

## Transatlantic Relations in Security Politics

When Trump was re-elected in November 2024, European press, decision-makers and the public were mainly discussing one question: What difference would this election make for transatlantic relations – and particularly for the stability of transatlantic security politics?

The term “transatlantic relations” is used to describe relations between Europe and Northern America, especially the US, that are built upon a common history, shared values, such as peace, democracy, and rule of law, as well as shared interests, e.g. in security. Today, these relations primarily involve political, economic and cultural relations – and a common, transatlantic security structure centring around NATO. Since the end of the Cold War, transatlantic relations have had a diverse history – and their stability has not only started to deteriorate since the first term of Donald Trump.

At the end of the Cold War and during the 1990s and early 2000s, transatlantic relations were relatively stable. New member states had joined NATO that previously had been part of the USSR’s security institutions and new NATO committees such as the Russia-NATO Council were formed. When in the wake of the events of 9/11, the US invoked Article 5 for the first time in NATO’s history, NATO members supported the intervention in Afghanistan both financially and with troops.

Shortly thereafter, however, it became apparent that transatlantic relations especially through NATO did no longer fully rest on common interests. A first shift happened in 2003, when the US argued in favour of an intervention to Iraq on the basis of alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. European countries, among them Germany and France, did not support the intervention and criticised it publicly. When in 2011, France and Great Britain tried to involve NATO in Libya, similarly, other European countries did not agree with it.

In the 2010s, in addition to that, China became more important for the US, who started their “pivot to Asia” under Obama.

Next to these more and more diverging interests, the second basis of transatlantic relations, common values, became less stable when Trump was first elected in 2016. As part of his “America First” policy, Trump deprioritised both the promotion of shared values such as human rights and democracy and transatlantic security politics, for example demanding that Europe increased its defence spending for NATO or questioning Europe’s nuclear sharing.

As a reaction to this growing instability of transatlantic relations, European countries started a process of strategic autonomy, in which the EU tried to minimize dependencies and strengthen the capacity to act on its own. Primarily promoted by France under President Macron, this process, however, has not been coherently implemented as some EU member states such as Hungary and Poland remain sceptical about the EU strengthening its military capacities.

In addition to the EU stepping up its security politics, experts call for a reform of transatlantic security structures.

Future political action, be it at the EU, the UN, or the Munich Security Conference, will need to address questions such as:

- What reform is needed for (transatlantic) security structures? How can future security structures look like?
- How can transatlantic relations be diversified, e.g. through involving other countries across the Atlantic such as Canada or Brazil?

### Important specialist terminology

NATO stands for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a security institution that was founded in 1949 and involves member states in Northern America and Europe.

On September 11th, 2001 (short: 9/11), Al-Qaida terrorists attacked the US by, among others, flying two passenger planes into the World Trade Center in New York City.

Article 5 or, with its full term, the principle of collective defence, means that NATO member states agree to protect each other and respond together if attacked.

The pivot to Asia describes a US-policy under President Obama. This policy was supposed to put more emphasis on US relations to Asia, especially to China.

Nuclear sharing means that there are some states in the world on whose territory nuclear weapons are stationed even though they do not possess nuclear weapons themselves. This means that these states also participate in management and eventual use of nuclear weapons.