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Article

How Much of a New Agenda? International Structures, Agency, and Transatlantic Order

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Abstract
This article focuses on the links between transatlantic relations—a structured array of markets, hierarchies, networks, ideas, and institutions—and broader elements of international structure and world order. It argues that the changing state of transatlantic relations reflects changes in the structure of the relations themselves, but also structural change in the global and domestic arenas and how such change shapes or reflects the actions of a wide variety of agents. The first part of the article briefly explores the importance of international structure in order to identify the global forces that shape the context for transatlantic relations. The article then examines the key mechanisms in transatlantic relations which interact to create forms of transatlantic order; these create spaces for a wide variety of agents, operating within broader elements of international and domestic structure, and the article illustrates this through the ways in which the EU's "new agenda for EU–US relations" sought to shape transatlantic interactions during the first year of the Biden presidency. The article examines the implications of transatlantic responses to the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, and concludes that despite the move to enhanced EU–US cooperation in the short term, the interaction of structures, mechanisms, and actors will contribute to continuing differentiation of transatlantic relations, at least in the medium term, whatever the preferences of US and EU policy-makers.

Keywords
European Union; international structure; transatlantic relations; United States

Issue
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1. Introduction

On 30 November 2020, the *Financial Times* reported that the European Commission had initiated a campaign to "reboot" relations with the US, under the broad heading "a new EU-US agenda for global change" (European Commission, 2020; Fleming & Brunsden, 2020). The implication was that acts of political will by Brussels and Washington could lead to a re-invigoration of transatlantic relations and re-position them as the core of a new approach to world order. But it was also implied that this would be a re-establishment of a form of transatlantic and world order that had been interrupted and disrupted by the Trump administration between 2016 and 2020. Such implications were challenged almost immediately by those who argued that there was no golden age centred on transatlantic order, that the world had changed in any case, and that the possibilities for re-establishment of transatlantic order as the basis for a new world order were illusory (see, for example, Moyn, 2020). During early 2021, a series of initiatives from both sides of the Atlantic attempted to establish an agenda to follow up on the warm feelings generated by the installation of the Biden administration, but with inconclusive results as of the G7 summit held in the UK during June. Despite institutional initiatives such as the establishment of the EU–US Trade and Technology Council (TTC), which directly reflected part of the EU's "agenda," actions in other areas were patchy and often halting. In August, the precipitate US withdrawal from

Afghanistan created sharp conflicts of view amongst members of the "Atlantic community," whilst the growth of tensions in eastern Europe at the end of the year, followed by the Russian assault on Ukraine in early 2022, created new challenges for both the EU and the US. This article aims to explore the extent to which the assumptions behind the "new agenda" initiatives, in general, are valid, the extent to which they are challenged or vindicated by recent developments, and the extent to which transatlantic agency can overcome the structural constraints that emerge from international and domestic change. In doing so, it will focus on the key mechanisms underpinning transatlantic order, linking them to evidence from the first year of the Biden administration, as well as addressing the five areas of analysis identified in the introduction to this thematic issue (Riddervold & Newsome, 2022).

By taking this approach, the article cuts across each of the key arguments underlying this thematic issue and questions some of their key assumptions. It provides a description of transatlantic relations as reflecting structural constraints, which challenges assumptions about the types and levels of agency they encapsulate, and which also challenges assumptions about the key driving forces in transatlantic relations narrowly defined. Thus, assumptions about strategic utility, economic utility, the use of institutions, processes of crisis management, and the impact of domestic political change—in short, the ways in which agency on the part of policy-makers in the US and the EU is exercised—are here viewed within the context of structural forces and structuring mechanisms. In this perspective, transatlantic relations become an arena in which drivers of broader structural change are mediated and managed by the key participants, here the EU and the US. Concomitantly, in this account, the strengthening or weakening of transatlantic order is inherently linked to processes of structural change in the world arena, and thus cannot simply be the product of political will or practices on the part of those involved. The intention of the article is thus to question the extent to which agency (as expressed in policy initiatives on the part of the EU and the US) can overcome structural constraints and pressures. As such, it takes on board the debates about structure and agency initiated by Wendt and others and explores them in respect of transatlantic relations, starting from the importance of changing structures in creating constraints and opportunities (Wendt, 1987, 1992, 1999), linking them with the arguments advanced by Cox (1983) in relation to social forces, states, and world order, and by Strange (1988) in relation to the exercise of structural power.

2. International Structures as Drivers of Transatlantic Relations

In considering the potential impact of structural factors as drivers of transatlantic relations, it is important to understand what is meant by the term "structures." Here, the understanding is that structure at both the international and the domestic level is composed of three elements: the distribution of material power, the nature of governing institutions, and the nature of "reigning ideas" (Cox, 1983). This set of elements accounts for a broad sense of what constitutes "world order" at any given juncture, and it also shapes the nature of domestic orders. Structures can thus vary on a spectrum between hegemonic, pluralistic, and fragmented; they can be legitimate, contested, or subverted; they can generate leadership, followership, and forms of anarchy. In international relations, a host of terms has been coined to express these ideas: the nature of polarity (unipolar, bipolar, multipolar, variations such as "interpolar," as in Grevi, 2009, and "bi-multipolar"); the nature of actions and interactions (unilateral bilateral, minilateral, multilateral, or, in some cases, "bi-multilateral," as in Smith, 2005). The expression of such structures can be seen for example in terms of geopolitics and geo-economics (see, in this thematic issue, Hjertaker & Tranøy, 2022; Schwartz, 2022), or in terms of dominant and subordinate cultures.

One specific expression of these structural forces is that of "structural power." The nature of structural power is well set out by Strange (1988, p. 25):

> Structural power…confers the power to decide how things shall be done, the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises. The relative power of each party in a relationship is more, or less, if one party is also determining the surrounding structure of the relationship.

One might add that variations in international and domestic structure can produce the capacity to determine the structure of relationships and that this can be a self-perpetuating state of affairs. This capacity to frame the terms of interaction, to shape—if not dictate—how domestic and international activities are conducted, is partly material (reflecting the distribution of material power referred to above), partly institutional (derived from the ability to shape rules and terms of action and interaction), and partly ideational (conferring the power to shape perceptions and norms both domestically and internationally). In these ways, it relates not only to "hard power" but also to major elements of "soft power" (Nye, 2004, 2011) as observed in contemporary domestic and international processes, and to the ideas of international order outlined above.

This means, in turn, that significant roles are played in world order by "structural powers" (Keukeleire, 2003; Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014; Keukeleire et al., 2009)—actors that can use their predominant agency to shape the nature of international interactions and, importantly, to get under the skin of those they interact with to shape domestic structures and practices. Both the EU and the US can be identified as "structural powers," but so can Russia, China, and others (for an exploration of US

structural power see Schwartz, 2022). A key implication of this argument is that structural power at the global level is exercised by a limited number of key actors, and thus that only a small number of agents have the "reach" to be able to shape and re-shape the global order; but as will be seen later, this narrow conception of agency can be challenged by the presence and activities of a much wider range of actors at the level of transatlantic relations.

Alongside considerations of structure and agency it is important to deal with issues of change and transition. Whilst it might be tempting to assume that international and domestic structures are always clear and uncontested, the reality is that they are often contested, chaotic, decaying, or emergent. This untidy reality is often expressed in the ideas of power shifts or power transitions, and again it can be observed at both international and domestic levels (Alcaro et al., 2016; Brown, 2018; see also Hjertaker & Tranøy, 2022; Kerremans, 2022; Schwartz, 2022). There are two sets of possible implications attached to these kinds of situations. The first is that of *process*—that power shifts or power transitions can produce uncertainty, challenges to established institutions and ideas, and the emergence of competing rules and practices. The second is that of *outcomes*—the ways in which shifts or transitions result in losses or gains of status, transfers of structural power, and new alignments within the global or national arenas. In such conditions, the importance of agency is heightened, since new actors can emerge, established actors can be challenged, and existing practices and perceptions can be transformed.

Changes in international or domestic structures link strongly to perceptions of risk or opportunity among participants. Thus, it is important to consider the idea of risk or opportunity structures as part of the ways in which international and domestic structures can shape the activities of agents and the evolution of world orders. The literature of opportunity structures distinguishes between those that are open with respect to a given actor and those that are closed—and also allows for processes of opening and closing that can radically affect the available spaces for action (Tarrow, 1996, 1998; Tilly & Tarrow, 2006). The same line of analysis can be applied to structural components of risk, to distinguish between contexts in which risks are salient or unobtrusive, and to assess the extent to which risk structures are open to management or shaping by those involved in a given order. Thus, for example, in the height of the Cold War, the level of risks perceived by the members of the European Community was undoubtedly high, but it was far less clear how this could be managed by the European themselves; equally, in the late 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, there were opportunities for the European Union to expand its international activities in areas of "high politics," but those opportunities were progressively closed off in subsequent periods (Smith, 2012) and, in some cases, for example in Eastern Europe, accompanied by significant risks. The development of the EU's global strategy (European External Action Service, 2015; European Union, 2016; see also Tocci, 2017) and its implementation between 2015 and 2021 reflected both the desire to re-position the Union between shifting structures and the limitations inherent in those structures (Smith, in press). In this context, the EU's Joint Communication on EU–US relations can be seen as an attempt to capitalise on a specific conjuncture and the opportunities it was seen as creating for the exercise of leverage (European Commission, 2020).

What are the implications of this discussion for current transatlantic relations? It is widely accepted that current international structures are in transition and that the key elements of the "old order" are contested. Thus, the material distribution of power is challenged by emerging powers, and especially by China, at the same time as status quo powers such as the US have been uncertain and introspective (Alcaro et al., 2016; Brown, 2018). This is not simply a product of the "Trump era"; indeed, it has been gathering momentum since the late 1980s. There are also challenges to the distribution and use of power within both the US and the EU: The impact of the Trump administration was not simply a reflection of contingencies during the period 2017–2021, but indicative of a broader process of division and contestation that has been going on since the 1970s, whilst the challenges to the EU posed by nationalist and populist movements have created—or rather sharpened—challenges to the legitimacy of institutions at the domestic level that have been incubating for decades (Smith, 2021). But the change is not definitive—it is a work in progress, which leaves scope for agency, for opportunities to be exploited, risks to be managed, and the emerging order to be shaped. It also creates the possibility of seismic shifts that can create acute crises, as in the case of the Russian attack on Ukraine. This is a challenge both for the EU and for the US, providing the context for the next part of the argument here, which focuses on the mechanisms through which these structural forces come to bear on transatlantic relations and through which a range of actors can exercise their influence.

3. Key Mechanisms in the Evolution of Transatlantic Order

Transatlantic relations constitute a hybrid system, sustained by a range of overlapping and interlinked mechanisms. This part of the article considers how these mechanisms channel, mediate, or respond to the kinds of broader structural change outlined above, and thus how transatlantic order is shaped by change in international and domestic structures as well as the practices of key agents. Five key mechanisms are considered here: markets, hierarchies, networks, institutions, and ideas. These mechanisms are interconnected and co-constitutive in the evolution of transatlantic order, and they link strongly to the earlier discussion of

international structure (and see also the discussion of transatlantic policy coherence in Raube & Vega Rubio, 2022). Here, general discussion of each mechanism is then related to specific elements of the "new agenda" proposed by the EU in 2020 to provide empirical "probes" of the processes and practices entailed and of their implications for transatlantic order.

First, transatlantic relations are in significant part relations of markets. The political economy of relations especially between the EU and the US is one of the longest-established areas of analysis, responding to the political/economic focus of the European integration project and the progressive economic entanglement of the EU and the US over a period of seventy years (see, for example, Diebold, 1972; Hamilton & Quinlan, 2021; Tsoukalis, 1986; see also Hjertaker & Tranøy, 2022; Schwartz, 2022). The focus may originally have been on trade in goods, but as the relationship has evolved, it has encompassed more and more issues relating to financial services, investment, and most recently the knowledge economy. The patterns of evolution in transatlantic market relations and the ways in which they have reflected a broader structural change in the world political economy are thus a dynamic source of change in the transatlantic order. In this context, processes of globalisation and potential de-globalisation loom large: It has been argued at times that if globalisation has thrived anywhere, it has thrived in the transatlantic political economy, but recent evidence is more equivocal. The persistence of protectionism in some areas such as agriculture has now been joined by various degrees of economic nationalism on both sides of the Atlantic, most obviously during the period of the Trump administration in the US and the rise of populist and nationalist elements in EU domestic politics. This trend has been given an added twist by the rise of economic powers outside the Atlantic area, most notably China, and by the differential responses of Brussels and Washington to this phenomenon (see Kerremans, 2022). At the same time, however, there has also been continuing evidence of the role of transnational and transgovernmental networks in perpetuating linkages (see below, this section). The result has been a picture of unevenness and uncertainty, straining institutions, making negotiations such as those between 2013 and 2016 aimed at a transatlantic trade and investment partnership more fraught (De Ville & Siles-Brugge, 2016; Morin et al., 2015; Young, 2016), and putting pressure on what have been assumed to be central norms of market management. The interaction of international and domestic structures is both apparent and impactful, creating uncertainties and tensions and challenging established practices.

It is thus not surprising that one of the key elements in the EU's proposed "new agenda" for transatlantic relations was a revitalisation of attempts at managing transatlantic (and by extension global) markets. The Joint Communication identified several key areas in which joint EU–US action could exert significant influence: trade in health products (especially in light of the Covid pandemic), "green trade," the regulation of new and emerging technologies, for example. Structured transatlantic dialogues, joint action in multilateral arenas and, in some cases, joint institutions were proposed. The attempts to pursue this part of the agenda reflected one key fact: The nature of international structures and the range of international agents to which these initiatives might apply was wide-ranging and in some ways uncontrollable. It was also the case that in at least some of these areas, EU and US interests were not instinctively compatible. An extreme example of this condition was provided by international energy markets—an area in which the EU and some of its member states faced almost existential threats given the role of Russia, but in which the US had a far more distant interest given its relative self-sufficiency. Parallel to this was the differential between EU approaches to China (see also Raube & Vega Rubio, 2022)—shaped by commercial as well as security and values considerations—and that of the US, predominantly governed by security and values such as human rights; this was focused especially by the possibility of a far-reaching bilateral investment treaty between the EU and China, which caused tensions within the Union itself (Wintour, 2021).

Second, transatlantic relations have been characterised by hierarchies—most obviously in security (see, in this thematic issue, Cross, 2022; Knutsen, 2022; Rieker, 2022). For much of the history of the transatlantic order, the US was presumed to be the effective leader on both sides of the Atlantic because of its material power and its capacity to shape rules and institutions. The liberal international order has been as much a reflection of the predominance of the US as it has been an expression of the growth of interdependence (Ikenberry, 2018, 2021; Peterson, 2018). But by the same token, the decay of that order, its fragmentation and potential collapse have also reflected the erosion of US predominance and the unwillingness of US administrations to assume the mantle of leadership. The effects have been felt in terms of the perceived legitimacy of Atlanticism, both in the US and in the EU, and were especially intense during the Trump administration: The erosion of trust and legitimacy may have been accentuated by Washington's actions between 2017–2021, but it did not originate during that period (Jones, 2021; see also Olsen, 2022). At the same time, the capacity of the EU to compensate for these fluctuations in hierarchy, and to others focused outside the transatlantic area, has been in question: The strategic inadequacies of "European foreign policy" and its security dimension, the defection of the UK through the "Brexit" process, and internal tensions over the meaning and operationalisation of neighbourhood policies have all contributed to the erosion of belief in the idea that the EU can operate as a "power" in the world and transatlantic arenas (Duke, 2017), despite recent assertions that the EU should become more "geopolitical" and muscular in its external actions (Biscop, 2019;

Blockmans, 2020). The result of these intersecting fluctuations is as much psychological as material: The notion of a settled and acceptable hierarchy in transatlantic relations has been challenged and in places undermined.

In this context, the Joint Communication proposed reinvigorated EU–US cooperation in the "safeguarding of democracy," expressed through the pursuit of security and enhanced resilience not just in the transatlantic area but also in key regions of the world. This was an explicitly geopolitical perspective, in line with the new geopolitical orientation proclaimed by the European Commission on its installation in 2019. A parallel process was set in motion by the Biden administration during 2021, in the shape of the Summit for Democracy, held in December of that year. The Joint Communication called for an EU–US dialogue on defence and security, but events in 2021 and early 2022 challenged this deliberative image of the transatlantic relationship (although the dialogue was to have its first meeting in early 2022). The US withdrawal from Afghanistan, set in motion by the Trump administration but accelerated in the Summer by the Biden presidency, gave only a marginal and reactive role to the EU. Perhaps even more dramatically, the transatlantic response to the increasing tensions in eastern Europe during late 2021 and early 2022 saw the EU scrambling for a place at the table in a situation where US-Russian summitry took pride of place (Foy, 2022). This may have been an inevitable outcome of the geopolitical context, but it was a sharp reminder to Brussels that whatever its leverage in areas of "soft power" and geo-economics, the shift towards "hard power" privileged the US.

Despite such disparities, there is considerable resilience within the transatlantic order, reflecting in part the structural importance of another mechanism: networks. In addition to the essentially intergovernmental relationships implied in considerations of hierarchy, there is a good deal of evidence that transgovernmental and transnational relationships have enduring strength. This injects another dimension into the consideration of transatlantic order, most explicitly identified by Pollack and Shaffer twenty years ago (Pollack & Shaffer, 2001; see also Steffenson, 2005). Networks of officials and non-governmental actors ranging from multinational corporations through humanitarian and cultural bodies may be shaped by intergovernmental relations, but they also respond to market relationships, to the establishment and persistence of institutions, and to the transatlantic dissemination of ideas about the nature of international and transatlantic order. This does not mean that such networks have not been disrupted; indeed, one of the more obvious effects of "Trumpism" was the intense politicisation of apparently professional or socio-cultural networks, both within the US and across the Atlantic. Another source of disruption at the EU level was the contagion of "Trumpism" into domestic political, social, and cultural activities, and thus the disruption of networks in the domestic context as well as at the transatlantic level. At times, these were also accompanied by the intervention of "challenger networks" associated for example with China (through the Belt and Road Initiative and the 17+1 processes, through which China developed links with sub-groups of EU member states), and thus reflective at least indirectly of the international power shifts identified earlier in the article. The overall effect of these trends has been to throw into question some of the most central elements of transatlantic integration, within a context of more generalised "competitive interdependence" (Damro, 2016; Sbragia, 2010; see also the discussion of policy coherence in Raube & Vega Rubio, 2022) at the transatlantic and global levels. But at least at present, it does not appear that these tensions have fatally undermined the resilience afforded over an extended period by the growth of transatlantic networks.

Implicit in the Joint Communication was an assumption that both the EU and the US shared an interest in the promotion of transatlantic networks; these were proposed in a variety of areas such as health, climate and technology. There is no doubt that the growth of powerful and persistent transnational and transgovernmental links has been at the centre of transatlantic order, and that this has given space for the agency of a wide range of actors. Thus, the aim of promoting and enhancing this infrastructure is logical—but given the breadth and diversity of actors engaged in the process of network-building, it is not wholly or even (at times) partly under the control of the EU and the US as governmental actors. Not only this, but it engages directly with some of the issues of domestic structure that have come to shape transatlantic relations. The general aim of constructing networks in key sectors and engaging business, non-governmental organisations as well as constructing transgovernmental networks can be and has been frustrated by the often powerful agency of groups as diverse as the coal lobby, "big pharma," and transnational corporations in the transportation area. The EU and the US during 2021 cooperated more effectively than before in areas such as climate change, and the Summit for Democracy in December 2021 brought together a wide range of governmental and non-governmental groups to discuss a range of material and normative problems, but it is clear that fostering productive networks—and challenging powerful existing networks—is often easier said than done (for a perspective on EU and US dealings with China see Raube & Vega Rubio, 2022).

The discussion above demonstrates the role and the contestation of institutions broadly defined. At one level, in the transatlantic context these have been perceived as the institutions of liberal democracy, as the cement of the liberal international order and as an expression of the post-World War II settlement that was sustained by US leadership and European followership (Alcaro et al., 2016; Bouchard et al., 2014; Ikenberry, 2018, 2021, Chapter 7; Peterson, 2018). To that extent, they represent the operation of the mechanisms noted above—a kind of institutional structure aligned with and reflected in markets, hierarchies, networks, and

ideational convergence. It is questionable whether the institutions of transatlantic and global governance were ever uncontested at the transatlantic level, but it is clear that in recent years, they have been subject to intense questioning, and in some cases intense neglect. Most obviously, the Trump administration explicitly rejected recourse to a number of EU–US institutions, emphasised bilateral relations with sympathetic EU member states like Hungary (Sevastopulo & Chazan, 2019), and openly questioned the continuing utility of NATO. On the EU side, the response was uncertain, with elements of resistance and also of attempted reconciliation (for example on questions of economic sanctions). Where the Trump administration's unilateral actions effectively placed the EU in a position of dependency, for example on sanctions against Iran, one marked response by the Union was to emphasise the pursuit of "strategic autonomy," with particular reference to the US (see, for example, Fiott, 2018; Howorth, 2018; Youngs, 2021). Another EU response was to institutionalise its relationships with other "strategic partners," although this has not achieved unbroken success (Ferreira-Pereira & Smith, 2021). A third, as noted above, was to re-emphasise commitment to global multilateral institutions and to underline the Union's commitment to global governance.

These institutional developments meant that the EU was persuaded to base its Joint Communication on an assumption of institutional equivalence between Brussels and Washington—indeed, the whole "new agenda" could be read as a call for the intensive institutionalisation of the transatlantic relationship, and in a way for the consolidation of a strategic partnership between the EU and the US. This partnership was conceived as extending to joint activities in multilateral bodies such as the World Trade Organisation, and thus to a direct attempt to reform institutions of global governance. At the Transatlantic level, its major initial product was the EU–US TTC, which met for the first time in Pittsburgh during September 2021. This was in itself a direct output from the EU's "new agenda," and it set up ten working groups to review a wide range of trade and technology issues, together with a call for engagement from a wide range of industrial and civil society stakeholders (European Commission, 2021). In its scope and presentation, the TTC has echoes of earlier transatlantic efforts to formalise this partnership, such as the New Transatlantic Agenda of 1995 and the Transatlantic Economic Council of 2007. A question that immediately follows, though, is: How far can the TTC contribute to a full transatlantic partnership in the conditions of flux and geo-economic realignment that characterise the 2020s?

A final dimension of transatlantic order is the role of ideas and values. These have been inseparable from the development of relations in terms of markets, hierarchies and networks, and from the distribution of material power and ideas within the transatlantic order. Whilst they can be defined in terms of pluralism, liberal democracy and open markets, they have always been strongly infused with considerations of US power, both material and institutional. Most particularly, they have been conceived in terms of multilateralism: the set of practices and values that privilege the management of relationships in terms of reciprocity, negotiation, and institutionalised habits of cooperation (Smith, 2018). In recent years, this apparent consensus on core values and practices has been challenged in two ways. First, there has been the challenge of competing multilateralisms, reflecting the material power shifts that have taken place in the world arena and challenging the assumed centrality of "western" values and models. As in other areas, the key challenge here has emerged from China, which has promoted a form of multilateralism shaped by the interests and resources of an emerging superpower. Second, and much closer to home, the crisis of multilateralist ideas was heightened by the behaviour of the Trump administration in disowning multilateral commitments, pronouncing an international policy based on "America First" and practising the politics of unilateralism or opportunistic bilateralism (Smith, 2021). As with other areas, such ideational disruptions can be traced back, in part, to the broader disruption of the world order, to the emergence of new powers, and to the contestation of "reigning ideas." But they are also integral to the current and recent state of the transatlantic order itself (as suggested, this thematic issue, by Olsen, 2022). One response by the EU has been to double down on ideas of multilateralism, through the Franco-German proposal in 2019 for a new global governance initiative under the banner of the "alliance for multilateralism" and the subsequent Joint Communication on the EU's role (European Commission & European External Action Service, 2021; Kaplan & Keijzer, 2019), alongside the idea noted above, that the Union should promote its own "strategic autonomy" and thus a more muscular and "geopolitical" approach to external action as well as a network of bilateral strategic partnerships.

This implies that the Joint Communication of December 2020, and the EU's "new agenda" for EU–US relations, can be read explicitly as a template for a reassertion of common values and ideas at the transatlantic level, and a reflection of the EU's search for agency in that process (European Commission, 2020). Key to this effort are the linked ideas of multilateralism and democracy. Throughout the Joint Communication, it was made clear that the EU wished to regenerate ideas of multilateralism and to form the kind of partnership with the US that might form the basis for a revival of multilateral institutions for global governance. At the level of EU–US relations, this implied a commitment to openness and reciprocity, while at the global level it promoted the idea of the rules-based international order—and openly cast the EU and the US as points of resistance to competing models of order such as those promoted by the Chinese. In the case of democracy, the Joint Communication set out an agenda for the defence of democracy and for the promotion of resilience where

democratic institutions are challenged. The defence and revitalisation of democracy was also at the core of the Summit for Democracy held by the Biden administration in Washington DC in December 2021 (The White House, 2021)—not simply an EU–US initiative, but a much wider multilateral event organised and framed by the US, and one that involved a very wide range of governmental and non-governmental bodies.

4. Conclusion

This article has attempted to clarify the relationship between changing international and domestic structures, the nature of transatlantic relations, and the pursuit of transatlantic order through several key mechanisms. Overall, the argument leads to a number of key conclusions. These relate to the nature and extent of changes in the world order, which have created a context of flux and transition, to the implications these changes have for the exercise of agency and, particularly, for the exercise of structural power, to the ways in which they have been mediated and shaped by mechanisms at the transatlantic level, and to the challenges that structural change has created for the effectiveness of those mechanisms (markets, hierarchies, networks, institutions, and ideas). Whilst the impact of overall structure can be seen as crucial in a very broad sense, it is at the level of mechanisms and domains that the evolution of EU–US relations can be defined more precisely, and the fate of the EU's call for a "new agenda" can be evaluated. This is especially the case in light of the crisis created by the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022. At a stroke, this event raised a set of linked challenges to EU–US relations and to broader transatlantic relations in respect of markets (through its reverberations in terms of energy security and economic sanctions), hierarchies (through its attack on the European security order and its escalation of risks in defending that order), networks (through its impact on public and private actors at the transnational and the transgovernmental level), institutions (through its rejection of core principles of international cooperation and negotiation), and ideas (through its frontal assault on democracy and legitimacy in the European order). How is analysis of this set of challenges supported by the discussion in this article?

The discussion of mechanisms, as opposed to broad structures, gives a nuanced and differentiated view of the ways in which transatlantic relations have been affected by broader forces of global structure and domestic pressure. The assumption that there would be a return to a form of transatlantic order familiar to those whose world had been challenged by the Trump administration, focused on multilateralism and the evolution of the EU–US partnership, ignored or wished away the longer-term structural changes that had operated not just between 2017 and 2021, but arguably from the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. In this context, the EU's push for a "new EU–US agenda" could be seen as a plan for the renewal of transatlantic order and governance. But it could also be seen as a play for recognition as a "partner in leadership" or an attempt to create a situation in which the EU and the US together could re-shape broader world order and global governance—both of these implying an assertion of agency and structural power. Equally, the Biden administration's reinvigoration of multilateralism could be seen as an attempt to bring together democracies on a global level (the idea of the D10 democratic countries and the Summit for Democracy). But it could also be seen as a reassertion of the US' right to lead, or as a recipe for western minilateralism, with the aim of defying or rolling back the geopolitical and geo-economic shifts analysed earlier and reasserting the US' predominant agency. Both of these positions encapsulate a specific idea of agency: that it is for the EU and the US to act as partners in the revitalisation of the rules-based international order, and that if they get their act together, then others will feel able to fall in line and reject the alternatives. The Russian attack on Ukraine posed a direct challenge to such ideas, but at least in the short term it appeared to lead to a broadening and deepening of partnership between the EU and the US, in which the EU was able to take on a role in the joint leadership of a transatlantic response, and move beyond a purely "civilian" or soft power orientation.

This appears to confirm that an enhancement of transatlantic partnership cannot simply be pronounced as a comprehensive strategy: It has to respond to the specific structures, processes, and range of agents present in key areas of transatlantic and world order—and in this case, to the crisis in eastern Europe provoked by Russian actions as well as to broader challenges (Rachman, 2022). Thus, while it is clearly possible—but challenging—for the EU and the US to concert their activities in terms of markets, this does not pre-ordain that their efforts will be successful either at the transatlantic or at the global level as the implications of sanctions become apparent on both sides of the Atlantic. While it is possible for the EU to present itself as a newly capable partner for the US in matters of security, the inexorable effects of the geopolitical hierarchy may expose the limitations of such a view in the longer term. Whilst networks are a source of resilience and creativity at the transatlantic level, they are far from completely subject to EU–US cooperation at the governmental level, and they are often global in their scope and reach—creating tensions as responses to the events in Ukraine feed into the operation of commercial and governmental communication chains. Transatlantic institutions can be reformed, maybe as the basis for a "bi-multilateral'' effort to cooperate in pursuit of leverage in global governance, but they have to operate in a world of "competitive interdependence" where there are rivals and alternatives—and since February 2022 in a world where the foundations of the liberal world order have been fundamentally challenged. Finally, the regeneration of multilateralism

and democracy can be adopted as a transatlantic project, but it depends upon far more than EU–US cooperation if it is to extend beyond the north Atlantic area in a newly-hostile environment.

In terms of the five more specific (and largely agent-centred) arguments that are central to the thematic issue, an estimate of their validity looks as follows in light of the discussion here. The first argument, focused on "strategic utility," is partly borne out by the discussion, but with the major qualification that the "strategic utility" of the transatlantic relationship to both the EU and the US is strongly conditioned by broader forces of world order and international or domestic structures. Likewise, the economic utility of the relationship is strongly conditioned by the structural shifts in the global economic order outlined in the article, and by the intervention of external actors. The transatlantic relationship is not a sealed system—in fact, it is heavily dependent for its relevance on considerations of international structure and world order. In relation to transatlantic institutions, the argument is borne out in part, since the established institutions of transatlantic relations are certainly challenged and demand restoration. But even if they are restored, how effective might they be in constructing a transatlantic order that is resilient and relevant in the face of broader structural change? In relation to the fourth argument about mutual perceptions, it is not clear that perceptions on either side of the Atlantic have adjusted to the kinds of structural change—and the kinds of long-term strategic solutions—that might be required to make the relationship relevant. In this context, it is vital that policy-makers on both sides focus not only on the measures necessary to restore trust and resilience, but also on a realistic assessment of the relevance of the transatlantic order and the agency available to both the EU and the US, in a world in transition. Finally, there is support for the argument advanced by the editors in the introduction to this thematic issue that domestic political and other cleavages can challenge the legitimacy of transatlantic order by providing structural constraints on the activities of governments and other institutions (Riddervold & Newsome, 2022); but there is also evidence that these pressures coexist with external structural constraints and opportunities in a complex set of processes that can create unexpected conflicts and contradictions. Despite the transatlantic unity achieved in the face of the Russian assault on Ukraine in February 2022, and the significant evidence of EU policy development in fields closely linked to "hard security" at that time, it is too early to conclude that a step-change in transatlantic relations will result, or that the EU will achieve the kind of "strategic autonomy" that would make it a full strategic partner for the US in challenging times. Still less is it possible to assert that the capacity of the EU and the US to exercise structural power in Europe or more broadly can be maintained or enhanced in a potentially transformed world order.

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