

INFOCUS

Harris or Trump: Consequences of the 2024 United States presidential election result

C4EP analysis on the subject – *A choice not for, but affecting Europe – whom for POTUS, Harris or Trump?*

„With the US presidential elections around the corner, there is a question in the mind of Europeans: which candidate would be a better fit for European interests/values? We try to make a quick attempt to outline the foreign policy- and Europe-related views of the two candidates and make an educated guess about their future policies on the matter – coming to some kind of conclusion in this uneasy question.”

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C4REPORT

EPC: Justice for Ukrainian POWs & the Path to Freedom – 15 October 2024

„Amanda Paul started the panel drawing attention to the widespread and systematic torture and mistreatment – and even execution – of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Russia. She raised questions about what more could be done to free and support them, and how we could secure better detainment for them, also wondering about how international oversight could be improved to get more countries involved and more Ukrainian heroes back.”

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EPC: Middle East on the brink: Potential paths for de-escalation? – 16 October 2024

„The purpose of this conference organized by EPC was to review recent developments in the Middle East, particularly the tensions between Israel and Hezbollah, the war in Gaza, and Iranian missile attacks on Israel. The speakers explored possibilities for de-escalation and discussed the roles that the European Union, the United States, and other international actors could play in resolving the conflicts.”

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EPC: EU-UK relations: Towards deeper cooperation in defence and security – 17 October 2024

„Almut Möller opened the panel – the first one in a series of policy dialogues organized by EPC – with the aim to help the audience better understand how a rapprochement could look like in the future between the EU and the UK in the field of security and defence.”

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C4EPOSITION

Dr. Zoltán Fehér, nonresident fellow, Atlantic Council, Global China Hub; visiting scholar, George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Institute for Security and Conflict Studies

How will the U.S. presidential elections impact the U.S.-European relations? What will a Trump administration and a Harris administration do towards Europe? First of all, contrary to conventional wisdom, the foreign policies of the Trump and the Biden-Harris administrations have had more continuity than discontinuity, despite the unprecedented level of polarization in U.S. politics between the two sides and their enormous ideological differences. I would describe the past eight years as the Trump-Biden grand strategic adjustment. What does this adjustment mean? The post-Cold War liberal international system (where cooperation and free trade dominated) has given way in the 2010s to a realist world (where strategic competition and protectionism rule). As a response, after nearly 30 years of a U.S. grand strategy best described as a blend of deep engagement, liberal internationalism, and liberal interventionism, Trump ushered in an age of realism in U.S. grand strategy, which Biden has largely continued, albeit with crucial differences. Both have placed strategic competition with China (and also Russia in Biden's case) in the center of U.S. grand strategy and focused the American grand strategic posture more inward, i.e. in more direct service of the prosperity of American middle classes (hence the protectionist turn).

What has been different between Trump and Biden in their grand strategies/foreign policies is their approach to how they want to win the strategic competition(s) and to elevate U.S. middle classes. Trump sought to shape his new realist grand strategy in a unilateralist way, i.e. he showed great aversion towards U.S. allies and partners as well as multilateral institutions, wanting the United States to "go it alone." Biden, on the other hand, has made U.S. alliances and multilateral frameworks a centerpiece of its realist strategy. Another crucial difference between them is what U.S. grand strategy should serve in their view. For Trump, U.S. grand strategy/foreign policy is an almost sterile realist one, only serving the strengthening of different sources of U.S. power (Make America Great Again), whereas for Biden, U.S. grand strategy should serve not only the boosting of U.S. power but also the maintenance of the U.S.-led liberal international order and the safeguarding of those values and principles (democracy, human rights, rule of law, free market, etc.) that should always underpin U.S. power and the international order. As a result, U.S.-Europe relations have been part of the "discontinuity" bracket between Trump and Biden. U.S. relations with Europe under Trump were cool and strained, while they have seen more unity and cohesion during the Biden administration than at any time in the previous several decades. Of course, we can also thank Vladimir Putin for that, as Russia's unlawful aggression against Ukraine has brought together the Atlantic allies in support of Kyiv, and the Biden administration has done a good job at rallying allies to stand up to the aggressor.

From these continuities and discontinuities flows my analysis about what to expect after the November 5 U.S. presidential elections. If Trump wins, there is a chance that we are returning to an era of suspicion and distrust on the two sides of the Atlantic, unless his advisers convince him otherwise. Trump has made it abundantly clear that, beyond being sceptical of all U.S. allies and partners, he has deep disdain for both the European Union as a project and the United States' lazy and entitled allies in NATO. On the other side, European leaders are dreading Trump's return to the White House. This was evidenced this past July in Washington where the leaders of NATO allies at the 75th anniversary NATO Summit were working to "Trump-proof" the Atlantic Alliance and its posture on Ukraine. If Harris wins, she will continue pursuing the Biden administration's policy on Europe, which views Europeans as the main allies of the United States in its strategic competition with China and Russia and its mission to save the liberal international order. In particular, the United States, the European NATO allies, and the European Union and

its members have collaborated very closely in making sure that Ukraine has sufficient weapon systems, weapons, ammunition, training, and money to withstand Russia's aggression. Harris will continue supporting Ukraine and cooperating with the European allies in making such support the strongest possible for Ukraine's defense. Trump's intentions regarding U.S.-European cooperation on supporting Ukraine are unclear, but he will not give the same level of support to Kyiv as Biden has. The United States and the EU have also been aligning their strategies on countering China's challenge in the past four years, in fact they have both embraced de-risking as the strategy to follow vis-à-vis Beijing's technological and economic threats. I fully expect a Harris administration to keep pushing for increased transatlantic unity on China, as the Democrats clearly understand that balancing against and containing China is not possible without close coordination between the United States and its European (and Asian) allies. While Trump's pre-existing sentiments about Europe are well-known, he will not be the only one driving his administration's foreign policy. I hope and expect that some of his well-respected advisers (Matt Pottinger, Elbridge Colby, Matt Kroenig, Mike Pompeo) will steer a Trump administration's foreign policy in a less unilateral and more conservative internationalist direction and will facilitate U.S.-European cooperation on NATO, Russia/Ukraine, and especially on China.

It is important to point out that, while the U.S.-Europe cooperation on political, security, and strategic matters have been fruitful in the past four years and will continue being so if Harris wins, the Biden administration and the European Union have clashed in the economic realm and such conflicts will only grow in the next four years. We are living in a realist world not only because strategic competition has returned to the international system, but also because after more than two and a half decades of globalization and interdependence, major economies have been adjusting to a new environment where "everyone is out for themselves." Partially thanks to Trump, the United States has in the past decade recognized that it has "globalized" its economy more than it should have, outsourcing production to other regions and allowing competitors to gain crucial edges in trade and technology. Trump was the first president to set out bringing industrial production and especially key sectors like semiconductors back to the United States, and the Biden administration has been putting these ideas to practice, negotiating with Congress the Chips Act and the Infrastructure Act to revive U.S. manufacturing and to bring cutting-edge technology development back to America. In the process, Washington has not only targeted China but has also implemented a number of protectionist measures against the European Union. I expect that the increasing protectionism on both sides of the Atlantic (exacerbated by China's overcapacity and dumping) will create further tensions between the United States and Europe, regardless of whether Harris or Trump wins, which is in line with a continuity in U.S. grand strategy. While economic competition will present challenges between the United States and Europe whether the Democratic or Republican presidential candidate prevails, I expect that overall, the U.S.-Europe relations will be more strained again under Trump and will continue being more fruitful and friendly under Harris. Therefore, the November 5 elections will affect not only the lives of those living in America, but also the lives of all Europeans, for better or worse. Buckle up.