



Forum for American Leadership

Ten Principles for Europe Policy

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President Biden has advertised that he will “rebuild” relations with Europe after what his administration describes as four years of neglect and mistreatment under the Trump administration. Maintaining close ties with Europe is important – but so is ensuring that America’s alliances there perform in ways that benefit the United States and not our geopolitical rivals. Here are 10 principles that should inform U.S. policy in Europe.

Principle 1: America benefits when Europe is stable, prosperous, and free.

- More than any other region, U.S. security and prosperity are tied to the fate of Europe.
- Together, the United States and Europe make up the seat of the free West and demonstrate, through the liberty and attainments of their free citizenries, the attractions of the Western model.
- The 20th century showed that when Europe is unstable, America is not secure and must expend great effort and resources to stabilize Europe.
- Preventing any hostile nation or group of nations from dominating Europe is a primary and enduring U.S. national security interest.
- Even as Asia grows in importance, ensuring the stability of and convergence with Europe must be among our highest international priorities.

Principle 2: America’s European alliances are not ends in themselves.

- While America’s alliances in Europe carry great historical, symbolic, and emotional significance (principle 1), even our closest alliances exist for a specific purpose – to further the security and prosperity of the American people – and must be assessed accordingly.
- It is the job of policymakers to ensure that alliances advance U.S. interests in tangible ways and address allied behavior that is counterproductive to or actively undermines those interests.
- Specifically, it is reasonable for Americans to expect our allies in Europe to:
 - Participate vigorously in their own defense.
 - Extend reciprocity in trade with the United States.
 - Not actively abet the powers that the United States protects them against.
- Even as the United States seeks to consolidate and preserve alliances, it must keep these objectives in mind; policies that do not deliver concrete results in these areas are under-performing, irrespective of how much optical, political harmony they exhibit with allies.

Principle 3: American alliances in Europe must align with U.S. global strategic needs.

- The 2018 National Defense Strategy relinquished the two-war standard in favor of a focus on preparing for war with America’s most serious rival, China, in conditions in which the United States may not possess escalation dominance.

- This means that more and more U.S. military resources and attention are shifting to the Western Pacific.
- A major goal of U.S. policy in Europe must be to ensure that alliances perform in ways that support the Pentagon's shift of focus without undermining the stability of the European theater.
- Specifically, the United States needs European allies to accept a much greater share of the capabilities for conventional deterrence against Russia than they do at present.
- It is reasonable to expect Europeans to be able to shoulder fully at least half of the capabilities and enablers for securing Europe (at present, the United States provides about 70 percent).
- Responsibilities that are shirked by European nations result in heavier U.S. burdens and risks, fewer resources for the Western Pacific, and less stability at the global level.

Principle 4: Ensuring more equitable burden-sharing is necessary for sustaining the American public's political support of alliances.

- In addition to being a strategic necessity (per principle 3), America's longstanding efforts to convince major European allies like Germany to increase defense spending are important for ensuring good stewardship of U.S. tax dollars.
- With a nearly \$30 trillion debt and mounting deficits, American citizens and elected officials are [increasingly wary](#) of one-way alliance relationships that involve deep, sustained, and uncorrected defense dependencies.
- As then-Secretary of Defense Mattis put it, "Americans cannot care more about the security of allies than allies themselves."
- Allowing allies to shirk greater defense responsibilities, as the Biden administration seems willing to do, merely defers the matter and ensures a greater build-up of political frustration over time.

Principle 5: America should expect its allies not to abet its rivals.

- The growing tendency of many European allies to maintain close commercial and military-technological relationships with China and Russia is deleterious to U.S. as well as allied interests.
- Germany's deepening dependency on Russia for energy supplies, including via the Nordstream II pipeline, makes Europe less secure and increases the likelihood of a Russian military attack on Ukraine or eastern member of NATO.
- The reliance of many allies, especially in East-Central and Southern Europe, on Chinese infrastructure and investment augments Chinese power via the [Military Civil Fusion program](#) and gives Beijing de facto veto power over decisions in NATO.
- Over time, these and other allied ties to U.S. rivals threaten to weaken the bonds of U.S. alliances in Europe from within, even as those alliances continue to formally exist.
- It must be a high, ongoing goal of U.S. diplomacy to proactively address these problems.

Principle 6: America should expect its allies to give reciprocity in trade, even as they keep the overall strategic value of alliance trade relationships in mind.

- Competing effectively with a domestic market of China's size depends upon America's ability to form large, open, and aligned economic blocs with like-minded countries in Europe and Asia.
- EU trade and regulatory policies undermine this goal by presenting an unfair playing field for American companies in a range of sectors, from agriculture to manufacturing.

- The problem is especially acute in emerging technology, where prohibitive EU data policies threaten to impair access to the aggregate data sets that will drive innovation.
- EU market regulators disproportionately focus on American tech companies while devoting far less attention to monopolistic practices of Chinese telecommunications firms or Russian energy companies.
- Europe's future security depends on the success of American technological innovations.
- A major aim of U.S. policy in Europe must be to address trade asymmetries and achieve a convergence on technological standards that puts China, not the United States, at a disadvantage, even as the United States makes the case for a free and fair global trading system.
- The United States should press the case for free and fair trade while avoiding the use of tariffs against allies to the extent possible, both to avert a splintering of the Western alliance and to avoid undercutting our arguments against protectionism.

Principle 7: Pressure should not be America's first resort with allies, but neither should it be a taboo.

- In addressing allied behavior that harms U.S. interests, American policymakers should exhaust other means, including persuasion and carrots, before resorting to pressure.
- Sanctions in particular should be used as a last resort, as the over-use of sanctions [threatens to incentivize allies](#) to look for ways to bypass or duplicate the U.S. financial system.
- When using sanctions that affect allies, the United States should be as specific as possible about the reason for their implementation and provide clear and accessible guidance on compliance for allied firms.
- While avoiding pressure to the extent possible, the United States should be willing to use it when other techniques fail to modify allied behavior.
- Under the Trump administration, such pressure helped bring about a historic \$140 Billion [increase in defense spending](#) by NATO Allies, and in the enlistment of more than 60 allies and partners in the [Clean Network](#).
- Generally speaking, the effectiveness of pressure is likely to increase in proportion to how much the United States articulates a constructive program for advancing transatlantic ties and cohesion.

Principle 8: The U.S. must support democracy while competing for positive influence against China and Russia.

- America should remain steadfast in support of democracy and be vigilant in pressing despotic rivals on human rights abuses.
- When it comes to the governance of allies and partners, we should consistently support democracy while engaging diplomatically to avoid pushing states into the orbits of authoritarian rivals.
- When supporting democracy abroad, the United States should advocate for the classically American political principles—liberty, judicial independence, and rule of law.
- But the U.S. should carefully distinguish between these principles and the social and cultural issues favored by progressives, which include issues on which the U.S. public is itself divided.
- As a general rule, America's willingness to criticize allies for internal matters should increase in proportion to how much of a credible alternative the United States offers to long-term Chinese and Russian influence.

- As in the Cold War, the United States must play the long game of competing for positive influence, and keep in mind that the ultimate aim is to build the widest possible coalition to counterbalance China and Russia.

Principle 9: Europe is more than Berlin and Brussels.

- There is a longstanding tendency of Democratic administrations to prioritize close ties with major Western European capitals (especially Berlin) and the EU headquarters in Brussels—and to tacitly treat these power centers as representing Europe as a whole.
- Such an approach overlooks the political and strategic diversity of Europe and leads to a downgrading of relations with strategically crucial European allies such as the United Kingdom, Poland, Italy, and Greece.
- Under the Trump administration, U.S. relations with many of these allies improved significantly following years of strain and neglect by the Obama administration.
- A reversion to the Obama approach of treating these allies as “flyover” states would squander carefully-cultivated goodwill and put U.S. interests at risk.
- In particular, it must be a U.S. priority to retain and strengthen the U.S.-UK Special Relationship—specifically, by giving the UK a clear and expedited path to a bilateral trade agreement and by not appearing to take the EU’s side in ongoing disputes over Northern Ireland.
- The United States should also continue to develop its close relationship with Poland as the ally most critical to defending NATO’s Eastern flank and should continue the Trump administration’s efforts to deepen ties with Greece.

Principle 10: The U.S. should treat friends better than enemies.

- While pressuring allies when necessary, the United States must keep in mind the paramount goal of preserving alliances for a new and intense era of great-power competition.
- Alliances represent a major strategic advantage vis-à-vis rivals that do not possess extensive alliances and think in terms of tributaries and supplicants.
- The worst of all worlds would be to criticize allies while engaging authoritarian rivals and neglecting the basic care and feeding (including via high level visits) of European allies other than Berlin and Brussels.

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