt and reinvent itself like it did during and after the Cold War).<sup>7</sup> Simple recognition of the facts, like that the European allies' dependence on the U.S. security guarantee limits their incentive to invest in defense capabilities, or that the USA is acting increasingly unilaterally (and at times erratically) and that the interests are increasingly divergent, would go against the core of both narratives. The result is that these issues are often relegated to closed doors meetings with a glacial speed of progress.

There is palpable fear of change among European NATO members and a resulting drive to salvage and maintain the status quo which is increasingly dissatisfying to both sides of the Atlantic. The fear and anxiety are understandable, as there is a lingering question: what would replace the two narratives? This policy paper suggests embracing what we call soft-transactionalism. The term itself is an admittedly blatant attempt to distance it from Trump's transactionalism, focused solely on balance in the monetary dimension, bean counting and 'America getting ripped off'.<sup>8</sup> The gist of soft-transactionalism is the embrace of existing behind the

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<sup>5</sup> The U.S. were less than overjoyed about the degree of participation many European partners demonstrated in the Middle East whereas Europe increasingly questions those interventions and sees the U.S. as distinctly ungrateful. See e.g. Korski, Daniel. Afghanistan: Europe's Forgotten War. European Council on Foreign Relations, 2008.

[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/91746/Afghanistan\\_0108.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/91746/Afghanistan_0108.pdf); US complain over lacking European action in Libya see e.g. Humeyra Pamuk, U.S. senior diplomat complains Europe not doing enough in Libya, 16. July 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-usa-idUSKCN24H2V2>; or more recent disagreements over Lebanon and Iran see e.g. Emily Judd, US Secretary Pompeo criticizes France for policy on Iran, Hezbollah, 15. september 2020,

<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/09/15/US-Secretary-Pompeo-criticizes-France-for-policy-on-Iran-Hezbollah>; or disagreement over the pullout of US troops from northeastern Syria without notice, see Steven Erlanger, Trump's Syria and Ukraine Moves Further Alienate America's Already Wary Allies, 24 october, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/world/europe/trump-syria-ukraine-europe.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Bridget Kendall, Poll finds Nato's Europeans wary of Russia confrontation, BBC, 15 June 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33072093>.

<sup>7</sup> Seth Johnson, "From "Obsolete" to "Brain Dead": Crises in the Transatlantic Alliance and the Future of European Defence", 12. february, 2020, [https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#\\_ftn7](https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#_ftn7).

<sup>8</sup> Trump criticized alliances with NATO and South Korea: "It's a horrible bargain ... they make so much money. Costs us \$10 billion. We're suckers." See Leo Shane III. New book accuses Trump of blasting top military generals as 'pussies' for defending foreign alliances, 9. september, 2020,



scenes negotiation over diverging and competing national interests as an important and even crucial element of the alliance.

Negotiation over conflicting interests was always part of NATO and it is to a large degree already the operating principle in implicit, practical terms.<sup>9</sup> Viewing the alliance as based upon “exchange” is anathema to both the idealist and the friendship understanding of the transatlantic relationship but it may also prove to be a functional principle for reinventing NATO for a new era. A soft-transactionalist NATO would be a more pragmatic alliance - a mutually beneficial enterprise where there are clear expectations and agreement that would generate more predictability, limit the risk of a fatal transatlantic fracture and require less negotiating and strategic “costs”.

## Reviewing the balance of interests

The previous chapter outlined our belief in the need to review the interests of members in the existence of both NATO and the transatlantic bond between Europe and the United States. This chapter constitutes an attempt at a preliminary review of what those interests likely are at the moment and a suggestion of what they might be in the future. The chapter starts with the United States as the linchpin of the Alliance before moving in the latter half to the European side of things.

For the United States, NATO has served as a vehicle to ensure that European resources will not boost the power of another great power. While this might seem like an anachronistic realist reading of the situation and leftover from the Cold War, it is far from being so. Despite recently reaffirmed geopolitical ambitions of the European Union, Europe is far from being a contestant in the returning great power competition. And while it might decide on whether to take an active part, it is already a battleground in this competition. The United States therefore has preeminent interest in keeping China’s influence out of Europe as much as possible. Whether European states will consider this to be in their own interest or will expect reciprocal service from the U.S. is yet to be seen.

The often discussed benefit of the NATO alliance for the United States, especially in the context of many U.S. military operations in the Middle East, is the ease of access and basing in the European part of the globe. Maintaining it is certainly in the U.S. interest as it enables quicker air, sea, and land access to other locations of strategic importance and it would likely be much more complicated to secure without the existing overarching NATO framework and only on a bilateral basis with specific countries.

The United States also expects allies to help with local threats and problems, which might infringe upon U.S. interests. NATO operations in Afghanistan or Iraq certainly push the boundaries of what ‘local’ means, but stability operations in the Mediterranean certainly fit the bill, as well as in the Balkans, the Arctic or on the Eastern flank against Russia. It is indeed a sore point of transatlantic relations, both how much capability Europeans possess and to what degree they are willing to use it. While support for transatlantic relations and NATO remains ironclad among

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<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/09/09/new-book-accuses-trump-of-blasting-top-military-generals-as-pussies-for-defending-foreign-alliances/>.

<sup>9</sup> Burden sharing has bedeviled the alliance since its earliest efforts to establish conventional force goals at its Lisbon summit in 1952. See Seth Johnson, “From “Obsolete” to “Brain Dead”: Crises in the Transatlantic Alliance and the Future of European Defence”, 12. february, 2020, [https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#\\_ftn7](https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/obsolete-brain-dead-crises-transatlantic-alliance-and-future-european-defence#_ftn7).



Americans,<sup>10</sup> trends among young people<sup>11</sup> and republican voters<sup>12</sup> point to some possible sustainability problems. Moreover, an overwhelming 80 % of Americans want to see more local responsibility taken over by the U.S. allies.<sup>13</sup> But at the end of the day, there is little doubt that maintaining NATO as an overarching alliance is immensely useful for such common operations. It ensures interoperability<sup>14</sup> in such operations as well as a platform for the creation of coalitions and collective action.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the ability to bring allies on board with various foreign-policy and especially military operations significantly boosts the global legitimacy of U.S. actions.<sup>16</sup> Yet it has to be said, that while this benefit does not depend on the ability of allies to make a substantial contribution, it is contingent on the willingness of NATO allies to participate.

Other lesser interests obviously exist, including the American interest in keeping a major position in the European defense industry market.<sup>17</sup> But overall, the U.S. interest in being a member of NATO is also contingent on the broader question of American ambitions in world politics. As long as the expansive task of building and maintaining the liberal world order was seen as a crucial U.S. interest, it was relatively easy for its European allies to enlist U.S. participation in solving local problems and positions on how the problems should be solved were relatively close, as they were guided by similar general aims. But the role of the proverbial global policeman is becoming ever harder, as the relative dominance of the U.S. weakens, consent of the 'policed' states slowly disappears and partisan and demographic divides on the American role in the world grow. As will be argued further in the concluding part of this paper, Europe will have to work harder to provide the United States with adequate reciprocity for its continued support of European stability and security.

On the European side of the Atlantic, it is much harder to formulate a single set of interests as the individual national preferences are rarely the same. The most traditional task of NATO, meaning traditional collective defense against other states, is today seen as most acute by eastern members of the alliance. In the east, Poland, the Baltic states and Romania want the US to further strengthen its commitment along the Eastern flank, seeing U.S. security guarantees as particularly important given the overwhelming U.S. military power as well as a perceived willingness to deploy it. Feeling threatened by Russia, those countries profess little faith in the independent ability of European Allies to protect them without the participation of the U.S.<sup>18</sup>

To the south, Italy, Spain and Greece want the US to do more to project stability along its southern neighbourhood, including in the Mediterranean sea, the Middle East and Northern Africa, not least because of the direct implication of

<sup>10</sup> V. Lance Tarrance, Public Opinion and U.S. Engagement With the World, Gallup, 11. April, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/248588/public-opinion-engagement-world.aspx>.

<sup>11</sup> Who view international and military engagement less favourably, see Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Who favour a more unilateral U.S. approach, and see burden-sharing as a top priority, see Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "In a 2017 poll, when asked "Do you favour or oppose the idea of allies taking over some of these [defence] responsibilities so that the US can reduce its presence abroad", both 83% of Democrats and Republicans agreed. Christopher Kojm, The basis for strong US-European relations endures: Continuity in institutions and interests, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 12. February 2019, <https://www.fii.fi/en/publication/the-basis-for-strong-us-european-relations-endures?read>.

<sup>14</sup> Many national deployment caveats and other embarrassments notwithstanding.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Belkin, Assessing NATO's value, Congressional Research Service, 28. March 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45652.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Mark Webber, Ellen Hallams and Martin A. Smith. Repairing NATO's motors. In: International Affairs, 90: 4 (2014), p. 783.

<sup>17</sup> Arms exports to Europe accounted for 13 percent of US arms exports in 2015–19, an increase of 45 percent in 2010–14. Yet The USA accounted for 41 per cent of the region's arms imports in 2015–19, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/fs\\_2003\\_at\\_2019.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/fs_2003_at_2019.pdf), p. 3, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Piotr Buras & Josef Janning, Divided at the Center: Germany, Poland and the Troubles of the Trump Era. December 2018, p. 8 [https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/divided\\_at\\_the\\_centre\\_germany\\_poland\\_and\\_the\\_troubles\\_of\\_the\\_trump\\_era.pdf](https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/divided_at_the_centre_germany_poland_and_the_troubles_of_the_trump_era.pdf).



instability in these regions, manifesting among other things through migration flows. A specific group of northern alliance members, namely Norway and Denmark, would like to see more action to secure the Arctic frontier and halt climate change.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, two countries which might be considered to be special cases in their own right are Turkey and France. Turkey seems to be on a quest to become a strong regional power with independent policy, but it was quick to expect NATO support when it got into conflict with Russia over Syria. France, also often seen as a traditional troublemaker, stresses the role of NATO in counterterrorism efforts in the Middle East and North Africa. On a more cynical note, one might also assume that many western European states are not keen to take over full responsibility of defending the eastern flank of the alliance (which they might have to do because of shared membership in the EU) and see NATO as an opportunity to limit their defence spending and commitments.

Europe is generally interested in the United States maintaining global order and stability, especially in its vicinity, as it is an important beneficiary of this order and stability. But it also expects the United States to do it in cooperation or after consultation with its allies and with the recognition of their interests. This hope of maintaining an influence on U.S. policies can be safely listed among important European interests traditionally exercised through NATO.<sup>20</sup> NATO also seems to serve many European states as a primary vehicle for maintaining bilateral relations with the United States or increasing their global stature.

Overall, the European NATO members are difficult to describe collectively. Some see an existential need for U.S. guarantees and no alternative to them and can be consequently inclined to follow U.S. leadership or guidance on other issues and be keen to demonstrate themselves as good allies. Others see the United States as an important crisis-manager to provide global and local stability. But they often hold to the expectation that this effort is in the U.S. interest just as much as in theirs, even though intervention in Libya might be considered a breaking point in that regard.

## How to balance the balance sheet?

In the first part of this paper, we listed numerous signs of ongoing instability in the transatlantic relationship and NATO. The second part of the paper put much of the blame for this sorry state on the slow death of two major narratives justifying transatlantic solidarity embodied by NATO. We further argued that this slow death of the two narratives of friendship and common values is strongly determined by the shifting geopolitical landscape as well as generational changes on both sides of the Atlantic<sup>21</sup>. As an alternative to the two discussed reasonings on solidarity within NATO, we took a cue from president Trump, in that we decided to take a closer look at what we call soft-transactionalism, by which we mean embracing the diversity of interests within NATO and states formulating more explicitly and publicly both their interests in being a member of NATO and their willingness to contribute to the interests of others. In the preceding chapter, we reviewed what are or might be the interests of current NATO members. Now at the conclusion of this paper, some implications and recommendations are to be drawn and offered.

While much of the paper treated soft-transactionalism as an alternative approach to narratives of a friendship and values based alliance, it should be recognized that there

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<sup>19</sup> Sara Bjerg Moller, It will take more than a Biden victory to solve NATO's strategic malaise, War on the Rocks, 25. September 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/09/it-will-take-more-than-a-biden-victory-to-solve-natos-strategic-malaise/>.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Stephen M. Walt. Taming the American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy. 2005. p. 147-149.

<sup>21</sup> As the generation with memory of cooperation during the Cold War and the closer relationship of World War II cooperation is disappearing. On US side, see for example: Thorsten Benner, Europe and NATO: Time for Plan B, December 2019,

<https://www.gppi.net/2019/12/10/europe-and-nato-time-for-plan-b>.



is another alternative, which is Trump's 'hard' transactionalism. While we see this option as the worst for NATO, we need to acknowledge that a transactionalist turn in NATO is almost inevitable, given the changes in the geopolitical as well as internal political landscapes.

The crucial task for NATO member states, especially European ones, should therefore be to steer the debate away from no longer viable options but also from the hard transactionalist option. This requires the European states to identify areas, in which they can make a contribution to the United States' interest. Moreover, a contribution which will be clearly transactional and which cannot be misinterpreted by the United States as being in the European interest anyway. At the same time, there needs to be a recognition of diverging interests within NATO, especially in the context of some countries expecting much more from Washington than others. The basis of the new normal within NATO must be a recognition that the global interests of the United States will transform (they will focus on China), limit (less capability and willingness to engage with peripheral matters) and shift to Asia. Many things which the Europeans have come to expect from the United States, because it saw them as in its own interest or as helping the Europeans because of friendship, will now need to be paid off in one way or another. The basic choice will become whether the Europeans will decide to do those things mostly by themselves (with American support possibly) or be willing to find suitable reciprocal service to sustain American willingness.

Looking from the perspective of European independent development of military capabilities, it seems possible for Europe to take over the burden of stability operations in its neighborhood, especially given the fact that it was not all too satisfied with the US approach to those issues recently<sup>22</sup>. Where there is and will be continued need for the United States is on the Eastern flank of the Alliance for deterrence of the Russian threat. Our proposal is therefore to focus the transatlantic relationship on the task of territorial defense. While the Eastern European NATO members are obviously most interested in the American role in territorial defense, the other European NATO members should be conscious of the fact that without US involvement they would inevitably have to invest more into defense of the Eastern flank, as it is also the eastern border of the European Union. What Europe can offer is its support of the United States in its confrontation with China. Such support would mean considerable European economic losses in its trade with China. But hypothetical need for investments in defence in the absence of the United States would likely be much greater than the benefits of continued relations with China without respect to American interests. At the same time, it is precisely this economic loss incurred by the Europeans, which makes alignment on the China issue a costly signal to the United States, which can be reasonably expected to be reciprocated by the United States.

The European member states of NATO will inevitably come to know the reality of the famous American saying that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Unanimity of values and value driven interests in NATO are disappearing (if they ever existed), as is the profound sense of transatlantic friendship. But that should not be seen fatalistically as the end of NATO, but rather as the opening of a new NATO chapter, which might be less comfortable for all parties but which can nonetheless deliver substantial benefits to both sides of the Atlantic. The European states will have to pay for their security, but they still have control over what portion of this will be paid in defense spending and possibly blood, and what through political and economic concessions to the United States.

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<sup>22</sup> E.g. killing Soleimani in early 2020: Conrad Duncan. Iran crisis: Pompeo criticises UK and other US allies for 'not being helpful' in response to Soleimani killing. The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/pompeo-soleimani-trump-iran-crisis-war-uk-france-germany-a9270571.html>.



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