

Progress Report

The Transatlantic To-Do
List: Biden's Progress
Report

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Summary

Last October, the third annual Transatlantic Policy Forum (TAPF) took place virtually. The Forum not only brought together a wide range of experts but provided inputs and interesting takeaways, including recommendations and a Transatlantic To-Do List, which outlined action points on how the US and the EU should approach the given challenges ranging from increased multilateral collaboration to further development of economic and security engagement.

A little over 6 months into his administration, our EUROPEUM experts Danielle Piatkiewicz and Miroslava Pisklová have updated their Transatlantic To-Do List and their 100 day's progress report to reflect on where Biden's foreign policy stands now over a half a year into the new US administration.



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1. **The next US administration needs to continue to rebuild European trust in America as a reliable strategic partner and rebuild democratic values through strong leadership;**
 - **100 days in - Ongoing:** Early on in his term, Biden and his team have set out to undo Trump's unilateral approach to global relations and mend damaged international ties, especially with the EU. Post-elections, the Union's representatives admitted their relief with its result and expressed anticipation of warming the Transatlantic relations under the new administration. This has been echoed by the US Secretary of State Blinken's recent visit to Brussels to discuss NATO cooperation and Biden's pro-EU remarks at the March European Council meeting. Biden's invitation to join this meeting was a powerful symbol of the EU re-committing to a strong transatlantic alliance, as his predecessor never got such opportunity as a reaction to his foreign policy steps. Both sides can agree that the US-EU relationship is officially back on track. However, as both global and domestic challenges continue to mount, these democratic allies will need to start translating these symbolic and powerful commitments into action.
 - **Half a year in – Still ongoing:** Relations during the first 6 months between the US and the EU began vigorously and were echoed during Biden's first visit to Europe where he met with the EU leaders at the G7 and participated at the EU-US Summit and the NATO Summit. However, Biden's decision to back the controversial Nord Stream 2 has led to some discontent among EU member states, most notably from Central and Eastern Europe, who view the decision as inciting a threat from Russia. In addition, the US's hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan along with its current and future consequences, including security concerns, has rekindled the debate on mutual reliability and has caused some tension between the Transatlantic allies, which could build up in the upcoming weeks and months.

2. **Coordinate on creating joint economic recovery efforts to help rebuild transatlantic relations post-Covid;**
 - **100 days in - Pending:** Given that the pandemic is still raging on a global scale, including in the US and the EU, it seems that any forms of joint post-Covid recovery will be on hold until each region can manage the rise in cases as well as vaccine roll-out. As the EU currently lags behind the US in this regard quite significantly, we can expect such initiative to take months before even starting to take some concrete shape.
 - **Half a year in – Upgraded to ongoing:** One of the main issues discussed at the EU-US summit was to establish stronger coordination towards a renewed Transatlantic partnership. A Joint EU-US COVID Manufacturing and Supply Chain Taskforce which has begun in late August will address ongoing challenges with supply chain visibility and resiliency, including ways to mitigate risk. There was also a call for reinforcing cooperation to reform the World Health Organization (WHO), including advancing sustainable financing, and improving its internal operations, was proposed.

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3. **Further develop existing multilateral systems in place to help bolster economic, trade and security growth vis à vis Three Seas Initiative (3SI) and look to renew outdated ones;**
 - **100 days in - Completed:** There has been good news in this area. Biden has called for the continued development of the region's defense capabilities, so far prioritizing the 3SI to strengthen transatlantic business, energy, and geopolitical ties to the CEE. In March, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a bipartisan resolution in support of the 3SI.
 - **Half a year in – Downgraded to ongoing:** While there has been continued support for the initiative, especially to counter Chinese and Russian advances, the Biden Administration has primarily only given a strong rhetorical support to it, as indicated at the recent 3SI meeting taking place in July, by President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken. However, there hasn't been full commitment on the U.S. capital infusion pledge beyond the original loans provided. There needs to be a capital contribution added to the so-far rhetorical one.

4. **Work on infrastructure in terms of military mobility as well as of cyberspace and technologies;**
 - **100 days in - Ongoing:** Outlined in the NATO 2030 and in the Biden's strategic plan, modernizing military capabilities while also investing in digital infrastructure, including securing 5G networks, cyberspace, information technology and countering emerging threatening digital technologies, remain at the top of both agendas. To shape emerging tech standards and to boost joint security, economic competitiveness, and values, Biden has emphasized the need to partner with democratic friends and allies to amplify our collective competitive advantages.
 - **Half a year in – Updated to completed:** At the recent EU-US summit, the US accepted EU's invitation to join the PESCO project Military Mobility, which was an important step towards closer EU-US partnership in the area of security and defence. In addition, the new NATO 2030 agenda outlined measures by which the alliance aims to tackle these emerging disruptive threats. While there is still a lot of work to do, this is an important indication of closer coordination against these threats.

5. **Rethink the 2% threshold on defense spending and further invest in European joint capacity building, cohesion and consistency;**
 - **100 days in - Ongoing:** So far, there has been no concrete updates from the Biden's team on defense spending requirements from NATO allies. However, Blinken's recommitment towards NATO and plea for a stronger EU support on countering growing threats may require the EU member states to ramp up their military spending in the long term. Such expectation enunciated from the other side of the Atlantic are nothing new and the EU should seek to balance their strategic autonomy ambitions by continuing to invest in their security and defense capabilities. The EU member states need to work on preventing their defense budgets to suffer as a reaction to negative economic implications of the ongoing pandemic, as this would potentially

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irritate the recently re-established relations with the US ally and would generally not be a wise move in times of increasingly deteriorating security environment.

- **Half a year in – Still ongoing:** Still regarded a moving target, the debate over the 2% spending contributions may not have been a contested subject at the series of meetings between Biden, EU and NATO members, but it did not disappear either. While spending has been steadily increasing for some member states, the not yet fully known economic effects of COVID may slow down or redirect this spending habits in the future. There has been a continued push within Europe to pursue strategic autonomy through established programs, such as PESCO and EDF, or the development of the Strategic Compass. Biden should show more support in this area, especially to mitigate burden-sharing issues and bolster European innovation in military and defense cooperation.

6. **Develop a standard policy under which security considerations come before economic ones in order to lessen the danger of global dependencies;**

- **100 days in - Pending:** Unfortunately, economic concerns are still outpacing security concerns evident from the recent EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) and the ongoing Nord Stream 2 project. These make it challenging to adequately address continuous external security threats.
- **Half a year in – Upgraded to ongoing:** We have seen some progress over the last few months on this front with regard to China. Both the US and the EU have come out strong against mounting human rights violations in China, leading the US and its allies to apply sanctions over the treatment of its Muslim Uyghur minority and pro-democracy activities in Hong Kong, which triggered counter sanctions from China. In turn, the European Parliament passed a resolution to freeze ratification of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) as a response to Chinese sanctions on European human rights advocates. However, the aforementioned agreement between Biden and Germany's Chancellor Merkel to proceed with the Nord Stream 2 project raises concerns over a potential dependency on Russian energy, raising a significant security concern for Ukraine, as well as Central and Eastern Europe. Hope remains with the deal made by Berlin to promote Ukraine's transition to clean energy and to provide support for their energy infrastructure security, including building its cyber capacity.

7. **Restrengthen ongoing work on diplomacy and dialogue, as these cannot be stopped because of major disruptions, such as a pandemic or elections;**

- **100 days in - Completed:** Biden and his established foreign policy team have certainly delivered by quickly reengaging on multilateral agreements such as the World Health Organization and recommitting to the Paris Climate Agreement, among other initiatives. The new US administration also instantly reestablished a friendly and prospective/promising dialogue with the

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EU, as well as NATO, trying to show everyone its strong intention to solidify American position as a determined protector of democratic values and a trustworthy and reliable ally.

- **Half a year in – Still completed (for now?):** So far, the US and the EU have resorted to continuing a strong and meaningful dialogue to discuss global threats and look for ways how to address them better together. This has been showcased during the EU-US meeting, NATO Summit and G7. For now, diplomacy is back on track. However, the aforementioned political fallout following the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan has left the world wondering how the coordination between the US and allies on the ground could go so wrong. The jury is still out on whether it was a lack of communication or coordination but it was definitely a litmus test for the Transatlantic relationship.

8. **Work on mitigating the impact of disinformation and propaganda, both foreign and domestic, on our citizens;**

- **100 days in - Ongoing:** Unfortunately, the US election and events of January 6th have only amplified the growing threats that disinformation can have on democracies by eroding existing international rules and promoting alternative models of authoritarian governance. Biden has called for the US to help strengthen democracy around the world and has called upon fellow democracies to help in this endeavor, including the EU. Meanwhile, the EU is getting increasingly troubled by an escalating wave of disinformation incoming from the East and consolidation of some leaders with authoritarian tendencies, which are growing due to issues brought by the pandemic, such as vaccine approval and procurement. The need for a joint transatlantic response to these developments is thus only becoming more urgent.
- **Half a year in – Updated pending:** The recent state-sanctioned cyber-attacks from Russia have only highlighted the need to bolster both the US and EU's cyber domain but also strengthen and create counter measures to the ongoing disinformation campaigns being generated by external actors. This needs to be addressed, especially with Biden's internal frictions within the Senate, he will have to address and mitigate disinformation tactics as the US approaches mid-term elections where he could lose the narrow Democratic control over Congress. While fears remain for disinformation attempts around elections, for example the upcoming German elections in September, there has been a push by NGO's and tech firms to ensure that disinformation tactics are mitigated. We can, however, still see a large amount of disinformation focusing on COVID and vaccination, which is conducted by both internal and external actors. Biden has called upon tech firms to help counter this type of mis or disinformation to save lives, but there still has not been a coordinated approach developed between the US and the EU. The EU should now step up in reaction to these developments and become an initiator of a common transatlantic activity and strategy on fighting disinformation and propaganda, as otherwise, this area may become insufficiently addressed.

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9. **Develop a joint US-EU approach towards Russia and China as security threats; and**
- **100 days in - Pending:** Both the US and the EU, and especially within the context of NATO, consider Russia and China as geopolitical challengers and growing threats to global stability. However, when it comes to a cohesive EU and US policy, so far diverging security and economic approaches have hindered this development. We may see more alignment on security approaches under the framework of NATO towards Russia, especially as relations on the Ukrainian border increase. However, economic relations so far outpace security approaches towards China and a joint policy is unlikely to develop in the immediate future. Nevertheless, digital, and cyber policy could be a uniting issue as China increases its dominance in this area.
 - **Half a year in – Upgraded to ongoing:** While a clear strategy for dealing with Russia and China remain distant, there have been some coordinated steps taken by the US and the EU to align further on their approaches in dealing with these emerging challengers. As stated during the myriad of multilateral meetings in July 2021, both the US and the EU remain committed on countering China and Russia, especially in the NATO context where the NATO 2030 agenda represents a solid move in highlighting the challenges both nations pose towards the Transatlantic alliance. There is also an opportunity for the strategic concepts, the EU's Strategic Compass and Biden's National Security Strategic Guidance, to coordinate further and take concrete steps in developing a formally joint strategy.
10. **Work commonly in the area of energy (and climate) security (ex. by reinforcing LNG export-import between the US and the EU).**
- **100 days in - Ongoing:** The US and the EU have both set out ambitious goals to tackle climate change. The US has recommitted to the Paris Climate agreement and the EU placed climate and green transformation at top of the agenda under its Next Generation post-pandemic recovery plan. However, when it comes to energy collaboration, Nord Stream 2 continues to be a thorn in Transatlantic relations as Biden claims that it will threaten national security and pose potential regional threats, especially to the CEE, while the EU under the tutelage of Germany, does not seem to be willing to step back from this project.
 - **Half a year in – Still ongoing:** Without a doubt, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline agreement has caused a setback in finding a common approach that all the EU would agree with. However, the US and the EU continue to develop more opportunities with LNG and also have the option to utilize the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) to lessen reliance on Russian exports. While these steps help in regards to the European energy security, the transatlantic leaders' cooperation should also consider their sustainability. LNG not really being a “green” option in terms of climate security, alternative and renewable sources should be considered and invested in. As sustainable energy remains a key aspect of the 3SI, such approach could find support on common grounds and should be further developed by the Biden administration to perhaps make up for the Nord Stream 2 debacle.

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