

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE CHALLENGES GENERATED BY THE NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION. THE CONTEXT OF THE DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE USA

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Abstract: *Transatlantic relations, their consolidation after the Second World War, have been essential for the stability and security of Europe. However, in recent years, this strategic alliance has experienced significant deterioration, generated by multiple factors, such as political changes in the US, strategic divergences in the face of new global threats and the emergence of European autonomy in the field of security and intelligence. These changes have profoundly impacted the way in which Europe builds its security and intelligence capabilities, but also the nature of collaboration with traditional partners. This essay analyzes the causes and effects of the deterioration of transatlantic relations, providing a complex perspective on its implications for European security, with a focus on the field of intelligence and European strategic responses. The purpose of this article is to analyze how the new American administration has influenced European security, with a focus on relations in the fields of intelligence and defense. It will be demonstrated that, although partnership remains indispensable, the EU is forced to assume greater strategic autonomy and develop its own intelligence mechanisms.*

Keywords: American, administration, Europe, regional, security.

Introduction

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the role of NATO and the US in Europe was reconfigured. NATO's expansion eastward and the integration of new European states into the European Union changed the geopolitical balance (Kramer, 2005:49-69). Although this expansion was seen as a success in promoting democracy and stability, it generated negative reactions from Russia, which perceived these actions as a direct threat.

The US and Europe also had different approaches in several areas of interest: the 2003 intervention in Iraq deeply divided European opinion and the relationship with Washington (Lesser, 2005). These divergences were the first signs of a growing strategic distance.

Since the creation of NATO in 1949, relations between the United States of America (USA) and Europe have been the backbone of Western security. The USA has provided Europe with military guarantees and access to advanced technological capabilities, while Europe has been Washington's main strategic ally in the confrontation with the Soviet Union and, later, the Russian Federation. However, transatlantic relations have experienced significant fluctuations. The Suez Crisis (1956), disagreements over the intervention in Iraq

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(2003) or trade tensions in recent decades have shown that the partnership is often marked by divergences of interests. During the Trump administration (2017–2021), these tensions have reached unprecedented levels: anti-NATO rhetoric, withdrawals from international agreements and the "America First" policy have generated distrust in Europe.

Joe Biden's arrival in the White House was perceived as a "return to normality." However, the new administration did not exactly restore relations to the previous status quo. The strategic reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific, the definition of China as a systemic rival, the war in Ukraine and trade tensions have transformed the nature of the transatlantic partnership.

The North Atlantic Alliance was created in 1949 to counter the Soviet threat, and was a concrete expression of the US strategic commitment to Europe. The concept of "collective defense" enshrined in Article 5 of the Treaty was the foundation of an unprecedented partnership between countries with diverse political cultures and histories.

Through NATO, the US provided Europe with important security guarantees, military technology and logistical support, while Europe provided strategic positions, armed forces and political support. In addition, intelligence cooperation became a vital pillar, with agencies such as the CIA and MI6 collaborating with European services to counter Soviet espionage and international terrorism (Cristopher, 2018:412-430).

1. Transatlantic relations in transition

1.1. *Lessons from the Trump administration*

The Trump administration has brought about a paradigm shift. Harsh criticism of NATO, the conditioning of Article 5 on "proper payment" of financial contributions, and rapprochement with authoritarian leaders have sent shockwaves through Europe (Trump, 2018). In particular, claims that the US might not defend the Baltic states in the event of a Russian attack have undermined confidence in American security guarantees (Kasekamp, 2025). Moreover, unilateral withdrawal from international agreements – such as the Paris Agreement on climate change or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran (JCPOA) – has sent the message that Washington no longer considers multilateralism a necessary tool. This attitude has led Europe to ask fundamental questions about its own capacity to act.

The Trump administration has represented a significant break with the tradition of transatlantic relations. Under the slogan "America First," Trump has questioned the traditional US commitment to NATO and other multilateral bodies (O'Hanlon, 2018). He has demanded that European states increase their defense spending, threatening to reduce American support if they do not.

This rhetoric has created uncertainty and undermined allied unity, as well as Europeans' confidence in the stability of the transatlantic partnership (European Council, 2019). In addition, unilateral withdrawals from global agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, have heightened the perception of an America less willing to collaborate in the long term.

1.2. *The Biden Administration – Between Continuity and Change*

President Biden has repeatedly declared that “America is back.” (Biden, 2021). Re-entering the Paris Agreement, reaffirming our commitment to NATO, and consistent support for Ukraine seem to confirm this promise. However, this is not a complete return to the old status quo. The new administration has identified China as the primary systemic threat (The White House, 2021), meaning that the US strategic priority is the Indo-Pacific. Europe remains a vital but secondary partner. This repositioning raises a crucial question: what happens to European security if the US reallocates its resources to Asia?

1.3. European strategic autonomy

The concept of strategic autonomy emerged in European political discourse after 2016, driven by the EU's "Global Strategy" (EEAS, 2016). France promotes the idea of a "Defense Europe" capable of acting independently. Germany supports the strengthening of European capabilities, but in complementarity with NATO. In contrast, Central and Eastern European states, including Romania and Poland, are skeptical of European initiatives, considering that only the American umbrella can guarantee their security.

The publication of *the Strategic Compass* (2022) (Strategic Center for Security and Defense, 2022:7-15) represented a step forward in articulating a common European vision. However, the document also highlights its limits: without massive investments and political will, strategic autonomy remains more of a concept than a reality.

2. The challenges generated by the new American administration

2.1. The war in Ukraine and the relationship with Russia

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine (February 24, 2022) represented the greatest security shock to Europe since 1945. The US reacted quickly, providing Ukraine with tens of billions of dollars in military and logistical support (Congress.Gov, 2024). The European Union adopted unprecedented economic sanctions and provided significant financial and military assistance.

However, the war has exposed differences: Washington is pushing for greater European involvement, while some member states (Hungary, Slovakia) are taking ambiguous positions. Moreover, for the Biden administration, Ukraine is just one front in a global confrontation with authoritarian regimes, while for the EU it is an existential issue.

The Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and the subsequent invasion of 2022 tested transatlantic solidarity. Although the US took a firm stance, imposing tough sanctions and supporting Ukraine militarily and financially, some European states were more reluctant, concerned about the economic and energy consequences (Heather et al., 2020).

The differences were manifested through variations in the level of support provided and distinct diplomatic approaches, which illustrated Europe's difficulty in building a unitary security and defense policy (EU Institute for Security Studies, 2021).

2.2. Technological competition and economic security

The Biden administration has continued the protectionist policies started by Trump, passing legislation such as *the CHIPS and Science Act* (2022) and *the Inflation Reduction Act* (2022) (Congress.Gov, 2022). These aim to strengthen US semiconductor production and the

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green energy transition. For Europe, the measures create a risk of relocation of investments and loss of competitiveness.

At the same time, the US insists that Europe exclude Chinese companies from critical infrastructure, such as 5G. Although some member states have complied (Denmark, Sweden), others maintain close economic relations with Beijing (Germany).

Tensions between the US and the EU have also been exacerbated in the economic and technological fields. Disputes over the taxation of US tech giants, trade restrictions and conflicts over data protection standards have created a tense atmosphere (European Commission, 2020). In addition, competition in cutting-edge technologies, such as 5G and cybersecurity, has become a national and allied security issue. Europe is seeking to reduce its dependence on US and Chinese technologies, which is further complicating its relationship with the US (Deni, 2022).

2.3. The Indo-Pacific and China's dilemma

The US reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific became evident with the launch of the AUKUS (Australia–UK–US) partnership in 2021 (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2021). Europe was surprised, especially France, which lost an important contract for submarines.

As for China, Washington describes it as its “main systemic rival.” (The White House, 2022). The European Union, however, uses a more nuanced formula: “partner, competitor, and systemic rival.” (European Commission, 2019). The divergence reflects differences in interests: the US perceives China in terms of security, Europe also sees it as a vital market.

2.4. Trade and climate issues

Transatlantic economic relations have been marked by trade conflicts (tariffs on aluminum and steel, the Airbus-Boeing dispute). Even under Biden, tensions persist, especially in the area of green subsidies (Kleimann, 2023). However, climate cooperation represents an area of convergence, with both sides declaring their commitment to reducing emissions and promoting renewable energies.

3. Implications for European intelligence and security

3.1. Transatlantic intelligence cooperation

The US and Europe collaborate intensively on intelligence, particularly through NATO, Europol and bilateral partnerships. American intelligence has been crucial in preventing terrorist attacks and in managing the Ukrainian crisis. However, there are imbalances. The US has advanced technological capabilities (satellites, global intercepts), and Europe is largely dependent on this support. Information exchange is often more unilateral than reciprocal (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021).

Historically, cooperation between European and American intelligence services has been a pillar of transatlantic security. But the Snowden scandal in 2013 exposed controversies over surveillance and personal data protection, undermining trust (Greenwald, 2014).

Also, legislative divergences between the EU and the US on data protection and civil rights make information sharing more difficult (European Data Protection, 2021). These issues have led Europe to seek its own solutions to strengthen intelligence capabilities.

3.2. Limits of European capabilities

The EU has structures such as the EU INTCEN or the Satellite Analysis Centre (SatCen), but these do not have direct access to classified strategic information. Cooperation depends on the availability of Member States, and the lack of a single European intelligence service limits efficiency.

The European Union has invested in new institutions and mechanisms, such as the European Defence Agency and the European Counter-Terrorism Centre, to develop autonomous capabilities in intelligence and threat response (European Defense Agency, 2023).

Although progress is notable, administrative obstacles, national divergences and the lack of a common doctrine limit the full potential of this cooperation.

3.3. Hybrid threats

The new US administration places great importance on combating disinformation, cyberattacks and electoral interference. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that propaganda, cyber operations and information manipulation can be as dangerous as conventional military attacks (NATO StratCom Center of Excellence, 2024).

For the EU, building societal resilience and developing its own response mechanisms becomes imperative. At the same time, partnership with the US remains crucial, as European resources are insufficient.

New threats, such as cyberattacks and disinformation operations orchestrated by hostile state actors, have emphasized the need for rapid and effective collaboration between intelligence services (NATO Cooperative Cyver Defense Center of Excellence, 2022).

Europe is trying to develop critical infrastructure and strengthen the resilience of its societies through strategic partnerships, but also by promoting a common legal framework.

3.4. Normative divergences

A sensitive point is the differences in data protection. The EU, through the GDPR, promotes strict standards, while the US privileges security and the interests of companies. These discrepancies create recurring tensions (see the invalidation of the “Safe Harbor” and “Privacy Shield” agreements).

4. In-depth case studies

4.1. The AUKUS crisis and the Franco-American rift

The announcement by the AUKUS alliance, which excluded France from a major submarine contract with Australia, caused a severe diplomatic crisis between France and the United States, deeply affecting transatlantic relations (Heisbourg, 2021). France perceived this action as a breach of trust and an affront to European strategic autonomy.

This raised questions about how the US manages strategic partnerships and alignment with Europe in the face of China and other global challenges.

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4.2. Ukraine: a test of solidarity and responsiveness

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted both the potential and the limits of transatlantic solidarity. Massive military and economic support from the US and some European states contrasts with the more moderate positions of other countries, where energy dependence and economic considerations influence foreign policy (Atlantic Council, 2023).

This highlighted the difficulties of implementing a unified and coordinated European security policy.

4.3. The energy crisis and Europe's vulnerabilities

The war in Ukraine has exposed Europe's critical dependence on Russian energy resources. The crisis has prompted the European Union to accelerate policies to diversify sources and promote energy autonomy (European Commission, 2022).

This situation highlighted the need for an integrated strategic plan, which includes energy security as part of security and intelligence policy.

In this context, the European Union has promoted the idea of strategic autonomy as a response to the uncertainties generated by fluctuations in American policy. Strategic autonomy involves the development of its own defense, intelligence and crisis response capabilities, as well as a more independent foreign policy (European Commission, 2022).

This is not without controversy, however: some American analysts see European autonomy as a potential fracture in the alliance, fearing that Europe could reduce its commitment to the US (Hamilton, 2019).

Conclusions

The new US administration has reconfigured the transatlantic relationship. On the one hand, Biden has reaffirmed the commitment to NATO and supported Europe in the face of Russian aggression. On the other hand, the strategic repositioning towards the Indo-Pacific and protectionist economic policies are forcing the EU to develop its own capabilities.

For Europe, the dilemma is clear: exclusive dependence on the US is no longer sustainable, but neither is complete autonomy realistic in the short term. The solution lies in a renewed partnership, based on complementarity, but also in a strengthening of European security and intelligence mechanisms.

Recent transformations in transatlantic relations are a turning point for European security. The deterioration of traditional cooperation with the US requires Europe to develop its strategic autonomy and strengthen its own intelligence and security capabilities. Only through flexible adaptation and collaboration can Europe ensure long-term stability and the protection of its fundamental values and interests.

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