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Reevaluating the US-EU Defense Relationship

By Rylee Boyd

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current state of U.S.-European Union (EU) defense relations is unproductive and detrimental to both U.S. and EU interests. The U.S. is spending too much time and money on enhancing European continental security, to little benefit of its own. The EU is unable and unwilling to muster the capabilities and finances to enhance its own security, content to let the U.S. take the lead in providing for European security.

This type of transatlantic relationship is no longer tenable for either party. Serious changes are needed especially as the U.S. looks to pivot away from Europe, and more European countries have expressed interest in strategic autonomy than previously. The U.S. should capitalize on this and reevaluate its defense relationship with the EU.

The U.S. needs to prioritize its own core security interests, which requires it to drawdown its presence and influence in Europe. The U.S. needs to seek a normal state of relations with the EU, where backing and support is possible, but strong autonomy is expected. The U.S. should reevaluate its relations with key members of the EU and explore how it can gain support across the EU for European strategic autonomy and lesser role for the U.S. in this region. The U.S. should reduce its military footprint in Europe, strengthen its diplomatic initiatives, and reevaluate the U.S.-EU defense relationship.

The Sorry State of the Transatlantic Relationship

The transatlantic relationship between the United States and the European Union (EU) has hit a series of roadblocks in recent years. Issues about burden sharing and the proper role of the U.S. in Europe have been present ever since the Cold War. As previous U.S. administrations have turned away from Europe and towards the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. has begun to question exactly what type of role it should play in European defense. Led by France, Europe as well has begun to question its own prospects of strategic autonomy, and how to set a standard for defense when it can no longer reliably have confidence in the U.S. Diplomatic spats about burden sharing, AUKUS, and issues of threat perception about Russia and China have only continued to set this transatlantic alliance back. The transatlantic relationship has historically been defined by shared interests and a firm cultural foundation based on shared ideals of democracy, but this is not enough to keep it solid in the turbulent 21st century. While this transatlantic relationship also faces many issues across domains, issues about security and defense remain supreme.¹ The Biden administration has heralded the return of a strong transatlantic relationship, but back to the past is not where this relationship needs to be.

U.S.-EU Relations Need a Reevaluation, Not a Reset

The U.S. is no stranger to attempts to reset its relations with other major powers in the world, but previous resets have proven unsuccessful and unproductive. The U.S. attempted to reset relations with Russia when Obama came into office in 2009, but this so-called reset achieved little. The Biden administration is one of the first in over 20 years to come into office not hoping to achieve some sort of reset or new era of relations with Russia.² This is wise, resets only force a backlog to the status quo, and do not acknowledge the change in power dynamics from that time to now.³ A reset with the EU would achieve nothing more than previous resets with Russia have achieved either.

Following the end of the Trump administration, the beginning of the Biden administration led to multiple calls for a reset of the transatlantic relationship.⁴

A reset in these relations would just go back to the status quo, which is not working. Firstly, this status quo is characterized by a large U.S. military presence in Europe, with hundreds of thousands of troops in the region.⁵ Secondly, the U.S. is able to influence and provide its own opinions on issues in European security and defense, in order to ensure that the EU is doing what is especially beneficial for U.S. security interests as well. The U.S. has also been the main provider of funding for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European security, even while it continues to stretch itself thinner and thinner as it remains engaged around the world and works on its pivot towards Asia.⁶ As U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan recently stated, Biden is willing to support greater European military and defense capabilities.⁷ This statement is a start, but it must be echoed by action, not just talk. And a reset is not what is needed for the transatlantic relationship, a reevaluation is much more necessary.

U.S. Primacy in Europe Has Defined European Security

The U.S. had good reason to have such a strong presence in Europe in the 20th century following WWI and WWII, and then the Cold War, with the threat of the Soviet Union. Yet after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the U.S. should have begun to slowly remove itself from Europe. There was no reason to not only continue, but expand its presence in Europe, at a time when the major threat of the Soviet Union was no longer, and Russia was more or less just concerned with itself internally. Now the U.S. has become so entrenched in Europe, that almost any discussion of retrenchment from the area is met with immediate skepticism and backlash.

Primacy Has Not Benefitted the U.S. or Europe

The current state of security in Europe does not require an overwhelming U.S. presence and influence in the region. This heavy hand of the U.S. means that Europe has no reason to push for owning its own security, with the exception of certain countries like France who have always pushed for greater European strategic autonomy. This U.S. presence in Europe has also worked to unnecessarily antagonize many

actors, especially Russia. Russia has frequently used the presence of the U.S. in Europe, especially when it comes to states surrounding its border, as an excuse to justify its own adversarial actions.⁸ While the U.S. shouldn't just bow down to something because Russia doesn't like it, it makes no sense to keep such a heavy military presence in Europe when it doesn't even benefit the U.S., and it leads to an angry Russia that is willing to act out in return. Further, the U.S. presence is definitely contested between different states in the EU, with some being much greater proponents of it, while others disprove intensely.⁹ Further, relations within the EU are already difficult enough amongst such a large number of member states, each with different security and defense priorities that the U.S. attempting to insert itself into each issue as well is not beneficial in the slightest.

The U.S. has ultimate primacy in Europe, and therefore has defined how European security operates. Almost any discussion about European security includes the U.S. because it has become so entrenched in the region. Europe needs to be able to define its own security interests, without such U.S. influence affecting this. This will lead to Europe reevaluating its own security interests and threats, and not aligning up so well with U.S. thoughts on this anymore. Lastly, this would lead to a more normal defense relationship between the U.S. and the EU, which each set of actors quite able to manage their own security, and yet still willing to help out each other when necessary.

The U.S. Has Been Unwilling to Push for Greater European Autonomy in Security and Defense

Since the U.S. has so far been mostly unwilling to push for and allow for greater European autonomy in security and defense, Europe has not made many strong moves to actually achieve this. Any discussions also seemed to herald strengthening NATO as the most important organization to strengthen European security. Yet the EU needs to take a stronger role in European security, not NATO, because of U.S. involvement in NATO. After former President Trump took office, discussions on European strategic autonomy began to occur much more frequently along with recurrent harsh remarks from Trump about the uselessness of NATO, issues in burden sharing, and

comments on how the EU cannot handle its own security and defense without U.S. defense.¹⁰ While this was a great opportunity for both the US and the EU to reevaluate their defense relationship, only a small number of steps were taken in response. Now the recent spat over AUKUS, especially concerning France, has once again brought European strategic autonomy into the spotlight.¹¹ Combined with the debacle over the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, now is the perfect opportunity to make for a real push for the U.S. to reevaluate its interests in European security, and for the EU to reconsider how it can strengthen its own security. Since the U.S. is making clear that its current interests lie much beyond Europe, it needs to be willing to push for and, most importantly, accept European strategic autonomy. While issues like duplication between the EU and NATO are a concern, these issues cannot be used as an excuse to prevent a much-needed reevaluation of the EU-US defense relationship. The U.S. has also resisted such efforts because it believes that it will result in military redundancy, especially between the EU and NATO.¹² But as long as NATO and the EU are able to consult frequently and productively over these issues, there is no reason why the EU can't increase its military capabilities and avoid any serious overlap with NATO.

The U.S.-EU Divide on Views of Security and Threat Perception

EU Security Ambitions and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)

The U.S. and the EU have different views on defense and security, along with different threat perceptions. The EU view on security has been focused on a slow increase in capabilities, but this has been plagued by lots of issues, worries about duplication between the EU and NATO, along with much more talk than action. The EU has been working to develop a common security and defense policy (CSDP) since 1999, originally pushed for by the UK and France, but coming up with a common policy among 27 member states has been very difficult.¹³ EU's leaders have agreed that the CSDP is not adequate to address the continent's growing security needs, and so in November 2016 they announced the creation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which aimed to deepen defense cooperation with the

EU. This agreement is so important because it is a legally binding agreement, which has been joined by most (but not all) EU member states.¹⁴ The problem with PESCO is that even after being launched over 3 years ago, most of its projects are still in their infancy and others are behind schedule.¹⁵ The U.S. has also elected to join one of the projects, a military mobility program led by the Dutch.¹⁶ While it is fine for the U.S. to join and support a project here and there, it should not make this a habit. EU strategic autonomy can only be achieved by the EU itself, and too much US support will only serve to hinder these interests at the end of the day. The EU has also begun to undergo a strategic review under its Strategic Compass process, which should provide guidelines for how the EU can go forward towards its goals of European security and defense. This further provides great timing for both the EU and the U.S. to reevaluate how they think about the transatlantic relationship, and how it can be improved for both parties.¹⁷ There are many challenges ahead for EU defense cooperation, from implementation to capability development, to political will.¹⁸ These challenges are not insurmountable, and the U.S. should focus on encouraging the EU to overcome them, not discouraging these challenges.

EU Threat Perceptions and Beyond Military Power

The EU view on security is also quite concerned with the threat that Russia poses, particularly because multiple EU members share a border with Russia, and so obviously it is much more of a land threat than a country like China. The European Defence Fund is another initiative that has been established to strengthen EU security by focusing on financial funding and collaborative research.¹⁹ The way of framing European security goals was also defined quite well by the EU's top military official, General Claudio Graziano, who stated that Europe should work towards an ambition of autonomy, while also recognizing that that is a goal, but cooperation and partnerships and allies on defense and security issues benefits the EU. There should be a strategic compromise between full European strategic autonomy, and no significant moves towards this at all. He also states that while financial funding is important, how this money is spent is much more important than just hitting certain financial goals.²⁰

Proponents of stronger European defense capabilities acknowledge that this can help burden-sharing in the transatlantic relationship, as well as increasing the EU's responsibility for its own security interests.²¹ EU security will also likely want to stay pretty close to NATO, with that as the bedrock of its security.²² Europe has so far been unable to project power within its immediate neighborhood, and this is of course the most important region.²³ Europe also has two main security concerns right now, which differ from those of the U.S. Right now, Russia and problems of the Middle East spilling into Europe seem to be the EU's two main concerns.²⁴

European security also needs to be wielded beyond just military efforts and capabilities. Strengthening Europe's economic prowess is just as important as strengthening its security and defense. Europe can strengthen its continued relevance through its economic strength, especially with countries like China rising exponentially economically. Leading economically is also directly related to security.²⁵ Europe does not also believe in the U.S. as a reliable partner anymore, at least in the way that it did pre-2016.²⁶ Even though the Biden administration is committed to revitalizing the transatlantic relationship, there is no guarantee that the next president will be, or that the U.S. will indefinitely want to support such a strong transatlantic relationship and be such a player in European defense.

The U.S. Needs to Redefine its Core Interests in Europe

The current U.S. stature in Europe is unproductive and unsustainable long term. The U.S. has made clear that its major interests now lie in the Asia-Pacific region, especially as it feels the need to contend with a growing China and all that that brings with it. The U.S. is so entrenched in European security through its military presence, along with its involvement in NATO. Yet the U.S. core interests are not served by this overwhelming presence and influence in Europe. The U.S. needs to redefine its interests to realize that it first and foremost needs to protect its own national security interests, before entangling itself with numerous other allies and partners. While U.S. support for Europe, especially against Russia, is important, it should not play as strong of a factor as it currently

does. Russia does not pose as much a threat to Europe or the U.S. as it is over inflated to, and especially not as much as a strict military threat. Much of Russia's current threats come from its ability to wage grey zone conflict, information operations, stave discontent, and wage cyber-attacks against its adversaries. None of these activities require a large onshore presence in Europe to combat them.

But U.S. security provisions towards the EU in general do not serve core U.S. interests. The threat of Russia in Europe is overstated as it relates to U.S. national security interests. Russia is not as strong as many claim it to be. While it may not be a declining power like some state that it is, it is not as strong militarily as it was during the Cold War. Russia is plagued with a weakening economy, and Europe greatly outspends it defensively.²⁷ Furthermore, while the U.S. is pushed towards other areas and regions of interest and competition, Europe needs to be able to hold its own on its own continent, which at a minimum requires it to manage security along its borders and internally. Therefore, a core interest of the U.S. is for Europe to be able to hold its own defensively, and to pursue strategic autonomy. The U.S. can't force European strategic autonomy, but it can push for it and encourage it, while also drawing down on its own presence in Europe. By pursuing these goals in tandem, Europe should feel encouraged to pursue its own military autonomy. It is true that Europe is important to U.S. national security interests, but it is not so important, nor so unable, that the U.S. needs to take the main role in protecting European security. While the U.S. should make it a priority to keep a close relationship with the EU, this can be achieved without the current substantial U.S. presence on the continent.

Europe Can Defend Itself

Europe can defend itself and is working towards being able to defend itself autonomously. A gradual drawdown in U.S. support for European security combined with an increase in European defense capabilities will overtime equal Europe absolutely being able to defend itself completely autonomously. Many people argue that Europe cannot go it alone at the moment, but this is contested.²⁸ Many of the EU member states have quite capable military forces, and when combined, they can come together to represent a well-equipped and established military force.²⁹ One

argument against Europe being able to defend itself is that it does not have an established procedure for working together militarily, unlike NATO does with its command structure.³⁰ However, critics fail to realize that European states have been working together for over 70 years, including in world wars and conflicts in and outside of the European continent. These countries have habits of cooperation, they have the skills to surmount language barriers, and they have a strong knowledge of each other's military structures and military commanders.³¹ There is no doubt that there are constraints on Europe's ability to act, especially when it comes to the European command structure. For example, in a conflict with Russia they would have the benefit of being a unitary actor with a single command structure. Europe would have to contend with that because it is made up of over two dozen members, each with different military structures. Yet, as already mentioned, Europe would be able to surmount these obstacles because of its historic cooperation.

Europe could also work to establish a more significant military structure through the EU, by increasing cooperation and consultation on this issue, and it could increasingly define its military structure in the coming years. This is an issue that could be resolved, at least to some extent, so that if the EU did have to engage in a conflict it would have some sort of structured military command structure and hierarchy.³²

European Strategic Autonomy Will Not Come Instantaneously

Critics are right that Europe cannot achieve defense autonomy immediately. This will be a long and drawn-out process, but the sooner that Europe fully commits to this process, the better. It is reasonable to believe that this could occur within about a decade, especially if the U.S. slowly withdraws from the continent, which would provide an extra incentive for Europe to strengthen its own internal security and defense structures. This will require Europe to seriously think about how to make the financial contributions that are necessary for strategic autonomy. Already, Europe spends more on its military forces than Russia. Europe also possesses a nuclear deterrent through the nuclear weapons that the UK and France possess. Europe can pose a strong military threat with the right increases in its defense spending and operational ca-

pabilities. The pandemic will lead to a slight increase in defense spending, which will be used to implement force standardization through the European Defence Fund.³³ This force standardization will help to increase the mobility of European forces across the continent. The U.S. may not be able to force Europe to go all in on pursuing strategic autonomy, but it can encourage this and lay out exactly how this will benefit both the EU and the U.S. Europe will be able to defend itself autonomously within 10 years as long as it is committed to increasing its defense capabilities and structure.

Drawdown on the U.S. Military Presence in Europe

The U.S. needs to draw down on its military commitments in Europe. The onslaught of U.S. militarism in Europe makes the security and defense situation on the continent worse, and much more complicated. For starters, the vast numbers of U.S. troops in Europe likely angers Russia.³⁴ While not all of these troops are concentrated in just EU member states, they are enough that it does not make sense for the U.S. to have such a presence there, especially when this also costs a lot in terms of military personnel and also financially in general. The U.S. has an astronomical number of military personnel and bases in Europe. This is so unnecessary. It wastes money, and it takes up military personnel that could be better placed elsewhere. There are not really opportunities for these troops to engage in actual conflict, and while they can be beneficial to training and working in cooperation with European forces, they can still continue to do this at a much smaller number. Europe is home to over 60,000 U.S. troops and hundreds of bases. Germany alone contains about 33,000 troops and over 100 bases.³⁵ Germany is an important partner and a strategic location to base troops in to be sure, but these numbers are way too high. Withdrawing a number of troops from Europe and closing a few bases would seriously save money. Closing the Pulaski Barracks in Kaiserslautern and the Husterhoeh Kaserne in Pirmasens bases is beneficial for U.S. foreign policy because it could allow the U.S. to direct these resources elsewhere. More bases than just two need to be closed, but this would be a strong start to reducing the U.S. military footprint in Europe. These bases should be taken from Germany specifically because it

has the highest number of U.S. military bases in Europe, and because the U.S. needs to pressure Germany specially to push for European strategic autonomy. The U.S. defense budget is already seriously inflated, and even if this money was simply redirected for other challenges like disinformation or cybersecurity, it would be much better spent on that than on keeping up an astronomical military presence in Europe.

The E.U. Is Not a Monolith, so the U.S. Needs to Reevaluate How to Shape Relations Going Forward

While the U.S. needs to approach the entirety of the European Union while thinking about a reevaluation of these defense relations, each country within the EU of course has different priorities, and can offer different ways to work with the U.S. so that it can realize these goals. Overall, the U.S. needs to support European strategic initiatives like PESCO, the EDF, and others, while also working directly with different European leaders to draw further support for European defense initiatives and a lesser role for the U.S.

The U.S. Should Strengthen Relations With France

France is the strongest proponent of European strategic autonomy and has been for decades. Now after the AUKUS debacle, France has been even more upfront about the need for Europe to protect its own interests as the U.S. has been unwilling to. This reevaluation amongst the entire U.S.-EU defense relationship also warrants a look at how U.S.-France relations have operated, and how they can be improved. The Biden administration will need to continue to reach out after AUKUS since France is undoubtedly still holding in some anger over the entire situation and feeling left out about it.³⁶ France will also come to play an even stronger role in EU-U.S. relations as Merkel leaves Germany after 16 years in office, and a new German government that will likely prioritize strong Franco-German relations. Macron's role will be even more important in Europe, especially so if he is able to secure reelection in the upcoming French elections. France is also especially important because it is one of the most military capable powers within the European Union now that Britain has left. It spends 2

percent of its GDP on defense, and it has been willing to project military force to defend its own interests. France is also an important player in the Indo-Pacific region, which clearly is important to the U.S. France has conducted freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea and the Taiwan strait, and it also has 7,000 permanently deployed forces in the French Polynesia region in the South Pacific. Macron is also an ardent supporter of EU defense, and it is one of his main priorities in his presidency. He is planning to convene a major summit on E.U. defense next year, shortly before the French presidential elections.³⁷ U.S.-France relations have been strong, but actions like AUKUS have made them more contentious than in the past. However, AUKUS and Macron's ardent desire to strengthen EU defense offers the perfect partner for the U.S. to reevaluate its relationship with the EU. By enlisting the support of Macron and France, the U.S. can work to support EU strategic autonomy, while also enlisting a partner to help it market its own slow withdrawal from the region as well. France will be one of the most important countries in the EU for the U.S. to achieve its own goals to reevaluate the defense relationship.

The U.S. Must Continue a Strong Relationship With Germany

Germany is another especially important country when it comes to European Defense and U.S.-EU defense relations, and it is of great importance that Washington maintain a strong relationship with Berlin. Germany is one of the United States' closest and strongest allies in Europe, and Germany, like France, plays a strong role in spearheading (or not) European defense. Germany is a key player all over Europe, it is a leader within NATO, the OSCE, the G-7, and the G-20.³⁸ This leadership has been particularly spearheaded under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel, who has lead Germany for the past 16 years. However, these relations became somewhat weaker under the Trump presidency, as he called out Europe for refusing to share a respectable burden of its own defense and called out Merkel specifically as well. The Trump admin did work to deploy 12,000 troops that resided in Germany elsewhere, though this action was then reversed by Biden. In April, Biden then announced that he would increase the U.S. military presence in Germany by providing for 500 additional personnel.³⁹ While Germany has welcomed the presidency of Joe

Biden and what seems to be a return to more status quo transatlantic relations, it surely knows that America can no longer be relied upon as it was in the past. The new government could seriously affect U.S.-German relations, and Germany's role in providing for security and defense in Europe. While all the parties in the running for the recent German elections were in favor of a European army, none of them were willing to openly push for a militarily sovereign Europe.⁴⁰ Yet now as the new government gets settled in their new positions, they have the opportunity to push more for such ideals. Yet Germany also represents the many stark differences in how the U.S. and the EU perceive threats around the world. The EU views China from a different light than the U.S., and while the U.S. has encouraged Europe to make decisions in tandem with the U.S. on China, Europe has gone right ahead with many of its own decisions. Berlin pushed for the EU to complete an investment deal with China without consulting the incoming Biden administration because most of the EU does not share the same views of the U.S. on the threats that Huawei can pose. China is also Germany's largest trading partner.⁴¹ Yet the new German government looks posed to take a more critical stance towards China, as well as Russia.⁴² At least with China then, Germany may look to take a closer view of China that agrees with the U.S. view. Germany clearly does not share the same aspirations for European strategic autonomy that France does, but it definitely sees a stronger Europe as in everyone's best interest. It may be wary of a U.S. withdrawal from Europe, though with consultation hopefully the U.S. can work to allay Germany's concerns. Since Germany is such a strong power economically and militarily, the U.S. should continue emphasizing a strong relationship with Germany.

The U.S. Should Keep an Eye On Central Europe

U.S. relations with much of Central Europe may not be as important diplomatically or militarily as countries like Germany and France, but they are still valuable for the U.S. to keep tabs in. Romania for instance, is a country that has taken a tougher line against China recently, especially in sectors such as telecommunications. This neatly aligns with current U.S. views on telecommunications and Huawei, providing the U.S. another potential partner in the EU in terms of threat perception of China.⁴³ Central

European countries have also been working to increase their own military power, as 5 countries have met the 2% GDP benchmark of defense spending, and other countries in the region are working towards this target.⁴⁴ While views on the U.S. and support for the U.S. in Central Europe vary greatly amongst different countries, many of these countries have the potential to support U.S. goals to push for greater European strategic autonomy. Specifically, some of these countries that are much more wary of U.S. leadership in Europe could be beneficial partners to enlist as the U.S. works to figure out how to implement and market a slow U.S. drawdown in Europe. Countries like Poland have also worked strongly to invest in cyber defense capabilities, of which is a great priority, that should be encouraged across the EU, and especially in other central European countries as well. Poland specifically has pledged to raise their defense investment to 2.5% of GDP by 2030, making it clear that this country at least is committed to European defense from European countries.⁴⁵ Even though these countries have not shown to be that interested in increasing European strategic autonomy, the U.S. should reach out to all of them to encourage this. The U.S. needs to make clear that it will be drawing down on its presence and influence in European security and defense, and that all countries of the EU will need to pull their own weight going forward.

The U.S. Should Emphasize Steady Relations With the Baltic States Without Overreaching

The Baltic states are a strong front against Russia, and increasingly, against China as well. The U.S. would do well to continue their strong relations with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, especially as countries like Lithuania work to take a stronger stance against China. These countries are also especially committed to improving and enhancing their military capabilities. All of them have met their commitments to spend 2% of their GDP on defense, and to make 20% of major equipment purchases as a share of defense spending. Over the past few years, the U.S. has convened and signed a number of security cooperation agreements with the Baltic states. In 2016 the U.S. convened to the U.S.-Baltic Dialogue, which worked to broaden security cooperation and address security gaps. Then in 2017 the U.S. signed Defense Cooperation Agree-

ments with each country, which worked to further enhance security and defense cooperation. In 2019 the U.S. signed the Security Cooperation Roadmaps with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which identified agreed-upon security cooperation priorities for 2019-2024.⁴⁶ These agreements have proved beneficial, but U.S. support for the Baltic states may be better focused on nontraditional military threats like grey zone conflict, disinformation operations, and cybersecurity. The U.S. will not want to get too involved in the Baltic states lest it unnecessarily antagonizes Russia.

Keeping the U.S. Military Out of the Baltics

While certain calls have gone for the U.S. to permanently station troops in the Baltic states, they should not.⁴⁷ Russia would absolutely see this as a threat and may see fit to make a first move in a potential conflict in response.⁴⁸ This call for a permanent U.S. military presence in each of the Baltic states is unnecessary. Specifically, the argument that this would signal a solid American commitment to NATO is weak. The U.S. already has a rock-solid commitment to NATO, it is an active contributor financially and with personnel, and is a frequent participant in NATO missions. Further, the Baltic states have done such a great job improving their own military and defense capabilities, and the U.S. should not stymie this by permanently stationing troops in the Baltics. Involvement and cooperation from afar is working well for all parties, and it should stay that way. Any increase of a U.S. presence in this region would only waste manpower and resources, while also posing a threat to Russia.

Lithuania is one country of the Baltics which the U.S. should be sure to keep up support for diplomatically, as Lithuania fights back against Chinese influence in the region. Lithuania and China have gotten into recent spats over Taiwan, China's actions in Hong Kong, and China's treatment of its Uyghur population. While the U.S. should refrain from defining China as some huge impassable threat, it would benefit the U.S. to keep close relations with countries in the EU that are more willing to support current U.S. ideals and threat perceptions towards China.⁴⁹

Strengthen Diplomacy

While the U.S. should not drastically increase any sort of presence in the EU, it would do well to priori-

tize diplomacy over anything else. Diplomacy should especially be prioritized over military commitments. The Biden administration has worked to revitalize diplomacy after the Trump presidency, but there is still much more that can be done. This emphasis on diplomacy focuses on a shared set of interests, but the US and the EU do not always have shared interests when it comes to security and defense.⁵⁰ Therefore, a greater overall focus on diplomacy will be beneficial especially in conjunction with restraining U.S. militarism in Europe. The U.S. has also been lacking on many of its already available and implemented diplomatic initiatives. With new administrations coming into office, it is extremely slow at appointing ambassadors, especially to critically important countries and organizations.⁵¹ While Europe shouldn't need to get any decisions approved by the U.S., close consultation between leaders is important. The U.S. should prioritize this by making sure all ambassadorships are filled in a timely manner, and by qualified candidates as well. The trend of giving away ambassadorial positions to key funders of presidential campaigns is not beneficial to either the U.S. or Europe, especially when for positions in critically important partners like Germany and France.⁵² Even though people outside of the State Department can bring a valuable perspective to diplomacy, the Biden administration should prioritize filling key ambassador posts by those with significant experience in the State Department and the Foreign Service especially.

Conclusion

The U.S.-EU defense relationship does not serve anyone's interests, and this relationship needs to be reevaluated. Europe can and should work towards being able to defend itself autonomously, and the U.S. would do well to encourage this. The U.S. should redefine its core interests, strategically evaluate its relations with each member of the EU, strengthen diplomacy across the continent, and draw down on its military presence.

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