



Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press



THE RELEVANCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION FOR THE UNITED STATES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Both European and U.S. foreign policy since World War II have been built upon a strong, transatlantic relationship. The European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have provided solid institutional bases for this relationship. Yet, contemporary challenges could disrupt this structure and call into question the very viability of the EU and NATO. In addition, the “America First” foreign policy approach views relations with other countries, and by extension organizations like NATO and the EU, as a zero-sum game, where equitable burden sharing seems to be more important than political solidarity and mutual gains from cooperation. These trends portend significant challenges to U.S. relations with both NATO and the EU. Overcoming these challenges will require continued cooperation and trust between the United States and its allies and partners.

Both the EU and NATO provide the United States with a comparative advantage in promoting freedom, prosperity, and security globally, and in the European region. Not only do these organizations contribute to the U.S. interest of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, but they also provide the United States with diplomatic, economic, and military multipliers that give the United States significant influence in addressing threats and challenges from states such as Russia and China, as well as nonstate actors such as al-Qaeda.

NATO began as a conventional military alliance to balance against the threat of the Soviet Union. Over time, the Alliance has evolved into a security community that shares common values and interests and is committed not only to common defense, but also to cooperative security and crisis management. NATO also retains significant military capabilities and geostrategic value in promoting common

interests within and external to the region. The Alliance has always emphasized collective action and burden sharing among allied members. This is where the current U.S. approach to foreign policy is causing tension. Not only has the United States chosen to go against the consensus views of its allies in addressing key challenges, it has also suggested that the U.S. commitment to common defense might be contingent upon allies living up to their burden-sharing commitments.

So too has the EU evolved from its humble beginnings in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), established in 1951, to a customs union and common market in 1957 with the European Economic Community (EEC). After the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the EU became an imperfect, yet resilient economic and political union with the ultimate goal of an ever-closer union among member states. That ambitious goal has come under increasing pressure from the economic crisis, increased migration, and Brexit. Like NATO, the EU has strengthened the ability of European member states to resist outside aggression. It has also led members to eschew conflict in resolving their internal disputes. As a robust and prosperous union, the EU has also become an important economic partner of the United States. In addition to being the largest trading and investment partner of the United States, the EU shares the U.S. commitment to the international rule of law, free markets, and promoting democratic values.

The America First approach to U.S. foreign policy takes a zero-sum attitude to foreign policy, which seems to undermine the solidarity and cooperation that have made NATO and the EU so important to pursuing both U.S. and European interests. Instead of focusing on the benefits of collective action, the

United States has placed a greater emphasis on specific reciprocity with both NATO allies and the EU as a trading bloc.

In order to continue to promote the mutual interests of the United States and its EU and NATO allies and partners, the United States should:

- Hedge against unfavorable global trends by deepening, not reducing its cooperation with both NATO and the EU;
- Continue to pressure the allies to increase their capabilities, but take a more nuanced view of burden sharing; and,
- Promote greater trade and investment between the United States and the EU and increased NATO-EU cooperation.

While there are many directions U.S. grand strategy can ultimately take, the EU and NATO will remain relevant to the United States for the foreseeable future.

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