

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ORDER

THE MULTILATERAL MOMENT

Democracies Need to Move Fast

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With the election of Joe Biden, the U.S. and Europe now have an opportunity to drive a new and forward-leaning multilateral agenda. But the window to act may only last four years. Leaders and legislators have no time to waste.



Trump's combination of aggressive anti-multilateralism and his abdication of the American President's traditional, self-appointed role as »leader of the free world« has revealed just how fragile and outdated the existing international infrastructure truly is.



A realistic strategy that could be implemented in the immediate term consists of four pillars: strengthening the Europe Union foreign and defense capabilities; committing to democracy as an organizing force among nations; dedicating resources to multilateral institutions; and thinking creatively to address new, fast moving challenges.

INTRODUCTION

One of the clear outcomes of the 2020 American presidential election is that while Donald Trump was roundly defeated, Trumpism as a powerful force in American politics was not. For now, the Republican Party remains influenced and largely dominated by Donald Trump. This has only been reinforced in the time since the election, as most Republicans – with varying levels of commitment and only a few notable exceptions – have backed Trump's claims of election fraud, aspiring to overturn the results of the Presidential election. The fact that the claims are completely baseless, that these lies led to the assault on the Capital Building on January 6th, or even the incoherence in the argument that many of the same elected leaders who claim the election was rigged won their own election on the same ballot, does not appear to have dissuaded the overwhelming majority of the GOP from this view. The backlash against the few Republicans who did vote to convict Trump in the latest impeachment trial, including through a series of censures by their respective state party organizations, just goes to show how Trumpism – even after the horrific events of January 6th – remains dominant in the GOP.

This is a dangerous situation because America's two-party system makes it inevitable that the presidency will at some point shift back to Republican hands. While a future Republican president, whether in four, eight, or 12 years, may not be quite as reckless as Trump, they will likely pick up on elements of Trumpism.

One element of Trumpism that is likely to be continued by future Republican politicians is his foreign policy. Specifically, a nationalist, populist-driven Republican could be expected to adopt Trump's worldview that is hostile to liberal values such as democracy, a free press, and the belief that even small states have rights and which manifests as a »might-makes-right« approach to international relations, a view that is shared by authoritarian leaders worldwide.

A core component of this approach under Trump was a virulent anti-multilateralism, one which we should also expect from future Republican Presidents. Opposition to multilateralism has long been a significant part of the Republican foreign policy establishment, but it was often checked or marginalized by more pragmatic Republican elements. It was also less important as the United States, under both parties, purported to be a defender of liberal values and upholder of the international system. But Trump elevated and escalated anti-multilateralism, while also abdicating the bipartisan tradition of the U.S. president also serving as the »leader of the free world.« A future populist Republican will likely embrace a similar international approach.

Those who wish to strengthen a liberal international system must act now. The goal is not just to address global problems but to build a more resilient global system capable of withstanding another U.S. president that seeks to break it down rather than build it up.

AMERICA'S LOSS OF MORAL AUTHORITY

For decades, the United States was the most prominent – albeit often imperfect – voice for issues of human rights, democracy, rule of law, and respect for the international order. This position stemmed from its role as the world's most powerful state and its self-anointed status as defender of democracy coming out of World War II, and protector of the free world during the Cold War. It was the primary creator and protector of international institutions and organizations that guided the post-war international order, including the United Nations, NATO, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the World Trade Organization.

When human rights abuses were taking place, whether a fraudulent election or an outbreak of violence, what the United States said or didn't say mattered. It was not a perfect system and Washington did not always act competently or morally. Very often geopolitics and national interests got in the way and America was too often eager to condemn its adversaries and slow to criticize its friends, as vividly demonstrated when the Obama administration refused to call the military takeover in Egypt a »coup.« But for decades, America under both Democrats and Republicans embraced this responsibility and upheld liberal values on the global stage.

Under Trump, however, America wasn't even present as a voice for human rights and liberal values. Trump's transactional, pro-authoritarian worldview meant that U.S. foreign policy did not assume the duty to speak out with moral authority and stake a clear position on world events that past administrations of both parties would have taken on as their responsibility. When Jamal Khashoggi – a Saudi dissident working at an American newspaper – was gruesomely murdered inside the Kingdom's embassy in Turkey, the Trump White House parroted Saudi denials and cited the Kingdom's spending on American military equipment as a reason to oppose sanctions. They even moved forward with a controversial nuclear power agreement with Saudi Arabia following the murder. When China disappeared Meng Hongwei, the president of INTERPOL in 2018, America was silent. When Russia seized Ukrainian military vessels, imprisoning the sailors, the White House intervened to block a State Department condemnation of Russian action.¹ The examples go on. When the Russian dissident Sergej Skripal was poisoned using Novichok, an illegal chemical weapon, Trump was reportedly furious that the State Department expelled Russian diplomats in response.² This sent a clear signal both to the world and within his own government. When Alexei Navalny was poisoned just last year with the same chemical agent, the U.S. Government had essentially no response – a lesson apparently learned from Trump's rage over the response to the Skripal incident.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/oct/30/white-house-trump-russia-ukraine-state-department>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-a-reluctant-hawk-has-battled-his-top-aides-on-russia-and-lost/2018/04/15/a91e850a-3f1b-11e8-974f-aacd97698cef_story.html

For four years, it was clear that the Trump White House was fine with authoritarian abuses in the world, as long as it didn't negatively affect Trump personally. The consequence of this was that America abandoned its traditional global role as the champion of liberal values.

AMERICA'S LOSS OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

What was particularly unique about Trump among post-WWII American presidents was his lack of interest in playing the role of global leader. When COVID struck, the Swedish statesman Carl Bildt described it as »the first great crisis of the post-American world,«³ with *The New York Times* observing, »This is perhaps the first global crisis in more than a century where no one is even looking for Washington to lead.«⁴

While the U.S. Federal Reserve pumped liquidity into global markets, preserving the global economy, politically, the White House shrank from view and petulantly attacked the World Health Organization. No one even turned to Trump or the United States.

But it has been more than just the COVID response. Throughout the Trump administration, NATO and EU leaders made summits as substance-less as possible, seeking to create the illusion of unity, but which consequently made NATO appear »brain dead« in the words of French President Emmanuel Macron. One of Joe Biden's most impactful ads during the 2020 election involved the hot mic recording of French, British, and Canadian leaders mocking Trump behind his back at the NATO summit in London.

THE ANTI-MULTILATERALIST RIGHT

American anti-multilateralism is not a Trump-induced phenomenon. It has been a pillar of Republican foreign policy, especially since the end of the Cold War. Trump didn't drive the agenda for the U.S. to withdraw from the INF treaty and the Open Skies Treaty, sanction the International Criminal Court, and threaten to withdraw from the Universal Postal Union; his National Security Advisor, the longtime Republican hawk John Bolton, did. The hawkish approach toward Iran and the ripping up of the JCPOA was implemented by Trump, but was the position held by most of the Republican Party and the decision was cheered on by them.

There has been a decades-long project by the American conservative movement to undermine the United Nations specifically and multilateral institutions more generally. Many people were shocked when President Trump hired John Bolton as his national Security Advisor, but Bolton first came

to prominence when he was nominated by George W. Bush to be U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Bolton, who famously said if the United Nations Secretariat building in New York »lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference,«⁵ was selected by Bush for the job specifically because of this animosity towards the institution. It was meant as a thumb in the eye of the United Nations, made worse only by the fact that the Bush White House was unable to confirm Bolton in the U.S. Senate and appointed him in a temporary acting capacity – forcing the interim appointment through to make a point.

Conservative Republicans have also long blocked even common-sense multilateral agreements. Perhaps the most tragic example is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – which is actually based on the Americans with Disabilities Act, an American law passed under George H.W. Bush in 1991. The treaty would essentially extend the same protections as exist under American law internationally, thus protecting Americans with disabilities while traveling abroad and changing little at home. In a harrowing scene in 2012, Republican Senators walked by Robert Dole⁶, the former Senate Majority Leader and Republican Presidential candidate – himself a man with disabilities obtained through his injuries fighting in World War II – to vote down the treaty.

Conservative opposition has similarly hampered the ratification of the Law of the Seas Treaty, which has a unique and unlikely coalition of support including the military, environmentalists, and the private sector. The Treaty would also help call out Chinese military aggression in the South China Sea, making the opposition by conservatives somewhat ironic and illogical given the central role that China plays in their foreign policy thinking. Less dramatic, but equally impactful opposition has prevented the adoption of a host of important conventions and treaties, including the Arms Trade Treaty, the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In all, there are 37 treaties and agreements⁷ that have been submitted to the Senate for advise and consent that are still pending.

This antagonism dates back decades. In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan pulled the United States out of UNESCO,⁸ cut off U.S. contributions to the UN Fund for Population Activities and encouraged congressional efforts to withhold U.S. dues to the UN in an effort to pressure reforms. Senator Jesse Helms was a longtime critic of multilateralism from his powerful perch as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

³ <https://twitter.com/carlbildt/status/1245270549514911744>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/23/world/europe/coronavirus-american-exceptionalism.html>

⁵ <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/23/john-bolton-united-nations-iran-836454>

⁶ https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/senate-rejects-treaty-to-protect-disabled-around-the-world/2012/12/04/38e1de9a-3e2c-11e2-bca3-aadc9b7e29c5_story.html

⁷ <https://www.state.gov/treaties-pending-in-the-senate/>

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/09/26/reagans-peace-with-the-un/d2561843-6002-41b5-b810-2c3a0958b2a2/>

But Trump exacerbated existing Republican opposition to multilateralism.

First, Trump applied an anti-multilateral approach to trade, a plank of multilateralism that free-trade friendly Republicans had historically supported. Trump blocked appointments at the WTO and brought the organization to a stand-still. Instead of pursuing new economic agreements, Trump instigated trade wars with America's closest allies. Since the end of the Cold War, a pattern had developed where Democrats provided the support to political multilateral institutions and Republicans provided support to economic and free-trade multilateral institutions. Republicans in Congress often provided Democratic administrations the votes to approve free trade deals. This arrangement broke down during the 2016 election when the then-Speaker of the House, Republican Paul Ryan, refused to bring up the Transpacific Partnership Agreement for a vote, which was opposed by then-Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.⁹

Second, Trump's lack of concern for America's global standing and leadership meant the U.S. pursued anti-multilateralism with shocking fervor. In the past, the anti-multilateralism tendencies within the Republican party were often checked by more hard-headed realist thinking that didn't want to see America isolated or unnecessarily cause friction with allies. But under Trump, the conservative anti-multilateralists were left unchecked and put into key positions, like John Bolton as National Security Advisor and Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State.

One of the greatest fears about a Trump reelection in 2020 was what four more years of this anti-multilateralism would do to the existing international order. What would survive? Could NATO have endured a second Trump term? What would autocrats have felt empowered to get away with under a newly emboldened Trump? Where would attacks on the press stand with a two-term American president who describes them as the »enemy of the people«?

The election of Joe Biden as the 46th U.S. President served as an emergency brake on this rapid descent. But given the dubious turn in the Republican party, the world needs a structure that can withstand the twists and turns of American domestic politics and inevitable return of a Republican president.

CALLING ALL DEMOCRACIES

Madeleine Albright famously described the United States as »the indispensable nation«, saying that »We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.«¹⁰ This perception of America as the voice that counted most, that was looking out for

the world rather than its own narrow interests, as the protector of the liberal values in the world, has been a constant for over seventy years – even if that perception may have masked a more complicated reality at times. America was looked to because what America said and did mattered. But moving forward, for the sake of a liberal rules based international system, America cannot be the only »indispensable nation.« It needs other liberal democracies, particularly as autocratic states increasingly seek to rewrite international rules, and new global problems arise which require global multilateral action.

The democratic world therefore needs to use the next four years to prepare itself in case America once again serves as a negative force on the world stage. That means the United States, Europe, and democratic countries around the world need to pursue an aggressive multilateral agenda, and quickly.

The issues at hand are many. Arms control has already been a key early priority with the bilateral agreement extending the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between Russia and the United States.¹¹ But there may also be the need to revisit the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia – and likely China – also early on the agenda. As concerns of a potential return of a Trump foreign policy has shaken allies' confidence that America will always be there to fulfill its security guarantees, a new approach to arms control centered on multilateral agreements could be critical.¹² But beyond these Cold War-era frameworks, there are new issues related to arms control, including lethal autonomous systems and advances in conventional weaponry that would benefit from a multilateral framework. For example, establishing norms and an international framework around the use of autonomous lethal weapons could be critical in the years ahead and is an issue that only a true multilateral effort could effectively address.

Similarly, cybersecurity is now central to how states function, and the Internet is now a venue for state conflict. The recent revelations about massive Russian intrusions into American corporate and government networks demonstrates that there are no clear lines in this domain.

There is no area more in need of comprehensive multilateral cooperation than climate change. This is an issue that impacts everyone in the world and requires the involvement of every state in combating it. This should not only be in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, but also in dealing with the impact of climate change on relations among nations. For example, the arctic is rapidly changing due to the effects of climate change, and the consequences will have an impact

⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/04/house-speaker-ryan-no-point-in-lame-duck-vote-on-tpa-deal.html>

¹⁰ <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/980219a.html>

¹¹ https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/report/preventing-nuclear-proliferation-and-reassuring-americas-allies?utm_source=media&utm_campaign=rpt&utm_medium=article&utm_term=nuclear-task-force-report&utm_content=text

¹² https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/report/preventing-nuclear-proliferation-and-reassuring-americas-allies?utm_source=media&utm_campaign=rpt&utm_medium=article&utm_term=nuclear-task-force-report&utm_content=text

on everything from extraction rights to navigation routes, requiring significant global cooperation. Similarly, the impending crisis of ‘climate refugees’ can only be efficiently and well-managed through international fora.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that the current global public health structure is insufficient. Clearly, public health is an area where there is a need for greater global cooperation and coordination. And there is no reason to believe that another public health crisis is far off. In fact, one of the near certain impacts of climate change is the increase in new contagious diseases. Addressing this multilateral shortcoming will be critical in the years ahead.

There is also a lot of work to do in regulating the grey zones of the global financial system, especially by combating tax evasion and illicit finance. While Trump had shamelessly and unproductively attacked the WTO, there are in fact important reforms that need to be made there. Given the global nature of these issues, a multilateral framework could be critical in addressing the cross-border flow of illicit money and establishing clear international rules and norms.

THE U.S. NEEDS A STRONGER EU

Critical to building a robust international order is building up another liberal pillar in world affairs. For the sake of stability in the international system, other voices must also stand up with both moral authority and the ability to back up the rhetoric with meaningful action. While countries like Japan, the United Kingdom, South Korea, New Zealand, and Australia will all be important voices, none match the potential international clout of the European Union. The Biden administration should therefore encourage and help empower Europe to become a much stronger and more unified presence on foreign policy.

Washington has long viewed the European Union dismissively and warily, seeing it merely as a trading bloc and fearing that a stronger EU would prompt it to oppose policies of the United States. This perspective is misguided and ignores the potential that the EU has to act as a political superpower in addition to an economic one.

As the U.S. and EU work to revive transatlantic relations, the Biden administration should encourage the EU to bolster its ability to act on the global stage, especially in foreign and security policy. Not only does the U.S. need a strong, united, and capable European partner in Brussels, the United States should also want the EU to be capable of upholding the liberal international order in the event America once again plays a negative role in world affairs.

The current debate taking place in the EU over the concept of »strategic autonomy« should be welcomed by a Biden administration. The key point, however, is that strategic autonomy does not have to mean the EU *will* pursue a diverging path from the United States – only that it *can* pursue

such a path *if needed*. After all, the clearest examples of EU opposition to the U.S. have come when the United States is pursuing extremely destructive policies, such as invading Iraq, ripping up the Iran deal, or pulling out of climate agreements. A major goal of American policy under the Biden administration should therefore be to ensure close U.S.-EU relations so that the EU doesn’t need to pursue a separate path. But should another Trump-style Republican return to the White House there will be a strengthened Europe willing and able to enact a values-based foreign policy – another pillar to hold up the liberal order in case the American one again begins to crumble.

For this to happen though, it is critical that Europe actually becomes a geopolitical actor. This goal is shared by many EU leaders. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced her intention of leading a »geopolitical commission« and the Commission’s proposal for »A New EU-US Agenda for Global Change« that was released in December¹³ and meant as an extended hand to the Biden administration is an important signal about the intentions and the vision of the Commission’s leadership. The document provides a useful framework for transatlantic cooperation on global issues and expressed commitment for a »more assertive and capable European Union,« willing to carry more of the burden in world affairs. But some important recent Europe-wide decisions have appeared to betray these intentions, most notably the latest EU-China investment deal which has raised some real concerns about Europe’s strategic alignment, as well as its position on labor and human rights. European leaders defended the deal, claiming this was an example of Europe pursuing its »strategic autonomy« and not just waiting for Washington to tell it what to do. But there has never been any doubt that Europe can act autonomously on economic issues – the question is about its geopolitical intentions.

Washington should energetically engage Brussels and encourage it to develop a global outlook that is not rooted in advancing parochial business interests, but by a larger conception of European interests. This turn means pushing Europe to develop a strategic culture and forming a global strategy that has a more expansive vision of national or European interests, which puts upholding core liberal values at its core.

For its part, Washington should drop its longstanding opposition to the EU’s involvement in defense. In fact, the Biden administration should take a new approach that calls for a major EU role in European defense and foreign policy integration while also challenging the EU to take bolder action on the world stage. It should support Europe’s »strategic autonomy« as an effort to develop real European foreign policy and defense capabilities, rather than a strategic divergence from the US.

This strategic autonomy means more than the EU simply acting with greater coordination, it also requires greater co-

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_20_2285

herence around its own guiding values. Europe is dealing with its own internal democratic crisis¹⁴ – or crises – with illiberal governments of member states having a seat at the table. Not only does this obvious appearance of hypocrisy weaken the EU's moral standing, there are policy implications as well. The requirement for unanimity in EU decisions means that one or two countries can stop or dilute any action, which can be motivated by any combination of political or economic interests. For example, in 2016, the EU issued a weaker statement than originally planned on Chinese claims in the South China Sea – a key geopolitical contest in Asia – because Hungary and Greece, whose economies both benefit significantly from Chinese investment, blocked the stronger statement.

As part of becoming a global leader, the EU will need to address its internal democratic crisis, and improve decision-making¹⁵ on foreign policy matters so that the position of the entire bloc is not delayed, blocked, or watered down by any single member pursuing its narrow interests. Supporting these efforts will need to be a priority for the incoming Biden administration.

LINKING DEMOCRACIES

One of the Biden campaign's primary foreign policy commitments was to hold a democracy summit. The purpose of the summit is not to get democracies together to talk about how great democracy is, or how important human rights are, but to actually create a forum for democracies to discuss and forge approaches to address major global problems – whether that's COVID, the following economic recovery, poverty, climate change, or cyber security.

Linking democracies together is not intended to replace the UN but to create an important democratic pillar within the multilateral system. This pillar would involve a substantial portion of the world's wealth, creating incentives for developing democracies to be included and to stay on the democratic path.

Yet America has had its own recent issues with democracy. This was most clearly on display on January 6th with the siege on the Capitol Building. But is also apparent in the refusal among many elected officials to accept the election results, efforts to politicize the Justice Department and Judiciary under the Trump administration, the proliferation of conspiracy theories and extremist ideology, and intimidation of the free press. Many similar trends are also occurring in democracies around the world, including much of Europe. This requires that as part of the process for linking and prioritizing democracies, they must get their own house in order – the U.S. first and foremost. This should not be seen as a prerequisite for engagement on the interna-

tional stage, but instead should be pursued in parallel. The fact that some of the world's oldest democracies are in their own crises highlights the fact democracy is delicate, in need of constant maintenance, and not to be taken for granted.

REINVESTING IN MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

America needs a new approach to multilateral institutions, and this approach needs to be about more than simply returning to the *status quo ante* Trump. Investing in building and strengthening existing multilateral institutions should not be viewed as a chore or a charitable expense. It should be viewed as an investment in American interests, as part of an effort to uphold the structure and values that Americans of both parties purport to care about and which have served America's interests for decades.

This means more than simply rejoining the Paris Climate Accords and the World Health Organization or reengaging with the Human Rights Council and the Global Compact for Migration. It will require investing real resources in these organizations. By resources, we mean money, but also time, focus, attention, and personnel.

Today, China sends its top diplomats to multilateral organizations.¹⁶ It does this because it wants to influence those organizations towards a more China-friendly and more pro-authoritarian stance. But for the American diplomatic corps, these organizations have largely been a backwater assignment. These are not the posts to build your career or rise through the bureaucracy. The incoming administration would do well to reprioritize these assignments. In fact, as the Biden administration seeks to rebuild the State Department after the Trump administration gutted it,¹⁷ there may actually be an opportunity to make the necessary type of managerial and administrative changes that do not even require congressional action. It could be an easy, but important, part of the »build back better« agenda.

In Europe's case, it may mean taking more of a lead. Because Europe has historically placed greater value on multilateralism than the U.S., European diplomats are often more skilled at navigating these institutions. Part of playing a bigger role on the world stage may be taking the lead on this diplomacy, working closely with their American counterparts. This is a prime area for the two partners to work together, leveraging each other's strengths, even working together with like-minded democracies as a voting bloc.

¹⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/bfa58276-1868-4011-9891-ccd-363dc68dc>

¹⁵ <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/washington-should-push-for-a-stronger-e-u-foreign-policy/>

¹⁶ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/11/trump-who-withdrawal-china/616475/>

¹⁷ <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/29/how-rex-tillerson-destroying-state-department-215319>

BEING CREATIVE TO TACKLE NEW CHALLENGES

One of the overlooked innovations of the Obama-era foreign policy was the use of *ad hoc* multilateralism to address either urgent issues or matters that do not fit into preexisting structures.

The clearest example of this was the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS), first initiated in 2010, which brought together leaders from around the world for the common goal of securing fissile material, understanding that nuclear terrorism was a real and terrifying concern. Part of what made the Nuclear Security Summit so successful was that it wasn't about developing a communique that all participants would sign on to. It wasn't about building consensus around thorny issues. It didn't try to create a new international structure. It was about getting concrete deliverables on critically important issues. It was the side deals that mattered and »house gifts« that the leaders brought as the price of entry, not the official communique, that made it such a success.

But the NSS is only one example of this type of coordination being effective. Following the financial crisis in 2008, the G20 became the coordination hub for states to coordinate a policy response. While the G20 existed beforehand, its mission and purpose was rather ill-defined and redundant. Since the financial crisis, the group has largely fallen back into that posture, too large to represent any real consensus point of view, but too exclusionary to claim any real legitimacy for global governance. But during the response to the financial crisis, the coordination that took place within the G20 structure was a feat of diplomacy. More recently, COVAX, a WHO-backed initiative to deliver a COVID-19 vaccine to poorer countries, appears promising, especially now that the U.S. is behind the measure.

From terrorism, to the financial crisis, to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 21st century has proven quite capable of presenting new challenges which the institutions developed in the last century are not particularly well-suited to address. States and institutions will need to be agile and nimble to handle what is around the corner next. The more that they are able to develop the relationships, experiment with forums, and develop an understanding of what processes work best, the quicker and more effective diplomacy can take place during the next crisis.

CONCLUSION

The idea of trying to build a more resilient global system and to make a substantive reinvestment in the multilateral system may sound like a colossal task at this particular moment. Both the United States and Europe are fighting the pandemic and managing a massive economic recovery, which requires the lion's share of their leaders' attention. But this paper outlines a simple approach that consists of four pillars that are relatively light lifts:

1. A strengthened Europe Union to serve as a liberal pillar in global affairs;
2. A commitment to democracy as an organizing force among nations;
3. A reinvestment in traditional multilateral institutions by the U.S. and other democracies; and
4. A willingness to think creatively and act nimbly to address new, fast moving challenges.

Each of these individual components is a worthy endeavor for the United States, Europe, and the broader international community to pursue on their own. They are also relatively low-cost efforts that are more about finding efficiencies and removing needless redundancies than major spending on new initiatives. Most importantly though, these efforts will help to stabilize the global system so that it is not dependent on the domestic politics of any one state or vulnerable to the whims of any one political trend. A small investment could go a long way, but now is the time to seize the multilateral moment.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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THE MULTILATERAL MOMENT

Democracies Need to Move Fast



Donald Trump ran a dangerous foreign policy that was transactional and pro-authoritarian. It ignored human rights and liberal values that past U.S. presidents of both parties have proclaimed to be the champion of – albeit often imperfectly. It was also aggressively hostile to multilateral institutions and revealed the fragility of the current international infrastructure. If Trump had been re-elected, it's unclear whether the alliance structure and institutions that allow for small states to matter without being beholden to great power patrons, and which preserve and expand liberal values and democracy would have survived.



While Donald Trump was defeated in November's election, Trumpism remains a potent force in U.S. politics and will likely be the defining trend in conservative politics for the foreseeable future. In America's two-party system, this means it is quite likely that another Trump-like figure could return to the White House. Trump's foreign policy is likely to be one of the elements of Trumpism that a younger, conservative populist is likely to embrace. This is in part because anti-multilateralism has been a cornerstone of the conservative foreign policy agenda for decades, Trump just accelerated it and took it to new extremes.



With the election of Joe Biden, the U.S. and Europe now have an opportunity to drive a new and forward-leaning multilateral agenda. But the window to act may only last four years, there is little time to waste. A realistic agenda that could be implemented in the immediate term consists of four pillars: strengthening the European Union's foreign and defense capabilities; committing to democracy as an organizing force among nations; dedicating resources to multilateral institutions; and thinking creatively to address new, fast-moving challenges.

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