



FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES FACING THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION EUROPE AND EURASIA

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ABOUT THE NEW CENTER

American politics is broken, with the far left and far right making it increasingly impossible to govern. This will not change until a vibrant center emerges with an agenda that appeals to the vast majority of the American people. This is the mission of The New Center, which aims to establish the ideas and the community to create a powerful political center in today's America.

THE NEW CENTER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trump administration marked a noticeable shift in America's posture toward its traditional European allies and international organizations. The president was skeptical of multilateral agreements and organizations; for example, Trump [often cited](#) the U.S.-E.U. trade relationship as unfair to the United States and [criticized](#) fellow NATO members for not meeting agreed-upon domestic defense spending targets.

This posturing produced tangible effects. On the one hand, more NATO members are now meeting their defense spending benchmarks. According to a [NATO report](#) released in October 2020, ten NATO members are now spending at the 2% benchmark following six consecutive years of defense spending increases, up from just three meeting this target in 2014. On the other hand, according to the Pew Research Center's [Summer 2020 Global Attitudes Survey](#), America's favorability ratings amongst traditional allies such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany have plummeted to an all-time low.

The Biden administration [announced](#) that it “will do more than restore our historic partnerships; it will lead the effort to reimagine them for the future.” But changing dynamics in Europe might make this vision more difficult. In an interview at Dartmouth in 2019, Biden's appointed National Security Advisor [Jake Sullivan said](#) that “Europe is feeling immense pressure from its East, from Russia, from its South, from a refugee crisis that will only accelerate and not abate, and then from its West, with Brexit... even without Donald Trump, the pressure and stress on the European project are profound.”

Here are the most critical emerging challenges in Europe and Eurasia the Biden administration will likely need to address.





URGENT PRIORITY

NEGOTIATING U.S.-RUSSIA ARMS CONTROL

New START is the only remaining treaty that limits the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the U.S., which together control [90% of the world's nuclear arms](#). It is the latest in a series of [arms control agreements and negotiations](#) between the United States and Russia (and formerly the Soviet Union) that date back to the 1970s. These include: SALT I, SALT II, START I, START II, the START III Framework, and SORT. [New START](#) was signed by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dimitry Medvedev on April 8, 2010. Following ratification by the U.S. Senate and the Russian Duma and Federation Council, the treaty entered into force on February 5, 2011. New START features detailed strategic and offensive arms limits, a monitoring and verification regime, and a seven-year deadline by which parties were required to reduce their forces.

According to the original terms of New START, the treaty would be in effect for ten years, which means that it is set to expire on February 5, 2021, with the option for a five-year renewal. While negotiations to renew New START were underway between the Russian government and the Trump administration, the two parties reached an impasse over tougher new terms requested by American officials and a clean renewal requested by Russian officials. Thus, the decision for how to proceed on U.S.-Russia arms control rests with the Biden administration, which [announced](#) on January 21, 2020 that it will seek a 5-year extension on New START.

NEW START LIMITS AND THE CURRENT AGGREGATE ARMS DATA

New START Limits	800 deployed and nondeployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers and heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear weapons	700 deployed ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear weapons	1,550 deployed warheads
Current Aggregated Numbers of Strategic and Offensive Arms for the United States	800	675	1,457
Current Aggregated Numbers of Strategic and Offensive Arms for the Russian Federation	764	510	1,447

Note: Arms Data Current as of September 1, 2020. Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) and [CRS](#).

NEGOTIATING A U.S.-U.K. TRADE DEAL

On May 5, 2020, representatives from the United States and the United Kingdom [launched](#) the first round of talks toward establishing a free trade agreement between the two nations. These negotiations were prompted by the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (commonly known as Brexit) in January 2020.

As of December 2020, negotiators have successfully worked through four rounds of trade talks. According to the [most recent documents](#) relating to trade deal negotiations obtained by POLITICO, “sections related to small and medium-sized businesses, investment and digital services were close to completion...but there were some substantial outstanding points, particularly on the issues of pharmaceutical regulation, textiles and other goods standards along with some thorny points on intellectual property.”

Negotiations were slowed by the U.S. presidential race, the Brexit transition process (which comes with its own internal political strife, such as Northern Ireland border issues), and the fact that the U.K. is attempting to negotiate trade deals with multiple parties at once, a process which used to be handled by E.U. negotiators.

A new year brings a sense of urgency to trade talks. Advocates want to reach an agreement while a trade deal can still be ratified in the U.S. under the [Trade Promotion Authority \(TPA\)](#), which allows for a simple up or down majority vote in Congress for international agreements that have been negotiated by the President, amongst other protections. Because the Trade Protection Authority is only authorized through July 1, 2021, and the bill can spend a maximum of 90 days in session, negotiators have until April to present an agreed-upon deal to Congress.

It is not clear that President Joe Biden shares the Trump administration's sense of urgency to finalize a trade deal, however. In a December 2020 [New York Times interview](#) with Thomas Friedman, Biden said that he wants “make sure we're going to fight like hell by investing in America first... I'm not going to enter any new trade agreement with anybody until we have major investments here at home and in our workers.”



Negotiators from the U.S. and U.K. meeting virtually for trade negotiations. Source: [United States Trade Representative](#).

WATCH LIST

NORD STREAM 2 PIPELINE PROJECT

Nord Stream 2 is a [natural gas pipeline project](#) that would supply more Russian natural gas to Germany and other European states. Construction of the pipeline is expected to be completed by early 2021. Nord Stream 2 will double the amount of natural gas supplied to Europe from Russia from 55 to 110 billion cubic meters (BCM).



Gazprom's Nord Stream Pipelines. Source: [Gazprom](#) and [Geopolitical Intelligence Services](#).

The project is particularly critical for Germany, which is in the middle of its [Energiewende](#) plan to transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to a low-carbon economy. As Germany closes down its nuclear and coal-fired plants, a steady and strong supply of natural gas is needed to meet energy demands and replace “dirtier” fossil fuels.

On the other hand, there are many reasons why other European governments, as well as the United States, oppose Nord Stream 2. Importing more natural gas from Russia doesn’t contribute to energy source diversification, which critics argue makes EU member states more dependent on Russia and more exposed to political and economic risks. Nord Stream 2 might also pose a risk to Ukraine; in an [October 2020 letter](#) published by the Atlantic Council, 29 members of the Ukrainian parliament argued that “Russia relies on Ukraine to sell billions of dollars in natural gas to customers in Europe... the completion of the pipeline would eliminate Ukraine’s key leverage over Russia, leaving our country wholly vulnerable to Russian subjugation. For Ukraine, it’s an almost existential matter of national defense and security.”

President Trump vocally opposed Nord Stream 2 and [signed several bipartisan bills](#) in the last few years relating to it, including the Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017, House Resolution 1035, The Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019 (PEESA), and the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act.

It is expected that Biden's administration will also oppose the Nord Stream 2 project. In 2016, during his time as Vice President, [Joe Biden remarked](#) that Nord Stream 2 was a "bad deal" for Europe. However, President Biden is up against the clock, with construction of Nord Stream 2 almost finished. Convincing EU countries to abandon Nord Stream 2 may require action from the Biden administration in the form of imposing more expansive sanctions or offering European nations [increased](#) U.S. liquefied natural gas exports, which could be processed through LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminals in Poland and Lithuania, as an alternative to Russian gas.

PROTESTS IN BELARUS

Alexander Lukashenko has been serving as the first and only president of Belarus since 1994, taking control following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Despite consistent protests from citizens and advocacy groups over the years for democratic reforms and against Lukashenko's rule, the Belarusian strongman has held onto and even consolidated power. However, the economic and public health crisis brought on by COVID-19 escalated the public's frustration. On top of that, Lukashenko faced a surprisingly compelling candidate in Belarus's 2020 Presidential Election: political outsider Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Lukashenko won the election on August 9, 2020, but international observers and many Belarusians alleged widespread fraud. In response, massive public demonstrations began in August 2020 and continue to this day.

It's created a simmering situation that could boil over in the form of more strident or violent public protests, as well as efforts by Lukashenko to suppress them. Russia is also seeking to exploit the situation to its advantage. The [Atlantic Council reports](#) that, according to [leaked documents](#) obtained by Russian investigative journalism website The Insider, Moscow "intends to create at least one pro-Russian political party in Belarus. The plan envisages winning future parliamentary elections through a newly created proxy or puppet political party that would be opposed to Lukashenka while favoring continued integration between Belarus and Russia."

CALLS FOR EUROPEAN COLLECTIVE DEFENSE

According to some European leaders, America is no longer as dependable a political and military partner as it used to be. In a speech from September 2017, French President [Emmanuel Macron said](#) that "Europe needs to establish a common intervention force, a common defence budget and a common doctrine for action" in response to "gradual and inevitable disengagement by the United States." And it seems that other European nations share Macron's sentiments; just one year later, in June 2018, representatives from Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain [agreed to form](#) a European intervention force. What is now formally known as the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) has officially reached fourteen members.

As opposed to promoting the build-up of a stand-alone armed force, EI2 was [instead developed](#) to promote better interoperability amongst European nations' individual domestic armed forces while increasing intelligence sharing and threat assessment capabilities, so that EI2 members can more effectively respond to crises together.

While the European Intervention Initiative was not intended to undermine NATO, the increased emphasis from European governments on responsibility for their own collective self-defense will inevitably force the Biden administration to reevaluate the foundations of the longstanding transatlantic partnership.

PROTESTS IN RUSSIA

On January 23-24, 2020, Russian authorities arrested [over 3,000 individuals](#) across 90 cities for being involved with demonstrations demanding the release of Russian opposition leader Aleksei Navalny and calling for democratic reforms in Russia. The anti-government protests are the largest in years, with the Associated Press reporting that 15,000 people gathered in the capital of Moscow alone.

Discontent mounted when Russian opposition leader Aleksei Navalny was arrested on January 17, 2020, after returning to Moscow from Berlin, where he had been recuperating from a previous assassination attempt. [A joint investigation](#) by Bellingcat, The Insider, Der Spiegel, and CNN concluded it was the work of Russian FSB agents who had poisoned him with Novichok, a deadly nerve agent. The Russian government, which denies involvement in Navalny's poisoning, has long sought to hamper Navalny's anti-corruption and pro-democracy activism.

In response to the demonstrations and arrests, the U.S. Department of State [released a statement](#) supporting the civil liberties of protesters, calling for Navalny's release, and condemning the use of "harsh tactics" against demonstrators and journalists.



⚠️ SIMMERING CONFLICTS

FIGHTING OVER NAGORNO-KARABAKH

In September 2020, a long-standing dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh suddenly escalated into the most serious armed conflict the region has seen since 1994. Following three failed cease-fire attempts brokered by France, Russia, and the United States, Armenia and Azerbaijan finally [agreed to a cease-fire](#) on November 10, 2020. But if history serves as a guide, the conflict could reignite at any moment.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a [landlocked, disputed region](#) in Central Asia that is within Azerbaijan and surrounded by Armenia, Iran, Georgia, and Russia. The Soviet Union originally designated Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous administrative region in Azerbaijan in 1923. In 1988, Nagorno-Karabakh, which has an ethnic Armenian majority, petitioned to join Armenia, resulting in increased regional tensions and fighting.

These clashes intensified in 1991 as both Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence from the crumbling USSR and sought control over Nagorno-Karabakh. After years of fighting, Armenia and Azerbaijan finally agreed to a ceasefire agreement in 1994, known as the Bishkek Protocol, which has remained in place ever since.

However, because territorial disputes were never addressed and a peace treaty was never signed, the region has been intermittently plagued by fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, with a drastic escalation occurring in September that was precipitated by the killing of an Azerbaijani general in July. This [most recent escalation](#) has left hundreds of people dead and thousands displaced, although some sources report higher tolls.

President Biden has [said previously](#) that “credible negotiations on a lasting resolution of the conflict must commence immediately once a ceasefire is concluded.” In 2021, the Biden administration will need to monitor the actions of Russia, Turkey, and Iran, as these regional actors have been diplomatically or militarily involved in the conflict in the past, and will most certainly seek to exert further influence in the future.



TERRITORIAL DISPUTES IN UKRAINE

In December 2020, the [International Crisis Group](#) labeled the territorial conflict in Ukraine as having “deteriorated,” citing over 200 ceasefire violations in Eastern Ukraine that were recorded over just three days. This conflict, now entering its seventh year, was initially precipitated by Ukraine’s deteriorating domestic political situation. In November 2013, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich [suspended](#) the signing of an association agreement with the European Union, citing pressure from Moscow. In response, Ukrainian citizens took to the streets en masse in a series of protests known as “Euromaidan.”

Following months of civil unrest, on February 21, 2014, Yanukovich and parliamentary opposition leaders [signed](#) the “Agreement on the Settlement of the Crisis in Ukraine.” By the next day, Yanukovich had fled to Russia, and shortly thereafter, the Ukrainian parliament removed him as president and set up an interim government.

In response to these political developments, and in an attempt to secure its own interests, Russia sent troops to Crimea and annexed it by March 2014. Shortly thereafter, pro-Russian separatists, aided by Russian military forces, declared the establishment of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics in the eastern Donbass region of Ukraine. Moscow has denied the presence of Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine, with the [Interpreter reporting](#) that Russian President Vladimir Putin came close to admitting military involvement by saying that Russia was “forced to defend the Russian-speaking population in the Donbass.”

Russia’s annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Ukraine has been widely condemned by the international community through targeted sanctions, United Nations General Assembly resolutions, and NATO deployments to Eastern Europe. Russia and Ukraine, in concert with other international actors, are in the process of trying to [resolve the conflict](#) diplomatically through the Minsk Protocol and Minsk II agreements, signed in September 2014 and February 2015, respectively. However, as noted by the Congressional Research Service, “measures in Minsk-2 for ending hostilities largely remain unfulfilled to date.”

The consequences of close to seven years of unresolved hostilities are grim; according to the Council on Foreign Relations’ [Global Conflict Tracker](#), the conflict in Ukraine has resulted in over 10,000 civilian casualties and 1.5 million people being internally displaced. President Biden re-enters the White House to encounter a Russo-Ukrainian conflict much unchanged from his time as Vice President but necessitating now more than ever a strong response from the United States to prevent further bloodshed and civil unrest.