

U.s.-eu relations

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The European Union is the United States' largest trade partner and home to the largest number of America's allies. It was once predictable and stable, but over the last decade it has been weakened under the strain of economic stagnation and political volatility. There is growing resistance to regulation that emanates from Brussels; the U. K. has decided to exit the EU; and migration from the Middle East and Africa is placing additional strains on the already ailing economies and social structures. We believe that a stable, prosperous and integrated Europe is a strong American interest, and are concerned about growing fissures between the U. S. and the EU and the prospects of a trade war that can only hurt all sides.

NATO

The same can be said about NATO. This alliance was formally signed in 1949, but its core principles, foremost among them collective defense against aggressor nations, were already embodied in the Atlantic Charter signed by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill in August 1941. NATO played a key role in the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, and afterwards helped maintain stability in Europe and counter the threat of terrorism in the Middle East and elsewhere. We therefore strongly believe in a robust NATO and in America's adherence to its legal and moral obligations to defend its allies in Europe. We understand the administration's concerns regarding fair participation of all members in shouldering the alliance's financial burden, but this consideration should not obscure the absolute necessity of NATO to the security of America and its allies. What message will the President deliver at the forthcoming NATO summit in

Brussels to alleviate concerns that U. S. commitment to the alliance is weakening?

Russia's aggressive policies

The aggressive foreign policy pursued by Russian President Vladimir Putin presents a major challenge to the U. S. and its European allies. Putin has invaded Georgia, occupied Crimea, meddled in the internal affairs of the Near Abroad, actively assisted the Assad regime in its murderous campaign against the Syrian people, participated through proxies in the civil war in Ukraine and, most alarming for us as U. S. citizens, meddled in the 2016 U. S. presidential election. Russia has also announced its intention to deploy nuclear-capable missiles in Kaliningrad, its administrative enclave between Poland and Lithuania, and even seems to entertain the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons in Crimea, which it took from Ukraine by force. The U. S. and its NATO allies have largely been unified in supporting sanctions on Russia for its actions in Ukraine. The U. S. has sent tanks, armored vehicles and other military hardware to temporary storage sites in Bulgaria, Romania and the Baltic States. It has also contributed special operations forces and weaponry to a new NATO rapid response force. While maintaining dialog with Mr. Putin, it is important that the U. S. convey to him its commitment to its allies in Europe and its firm resolve to counter his aggressive policies.

China's regional ambitions

The withdrawal of the U. S. from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement could make it easier for China to advance its strategic interests in that region. China's campaign of land reclamation in the South China Sea

could be the most sophisticated incremental effort today to change a regional order. This Chinese policy is conducted under two ambiguities. First, China has not clarified whether it regards its territorial claims in the South China Sea as a core interest on par with Taiwan and Tibet. Second, Beijing has not explained whether its self-declared sovereignty over the South China Sea applies only to select locations in the Sea or to the entire 90 percent of the Sea that its " nine-dash line" encompasses. China has so far reclaimed more than 3, 000 acres in the South China Sea. Many of China's neighbors protest its actions, but they find it increasingly difficult to resist China's military and economic preponderance. What is the U. S. administration's strategic alternative to the TPP? What steps is it taking to assert freedom-of-navigation in the South China Sea and to protect its regional allies from Chinese ambitions?

North Korea

North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs, and its aggressive posture toward its neighbors, threaten regional and international peace and security. We support the administration's efforts to find a peaceful, diplomatic solution to the North Korean crisis, and hope that the meeting last month between President Trump and the North Korean leader, and Secretary Pompeo's trip to Pyongyang later this week, will usher in such a solution. At the same time, we are keenly aware that North Korea has repeatedly violated agreements it signed with previous U. S. administrations. We therefore believe that any agreement with the North Korean regime must include safeguards that prevent the regime from breaching its obligations. The nuclear deal with Iran (JCPOA) was heavily criticized because it did not

eliminate Iran's nuclear weapons capability while affording it financial benefits that made it an even more troublesome player regionally and globally. We have shared this criticism and will apply the same standards to any future agreement with North Korea. We have long monitored the North Korean regime's severe human rights violations against its own people. In our opinion, this issue should be part of any future negotiations with North Korea.

Iran

When the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was concluded in July 2015, AJC couldn't support the deal for the following reasons: (a) it did not address Iran's ballistic missile development; (b) it delayed, not eliminated, Iran's prospect of achieving nuclear weapons capability, while affording it immediate benefits likely to make it an even more troublesome player regionally and globally; (c) its inspection regime left military sites off-limits; and (d) it did not address Iran's regional ambitions and support for violence and repression. Iran's behavior since 2015 has only reinforced our concerns.

Contrary to expectations created by the JCPOA's supporters that the deal would moderate Iranian behavior, Iran has become still more emboldened in its destabilizing activities in the region. The JCPOA failed to address other unacceptable Iranian policies: support for terrorist organizations; active assistance to the Assad regime in its murderous campaign against the Syrian people; interference in the internal affairs of other countries; and pervasive human rights abuses. We hope that President Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA will not end the efforts to find common ground between the

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U. S. and its European allies on this issue. Any wedge between the U. S. and its allies would only benefit Iran – and, given Iran's current and future threats, would weaken regional and global security.

Israeli-Palestinian peace

AJC has long supported a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on two states living side-by-side in peace and security. In our view, the best way to promote peace is direct negotiations between the parties. Historically, all major breakthroughs in the Arab-Israeli peace process were achieved through direct bilateral negotiations. That said, since the beginning of the Middle East peace process in the early 1970s, the U. S. has played an important role as a facilitator of such negotiations. We hope the Trump administration will assume the same role. (We take note of the efforts by White House advisor Jared Kushner and peace envoy Jason Greenblatt to resume the peace process.)

Syria and Iraq

In the Eastern Mediterranean, two conflicts – the war in Syria and the campaign against ISIS – are coming to an end. In Syria, it is now clear that President Bashar al-Assad, thanks to Russian and Iranian support, will survive and control most but not all of Syria. The buffer that separated the Iran-Syria-led efforts from the U. S.-led campaign against ISIS has disappeared. Consequently, the U. S. and local allies throughout Syria and Iraq are now in close proximity to Iranian surrogates. With ISIS defeated, will the U. S. withdraw from Syria and Iraq or will it use its footholds to resist Iran's efforts to convert Syria and Iraq into client states? Our strong preference is for the latter option.

U. S. in the multilateral arena

We agree with the administration's position regarding the need to reform the UN Human Rights Council and to rectify its anti-Israel bias. AJC has spoken out repeatedly against the body's obsession with Israel and its recent moves to compile a blacklist of companies doing business in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. For years, however, AJC maintained that only through full participation – and leadership – in the work of the UN can the U. S. advance its interests in the world body. Ideally, therefore, the U. S. should stay in the UNHRC and endeavor to reform it from inside. But three consecutive administrations tried to do just that and failed, which gives credence to the decision taken by the Trump administration. In the long run, forfeiting the U. S. seat on the UNHRC – or other UN organs and agencies such as UNESCO – may empower actors like Russia and China, which do not share American values. We therefore hope that before long the situation in the UNHRC will change – that much-needed reform will come at last – so that the U. S. administration can review its decision.