



## PERSPECTIVES

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# Must Restoring the US-Europe Alliance Be at Israel's and Sunni Arab States' Expense?

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The United States does not have to appease the Europeans over Iran in order to cement the trans-Atlantic alliance. Instead, it should press the Europeans to increase their military spending to merit the close relationship, especially in the face of a Russia that poses a greater threat to Europe than it does to the US.

While in the US, Joe Biden's inauguration ushered in widespread joy among his supporters and dismay among his detractors, among the allies of the US in the Middle East there is a feeling of anxious anticipation. Sharing this sentiment are Israel's incumbent leader, the leaders of the moderate Arab Sunni states, and even many in the Israeli opposition who want to see Netanyahu replaced.

The common denominator behind this concern is the ideological mindset of those chosen to critical appointments in Biden's administration. It is feared that these people will encourage Biden to commit to a soft policy toward Iran as the price to be paid to restore the US-European alliance, which (according to the liberal consensus) former President Trump did much to impair.

There is historical reason for this concern. Biden's team is headed by Anthony Blinken, the designated Secretary of State and former national security advisor to Obama. It was Blinken who spearheaded the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, which hurt the American relationship with allies in the Middle East for the sake of cementing the alliance with Europe.

By every objective and subjective criterion, Washington's European allies are far more important than its allies in the Middle East. Europe is the US's

greatest trading and service partner and home to its most formidable alliance (at least on paper), NATO. Even in its dwarfed post-Soviet state, NATO exists to counter Russia, which is a greater security challenge for the western alliance than Iran, which is both farther removed and less powerful.

It is also true that the US is far more similar to the European states, which share with Americans a common ideology, democratic government, and a belief in the democratic way of life, than it is to its allies in the Middle East.

And that is putting it mildly. The bicoastal elite that just returned to power in the US (as well as many ordinary non-coastal Americans) are deeply offended by the likes of Saudi Arabia and Egypt and their leaders. Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Emmanuel Macron are far more appealing than Saudi Arabia's Muhammad bin Salman or Egypt's President Fatah Sisi.

Yet the reasoning behind the trade-off of appeasing Europe at the expense of Washington's allies in the Middle East on the subject of Iran is based on the central misconception that Europe has to be appeased.

Despite four years of President Trump, who spoke of Europe in terms of blistering invective, the alliance is as strong as ever. Intercontinental trade and scientific cooperation grew almost as never before during the Trump administration. Pfizer's leading role in providing a vaccine against COVID-19 to both Americans and Europeans is emblematic of this cooperation. In 2018, Pfizer, an American company, announced a merger of its consumer healthcare division with UK pharma giant [GlaxoSmithKline](#).

President Trump was very critical of NATO and particularly Germany, its largest member state. He accused the European member states of free-riding on American largesse to assure their own security—an accusation so self-evidently true that it can hardly be debated.

Most of NATO's European partners hardly act like partners at all. US spending on the military is at least double relative to GDP than that of the average European member state and over two and half times higher than that of Germany, which is NATO's richest and most powerful European member. This might have been justifiable at the beginning of the Cold War, when Europe was emerging from the destruction of WWII, but it makes no sense seven decades later, when its constituent countries are wealthy states.

To add insult to injury, Germany is one of two countries in the EU and NATO that consistently runs vast trade surpluses with the US in both trade and services—yet it spends only 1.3% of GDP on military expenditures compared to 3.6% for the US.

What this means is that the Europeans are beholden to the US and do not have to be appeased by it—especially as their nemesis to the east, Russia, is far more menacing to them than it is to the US.

Why “engage” the Islamic regime to satisfy German and French business interests who look longingly at the large market of Iran even as its leadership hones its ballistic and drone skills against US allies, spawns proxies that undermine the independence of states, and supports groups that are systematically creating a ballistic siege on Israel—in addition, of course, to advancing its program to produce a nuclear bomb?

There is also a domestic dimension to the trade-off. President Biden is on record as saying he is going to reach out to all Americans to reduce polarization in American society and politics.

Instead of appeasing Europe, he should pursue what former President Trump claimed he would do but didn’t—get the Europeans to pay for their security at least in equal measure to the US. The hundred billion dollars of reduced military expenditures could be used instead to upgrade the skills and education of Americans in the Rust Belt and improve social and health services in rural America.

It’s not Israel and the Sunni Arab states that should pay the price for bolstering the trans-Atlantic alliance but rather the Europeans themselves, who have taken the Americans for a ride for too long.

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