The Future of the EU as a Military Hard Power: A US political perspective

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Abstract

The current war in Ukraine and the coinciding tectonic shifts in geopolitics have made discussions about the role of the US as the security provider of the European continent and the increased role of the EU as a security actor within the European security architecture more relevant than ever. It is therefore crucial to understand the US White House perspectives on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor. That is why this thesis analyses the research question '*Has the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor changed under the administrations of Trump and Biden and if so how?*' by using a critical discourse analysis. The findings underpin that this perspective has changed from a skeptical and critical perspective under the Trump administration to a supportive and stimulating perspective under the Biden administration. This change is meaningful as it has contributed to a context whereby EU defence policies can be realized more easily, while also leading to actual steps of enhanced cooperative US-EU security measures contributing to the further development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor. This change can be explained by two core reasons. First, perceptions will differ when two administrations look at the same international strategic context, which is shifting towards a multipolar world order, through different lenses. Second, in certain circumstances these lenses must bow to the hard reality of the international strategic context if it is sufficiently undeniable. This led to a situation whereby the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine made the Biden administration realize that it needs the EU as a partner in order to defend the US led world order and hegemonial position with multiple geopolitical threats now coming its way, the most important one still coming from China.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, a geopolitical shift can be seen in which the strategic interests of the United States (US) in the European continent relatively declined. This shift is underlined by the recent *US National Defense Strategy* (Biden, 2022) and the coinciding US defense priorities. An analysis of these priorities shows that Asia, and specifically the People's Republic of China (PRC), rather than Europe, has become the number one priority for the US (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). This shift started under the Obama administration in 2011 when it declared its 'Pivot to Asia' (Cumings, 2016). When explaining this shift, the power dynamics over the last two decades are shifting from a unipolar to a multipolar world order in which the US, as the sole hegemon, is challenged by powers like China aiming to change the current world order and displace the US from its number one position in power politics (Allison, 2017; Scobell, et al., 2020). This shift has sparked an intensified discussion in the West about European security and the role of the US as the security provider of the European continent (Ekim, 2017; Retter, et al. 2021). Part of this discussion is not new, however, and can be traced back many decades to the post-WWII era (Engberg, 2021). An important element in this debate touches upon tensions between the role of the US as the security provider of the European continent since the end of the Second World War and the increased role of the European Union (EU) as a more autonomous security actor within the European security architecture (ESA) (Techau, 2015). Although some of these tensions remain present, it can be concluded that the nature of the discussion is changing, due to this geopolitical shift impacting the strategic context (Ekim, 2017; Retter, et al. 2021).

Within this context, Russia's aggression on the European continent has made the debate and the coinciding differing transatlantic perspectives on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor more relevant than ever. The role of the US as the security provider of the European continent is central to the discussions (Sinkkonen & Martin, 2022). This can be illustrated by the important role of the US in supporting the Ukrainian government in defending their country against Russia's full-scale war. The US efforts have assuaged doubts in Europe about whether the US is committed to protecting the European continent as well (Olsen, 2022). The full-scale war in Ukraine has furthermore changed the dynamics within the discussion on the future of ESA significantly. An analysis of the current

literature shows that much is written about the consequences of US foreign policy on Europe under the administrations of Trump and Biden (Olsen, 2022; Brattberg & Valášek, 2019; Dimitrova, 2020; Sinkkonen & Martin, 2022; Knutsen, 2022). On the other hand, recent developments within the US foreign policy perspectives on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA are so new that it leaves room for this thesis to contribute to the literature by answering the main research question:

Has the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor changed under the administrations of Trump and Biden and if so how?

This thesis is structured as follows. The next chapter provides the reader with the historical background to the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA from an US perspective. In doing so, it includes the coinciding debates within the literature since the end of the Cold War. The third chapter addresses the methodology, while the fourth and fifth chapters dive deeper into the differing political perspectives within the US administrations of Trump and Biden, by using a critical discourse analysis. Finally, the sixth chapter summarises the previous sections and offers insights from this research by answering the research question while addressing possible implications and questions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter sets out the historical context of the significant developments and discussions related to the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within the relevant literature. Serving as the foundation of this thesis, the historical context of the reconstruction of the European security architecture after the end of the Cold War up until now is explained, including the role of the relevant institutions in this architecture. In order to be able to understand this development, it is important to understand what is meant by 'European security architecture'.

Defining European security architecture ('ESA')

Current academic literature leads to the conclusion that there is broad agreement on what is meant by 'security architecture'. This broad agreement is evidenced by definitions from various authors. For example, Taylor & Tow define it as 'an overarching, coherent and comprehensive security structure for a geographically-defined area, which facilitates the resolution of that region's policy concerns and achieves its security objectives' (Taylor & Tow, 2010, p.96). Another example is Rolls, who defines it more succinctly as 'those institutions, mechanisms, norms and processes aimed at fostering regional security and stability' (Rolls, 2020, p.97). When specifically looking at the definition of 'European security architecture', this thesis will use the following definition: 'the combination of governance structures, capabilities, norms, ideas and values that allow EU member states and European non-EU NATO member states to collectively make decisions and take action in the realm of security and defence' (Zandee, et al. 2020, p.11)

Post-Cold War Era

Much has been written about ESA and how this security structure should take further form after the Cold War (Biscop, 2020; Chappell & Mawdsley, 2019; Croft, 2000; Cobaleda, 2020; Engberg, 2021; Goda, 2015; Ojanen, 2006; Posen; 2006; Van Ham, 2006). The following section addresses the historical context of these changing security dynamics in order to clearly sketch the current context of ESA and how the US administrations of Trump and Biden look at the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor.

Until the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact dominated ESA in the context of a bipolar world order (Cobaleda, 2020. p.8). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the dynamics of ESA fundamentally changed as a security vacuum emerged in the area where the former Warsaw Pact members (excluding Russia) resided (Spohr, 2022. p. 2). Within this renewed security architecture, NATO, the EU, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), born out of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), played a central role. Besides these organizations, international agreements (e.g. treaties) and their coinciding norms and principles, such as respecting international law, played an important role as well (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2015; Goda, 2015).

Following the period between the Helsinki Accords in 1975 and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 in which the CSCE played an important role (Galbreath, 2019, p.68-82), different visions came to light on how this renewed security architecture should take form. The first category focussed on developing collective security in Europe through the pan-European OSCE (German-Czech view). The second category focussed on developing a separate security and defence identity through the EU (French-Belgian view). The third category focussed on creating a cohesive body of differing geopolitical powers within Europe through a European security council led by the major powers in Europe (meaning Russia, US, Britain, France and Germany) by modifying the OSCE structure and subordinating NATO (Russian view). Finally, the fourth category focussed on retaining NATO's dominance within Europe, a view mainly propagated by the US and the UK (Croft, 2000, p.1-8; Hill, 2018, p.39-67).

Ten years after the end of the Cold War, however, two visions had taken over the debate and dominated ESA: the NATO-vision and the EU-vision (Croft, 2000, p.1-8). Importantly, in this initial debate after the Cold War there were also sounds about disbanding NATO, even from within the US itself (Croft, 2000). Although both visions about the EU and NATO thus dominated ESA after this initial post-Cold War period (Chappell & Mawdsley, 2019, p. 22-28; Goda, 2015. p.3), the debate on several important questions with regard to this new security architecture continued.

Role of Russia in ESA

The common thread through these debates is the role of Russia and its relations with the rest of the security architecture. Those relations have deteriorated since the 2000s, as demonstrated by the current war in Ukraine, which has impacted the US perspective on ESA and the role of the EU as an autonomous security actor.

An important element in these tensions was the question of how exactly, after the Cold War, Russia and the former *Warsaw Pact* members would fit into this new security architecture and how the security vacuum created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union would be addressed (Spohr, K. 2022. p. 2). It is clear from the historical context that it was the EU and NATO which filled this security vacuum (Chappell & Mawdsley, 2019, p. 22-28; Goda, 2015. p.3). This development, however, also contributed to triggering important debates which have affected the current relations between Russia and the rest of the security architecture. Within these debates a key question is whether the enlargement of EU and particularly NATO into this security vacuum would hurt the overall stability of ESA.

On the one hand, critics argue that NATO enlargement eastwards is counterproductive as it would undermine Russia's willingness to cooperate because it would perceive this as a threat (Rauchhaus, 2000, p.4). However, this is hardly surprising as Russia, even in the initial period after the Cold War, voiced its views and concerns to ensure that NATO would get a diminished role in the new European security architecture (Croft, 2000). Within this debate, critics like Mearsheimer more recently have also voiced this opinion by arguing that NATO enlargement eastwards is a threat to Russia's 'core strategic interests', something to which Russia will have to react in a non-cooperative way (Mearsheimer, 2014).

On the other side of the spectrum, NATO and certain academics have always pointed to the 'open door policy' of NATO and the defensive nature of the alliance, while at the same time arguing that NATO enlargement eastwards brought stability to Central and Eastern Europe in times of post-Cold War instability (Asmus, 2008. p. 99; NATO, 2022a). Additionally, they argue that Russian rhetoric with regard to this topic is all part of Kremlin's frame, creating a narrative for domestic political purposes. A fictional foe – the West – would be 'portrayed as a danger to Russian statehood' (Synder, 2019. p.48-52; Asmus, 2008. p.100-101). Moreover, they point to the notion that countries 'are free to choose their alliances' (Asmus, 2008. p.100-101). Related to this issue, but often overlooked, is the perspective and actorness of the

former Warsaw Pact members in this discussion that explains the legitimate security reasons for these countries choosing to opt for EU and NATO membership (Asmus & Vondra, 2005).

When analysing these debates, the most important conclusion is that each country is free to choose the alliance it wants to join, as agreed within the OSCE and thus also by Russia itself (OSCE, 2010). However, even though there certainly have been moments of security cooperation between Russia and the rest of European security architecture, the relationship between Russia and the West clearly started to deteriorate since the 2000s (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2015; Goda, 2015). Moreover, in the course of that same period the Kremlin has become more assertive and aggressive in power politics, while distancing itself from the West and from cooperation within ESA (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2015; Goda, 2015). In combination with this Russian change in foreign policy, the Kremlin started to change its discourse as well. It has increasingly portrayed an existential fight between Russia and the West over identity and values in which the enlargement of NATO and the EU is described as a threat to Russia (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016. p.249-335). This historical context and the tensions over the relative dominance of the EU and NATO within the post-Soviet security vacuum play an important role in the current conflict raging in Europe. Likewise, they affect the US political perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA.

Specific role OSCE and the Council of Europe

To understand this newly reconstructed post Cold-War security architecture, it is also important to understand the specific role of both the OSCE and the Council of Europe in ESA, as they explain the current dynamics. Coming back to the initial period after the Cold War, the German-Czech idea about building this new security architecture through the OSCE evidently lost to the Anglo-American idea focussing on retaining NATO's dominance. According to scholars this inevitably led to NATO's enlargement eastwards (Croft, 2000. p.15; Hill, 2018, p.39-67). However, no single institution dominated ESA and represented all European countries, and it is exactly that role which the OSCE and the Council of Europe as two pan-European organizations have tried to fulfil. This is important especially when looking at it from a security perspective, as according to some scholars cooperation through such organizations contributes to decreasing the risks of conflict (Galbreath, 2019, p.68-82; Croft, 2000). However, due to the conflict between Russia and the rest of ESA, the significance of the OSCE

and the Council of Europe within ESA has diminished and they will need to reinvent themselves in that context (Casier, 2022, p.79). This became evident when Putin decided to invade Georgia in 2008, while the Russian invasion in Ukraine in 2014 and the coinciding full-scale war in 2022 confirms the assumption that Russia, for now, has turned its back on cooperation within ESA. That assumption is underscored by the Russian withdrawal from the Council of Europe on 15 March 2022 (Council of Europe, 2022). This is important to understand as the dynamics within ESA thus have changed significantly, also impacting how US politicians look at the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA.

The increasing threat coming out of Russia and its implications for NATO

The other implications coming with this changed attitude of the Kremlin within power politics are significant for the dynamics within ESA as well. The most relevant one focusses on its implications for NATO. Scholars have argued that the start of the war in Ukraine in 2014 contributed to a fundamental shift in the thought process regarding ESA, also in the United States (Ischinger, 2015; Wilson, 2014. p.205-207). Proof of this shift is based on the following compelling arguments. First, these events marked a moment in time in which many European countries realized they had invested too little for too long in their defences. Thus, a few months after the invasion of Crimea, at the Wales summit in 2014 NATO allies committed to devoting 2 percent of their GDP to defence by 2024 (Sperling & Webber, 2020, p.518; Cobaleda, A. 2020, p. 24). Second, NATO decided to establish an enhanced forward presence military posture in Eastern Europe while supporting Ukraine's resilience against Russia together with the EU (Novák, 2015, p. 244–266; Cobaleda, A. 2020. p.24-25). Scholars argue that Putin's full-scale war in 2022 accelerated this fundamental shift in thinking about ESA while stirring up the debate on how the European security architecture should be governed (Sweeney & Winn, 2022; Webber, et al. 2022). The shift is evidenced by two important documents: the new EU *Strategic Compass* envisaging a significant leap in European defence cooperation and NATO's new *Strategic Concept* including important elements like a change in NATO's military posture, moving from enhanced forward presence to forward defence (European Union, 2022; NATO, 2022b).

EU as a security actor within ESA

Focussing on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor, great strides have been taken since the end of the Cold War, when the EU started to develop into an institutionalized security actor. Significant progress was made in 1992 when the European Community 'was transformed from an economic *Community* into a political *Union*' in which the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was established as one of the three pillars on which the European Union rested (Cobaleda, 2020. p.10; Goda, 2015). This significant step is important to note because, from the US perspective, a new security actor had entered the geopolitical arena which could possibly interfere with their interests in Europe (Gobaleda, 2020, p.34). The continued growth of the EU's security and defence policies and capabilities led to another debate, which also can be seen in the current transatlantic discussions. This debate concerns the issue of whether the EU, as a security actor, is compatible with NATO. It raises questions about whether the further development of the EU as a security actor might see EU defence capabilities overlapping or duplicating NATO structures (Sangiovanni, 2003). Furthermore, a central question in this debate is whether and how well both institutions will cooperate (Ojanen, H. 2006; Howorth, J. 2018). An important aspect in this regard is the US view of the development of the EU as a security actor and whether this development will be beneficial for transatlantic relations, given that the US could perceive it as a threat to their strategic interests in Europe (Posen, 2006). Tying in with all this is the debate on the European quest for *strategic autonomy*.

In this classical debate, which has been going on for decades, proponents (Biscop, 2020; Fiott, 2019; Howorth, 2018; Ischinger, 2015) argue that the EU should be able to set their own priorities and make their own decisions with regard to foreign policy, security and defence. They hold that the EU should have the means to be able to achieve these decisions independently, for example by developing a European defence capability of such significance to be able to protect Europe without having to rely on the US to step in. Furthermore, these proponents argue that a stronger geopolitical Europe would be beneficial for transatlantic relations as it would strengthen the transatlantic partnership in general, for example by taking on more responsibility in sharing the burden of European security. According to these authors, achieving strategic autonomy would ultimately increase the security within ESA and allow the US to focus more on the East, on geopolitical threats like the ones coming from China.

On the other side of the debate, critics within the literature historically question the feasibility of this strategic autonomy, pointing to the flawed state of European defence cooperation and other significant hinderances (Sangiovanni, 2003; Haroche, 2017; Coffey, 2013). Additionally, authors on this side of the debate have long been wary about unnecessarily offending the US, as the security provider for the European continent. They fear that this quest for autonomy would lead to a European 'alleingang' and hurt the transatlantic relations and partnership in general, reinforcing US isolationist sentiments and causing a drift away from Europe (Posen, 2006; Coffey, 2013; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2014).

Although there are valid and compelling arguments on both sides of this debate, it should be noted that the geopolitical context in power politics has changed significantly, impacting US strategic interests in Europe. Within this changed strategic landscape, the EU as a geopolitical hard power could certainly be helpful in the US's aim to protect the current western led international world order and its hegemonial position in power politics (Allison, 2017). It may therefore be concluded that the arguments about unnecessarily offending the US are partly outdated. On the other hand, in the past the EU has faced some major obstacles in its direction towards becoming a geopolitical hard power. This was and still is mainly because security is tightly linked to national sovereignty and thus difficult for some EU member states to pool together (Koenig-Archibugi, 2004. p. 139). These arguments are still relevant now, as current attempts to take big strides in making the EU a significant security actor are still slowed down by national political sentiment (Loss & Puglierin, 2022).

US perspective on the EU as a security actor within ESA

The US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor after the Cold War contains an interesting paradox. On the one hand the US wanted Europe to be stable and independent enough to take responsibility for its share in the security burden. On the other hand, Europe should not become so independent as to hinder US interests and priorities (Cobaleda, 2020. p.34; Fiott, 2019. p.1-8.). Following this logic, any European action possibly interfering with these interests could be considered as a threat by the US. Moreover, scholars argue that such actions subsequently have been presented by the US as a threat to NATO because it could undermine NATO (Cobaleda, 2020. p.34; Kupchan, 2000, p.16; Van Ham, 2006, p. 27). This argument seems compelling when analysing the US political discourse since the end of the Cold War. Evidence of this can be seen in the US Ambassador to NATO in

2003 describing the plan to locate an EU military headquarter in Brussels as 'the greatest threat to NATO' (Deutsche Welle, 2003). A more recent example is the US government in 2019 presenting the launch of EU defence initiatives like the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF) as a possible threat to NATO cooperation (Bergmann, M., Lamond, J. & Cicarelli, 2021, p.14-15).

This position of US political skepticism against EU defence initiatives since the end of the Cold War has an important history and can be explained by the historical power dynamics. After the end of the Cold War, the US was the sole hegemon in a unilateral world order. It initially focused on preserving its role as the security provider of the European continent through NATO. This would benefit European security while maximizing the US's ability to project power and retain its dominance in Europe (Cobaleda, 2020. p.4; Valášek, 2019, p.19). Evidence of this can be found in the US political discourse of that period with the famous speech of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (Albright, 1998) reacting to the Franco-British St. Malo Declaration of 1998 stressing the need for an 'autonomous' EU defence capacity (Government of the United Kingdom and France, 1998). In her speech, Albright warned the EU that its defence initiatives came with the so called '3-Ds': duplication of existing NATO efforts, discrimination against non-EU members and delinking from NATO structures (Albright, 1998).
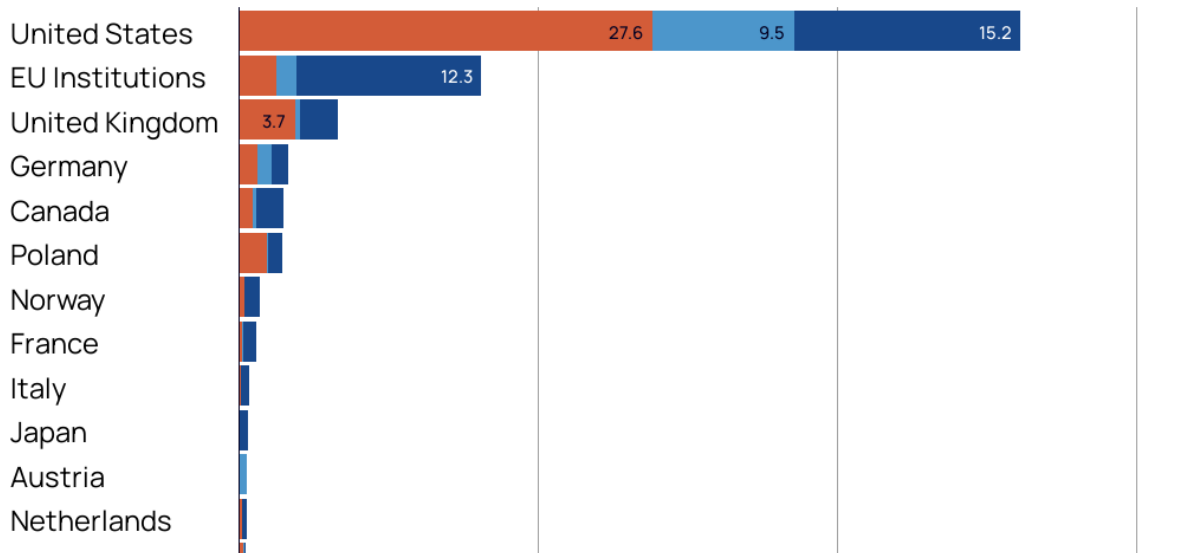
This discourse of US skepticism regarding EU defence initiatives is furthermore characteristic of the period of the administrations of Clinton and Bush, as both administrations focused on retaining NATO dominance within ESA (Bergmann, M., Lamond, J. & Cicarelli, 2021, p.10-14). An important element of that skepticism is the sentiment in the US that Europe was freeriding in NATO – a sentiment shared by many US administrations over decades (Howorth, 2018, p. 529). They have a point, of course, as the burden-sharing between the US and the European NATO members can indeed be considered a legitimate risk to NATO's stability (McInnis, 2022). This is clearly illustrated by the division of support for Ukraine in its war against Russia: the US has approximately doubled the number of investments compared to the EU and its individual member states, especially if you look at military support shown in the illustration below (Antezza, et al., 2022).

Government support to Ukraine: Type of assistance, € billion

Commitments Jan. 24 to Oct. 3, 2022. Data on 41 donors ; scroll to see more donors

Military Humanitarian Financial   Select the type of aid ⌄

United States	27.6 9.5 15.2
EU Institutions	12.3
United Kingdom	3.7
Germany	
Canada	
Poland	
Norway	
France	
Italy	
Japan	
Austria	
Netherlands	

Source: Antezza et al. (2022) "The Ukraine Support Tracker" Kiel WP   ifw-kiel.de/ukrainetracker

ℹ Disclaimer

Fig. 1. Government support to Ukraine (Antezza, et al. 2022)

Change of the strategic context of the US in power politics

This discourse of skepticism regarding EU defence initiatives started to change gradually under the Obama administration. This change can be explained by the shift in geopolitical dynamics from a unilateral world order immediately after the Cold War towards a multipolar world order in the last two decades. In this changing world order, the US's leading position in global power politics is challenged by countries like China (Allison, 2017; Scobell et al., 2020). Evidence of this shift can be found in the current power dynamics within the international system in which China is nearing the US's geopolitical influence in terms of economic and military power (Allison, Kiersznowski & Fitzek, 2022; Gale, 2022), while other powers like India appear to follow this path as well (Ikenberry, 2018).

So, in the initial post Cold-War period and the US-led unilateral world order, the rise of the EU as a security actor posed a possible threat to US dominance in Europe and its ability to project power through NATO. Then, however, came the geopolitical shift to a multipolar world order in which it is argued that this same rise meant support to the overall US strategic

interests in defending the US-led world order in its rivalry with countries like China and Russia (Bergmann, M., Lamond, J. & Cicarelli, 2021, p.14-16). Within this changed strategic context, it is therefore no surprise that the Obama administration changed policy by supporting EU defence initiatives. The Trump administration on the other hand, according to experts (Cobaleda, 2020; Sperling & Webber, 2020; Bergman et al. 2021), marked a period of holding these EU defence initiatives back while the Biden administration in turn seems to continue the line of the Obama administration (Bergmann, M., Lamond, J. & Cicarelli, 2021, p.14-16).

But what is the evidence for this? By looking at the discourse of the Trump and Biden administrations, this thesis analyses these assumptions, while exploring more deeply the question if the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor has changed under these administrations and if so how. Therefore, the following chapter will address the research methodology of this thesis and explain how this research will be conducted.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology of this thesis is set out, explaining the theoretical framework, the justification for the scope of this research, the research method and the analytical framework while providing the reader with an analysis on the source selection.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis applies an analytical framework based on the school of thought of neo-classical realism when analysing US perspectives on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor. More specifically, this thesis applies a neo-classical realist dual approach, as it tries to incorporate both external and internal factors driving foreign policy as argued within neo-classical realism (Rose, 1998, 145-146; Ripsman et al., 2016). Key to understanding this research is the realist position that how foreign policy is conducted is driven by a country's relative place and weight in power politics (Rose, 1998, p.146). This is important as the US perspectives on ESA within US foreign policy thus can primarily be explained by the dynamics in power politics, which can be considered as the independent variable. At the same time, however, this thesis leans towards constructivism as well, as it assumes that these external international variables are filtered and interpreted by US government officials (Rose, 1998, p.158). In this thought process, internal domestic variables like local voter interests or domestic political sentiment can thus play an important role in foreign policy decisions too (the intervening variables). This has to do with the assumption in this research that politicians have to weigh their perception of the external international variables against the interests and perception of their potential voters in order to get to power, which is inherent to a democracy (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.58-79). This dual approach builds on several theories when explaining the US perspectives on ESA, which can be divided into two variables affecting the US foreign policy on ESA, which will be set out in the next section.

Leaning on the realist theoretical framework of the Power Transition Theory (PTT) (Raunch, 2016) this thesis assumes that US foreign policy is determined by the dialectical relations within power politics as it dictates the scope in which US government officials can turn their perspectives into policy. This can be seen as the independent variable within this research. When exploring these relations, it becomes clear that these power dynamics heavily

impact both the dimension of logic and the dimension of ideas within US foreign policy. Zooming in further on these dialectical relations, it is a core assumption within this thesis that the US hegemonial position in the international world order is being challenged (Allison, 2017). This affects the perception of the US government officials and the way they translate these perceptions into foreign policy significantly. At the same time, however, these government officials need to filter and interpret these external international variables, which leads to different perceptions on how these officials perceive this assumption to be reality (Rose, 1998, p.158).

Leaning on the PTT theory, this thesis furthermore assumes that this challenge comes from the rising power of China, which is dissatisfied with the current international world order. From China's perspective, the current status quo serves the interests of the US and its allies and not those of powers like China or Russia (Raunch, 2016, p.5; Allison, 2017). According to this theory, the rising power is not satisfied with the international world order (in this case China) and strives to modify it, while the dominant power (in this case the US) is not inclined to give up 'its' international world order. These two views possibly lead to a scenario of conflict (Raunch, 2016, p.5).

The PTT-theory helps to explain the Biden administration's perception of ESA, as it assumes that it is part of the US long-term strategy to protect 'its' international world order. This assumption is based on Pedersen's Co-operative Hegemony theory (Pedersen, 2002) which argues that 'soft rule within and through co-operative arrangements based on a long-term strategy' can serve a hegemonial power (Pedersen, 2002, p.683). This theory will be applied to the perspective of both administrations on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor. Following this thesis expects that it will become clear that the Biden administration is focused on supporting this development as part of a long-term strategy to defend the US hegemonial position in power politics and restore its soft power in Europe (Kearn, 2022). When looking at the perspective of the Trump administration, the PTT-theory helps to explain its foreign policy vis-à-vis the EU as this thesis expects that the Trump administration views the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor as a threat to their hegemonial position in power politics.

The second variable within this thesis assumes that internal domestic variables provide US government officials with opportunities and at the same time restraints when it comes to laying out their perspective on the EU as a more autonomous security actor. This variable can

be seen as the intervening variable. To specify, this thesis builds on the decision units approach as described by Hermann (Hermann, 2001), arguing that decision-making dynamics have a different impact on foreign policy in each case (Hermann, 2001, p.50-51). Due to this uniqueness of each administration and the coinciding decision-making dynamics, this thesis assumes that both administrations are expected to have a different discourse on this issue. This can be explained by the Actor-Specific Theory, as their individual interpretations and perceptions, stemming from internal domestic variables, are inherently different (Hudson, 2005). Applying this theoretical framework to both administrations, this thesis expects that by looking at the discourse it will become clear that the Trump administration has another perception and interpretation of the dialectical relations within power politics and the coinciding strategic context. Consequently, while this thesis expects that the Biden administration will be supportive towards EU defence cooperation due to the strategic context, it expects the Trump administration to be less focused on cooperation with its European partners (especially the EU) due to a different interpretation and perception of the strategic context. In that context, a relative focus on internal domestic variables, specifically focusing on identity politics, plays a significant role (Rose, 1998, p.152-154).

Scope of research

The scope of this research is confined to researching the US political discourse under the Trump and Biden administrations and the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA. To provide the reader with more in-depth analysis, this thesis is limited to researching the official US political discourse as represented by these two administrations, while political discourse outside this scope (for example through journalist articles) will be used for context purposes only. Moreover, the focus while researching the discourse of these administrations will be on higher positions within these administrations, as their discourse has relatively more weight in the overall propagation of the administration's perspective on ESA. At the same time, however, this thesis concentrates as well on addressing the right representation of differences within these administrations, as important nuances and differences between different US government officials are expected to be found.

Research method

As this thesis seeks to uncover the context in international relations as translated into language, the method of choice is a critical discourse analysis. Discourse in this thesis can be defined as follows: 'the language and representations through which we describe and understand the world, and through which meanings, identities, and social relations are produced' (Dunne, Kurki & Smith, 2010. p.352).

As discussed, this thesis seeks to lay bare the deeper US political perspectives related to the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA. For several reasons, critical discourse analysis is a fitting research method in that regard. First, because this thesis not only tries to analyse the discourse which come with these differing political perspectives; it also analyses the dialectical relations ''between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse'' in order to uncover the context (Fairclough, 2013. p.4). Second, this thesis has a critical realist approach, fitting in with this research method, which takes into account that 'the natural and social worlds differ' (Fairclough, 2013. p.4). To elaborate, the social world in this regard ''depends upon human action for its existence and is 'socially constructed'' whereby the social construction depends on human interpretation dictated by a range of conditions including power relations (Fairclough, 2013. p.4). And finally, this thesis centres on understanding how discourse is related to the dynamics and relations of power, which makes a critical discourse analysis fit well within this research (Janks, 1997).

Specifically, this thesis applies Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model. It comprises three steps, requiring different kinds of analysis when executing the critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). First, the object of the source will be analysed through a text analysis. Second, the process by means of which this source is produced and received will be analysed (process analysis). And in the third step, the socio-historical conditions which dictate these processes will be analysed through an analysis of the overall context (social analysis) (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough's more recent work (Fairclough, 2013) is used for the following central questions when conducting the critical discourse analysis:

1. Text analysis
   o When and what is said?

2. Processing analysis

     o   What is the context in which these sources are produced?

     o   How does the author of the source reference the context in which the discourse is articulated and how is it received?

3. Social analysis

     o   What is the multi-layered context around these sources, which explain the socio-historical context?

Analytical framework

To effectively perform the critical discourse analysis, this thesis has gathered all the relevant transcripts of official speeches, press releases, policy papers and publications of both administrations, as presented by each administration itself, containing discourse on ESA. These sources have been found by researching the official websites of the US government and NATO. Furthermore, some sources outside these websites have been used where certain official speeches or press conferences could not been found. To find all relevant data within these websites this research has used the term 'Europe' to gather the first batch of relevant sources. Subsequently, this batch was narrowed down by analysing these sources on their relevance with regard to the theme 'European security architecture'. To that end, terms like EU, security, defence, crisis, threat or insecurity were searched, resulting in the collection of all relevant discourse as presented by the administrations themselves (33 sources in total). The theme 'European security architecture' was chosen because it is broad enough to cover all nuances with regard to the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor, as different factors like NATO or Russia play an important role in this perspective as well. Finally, as described in the research method, the three steps of text analysis, processing analysis and social analysis were applied to these sources. Thus, this thesis provides an overall assessment whether the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor has changed under the administrations of Trump and Biden and if so how.

Chapter 4: The perspective of the Trump administration

The following chapter makes an overall assessment of the Trump administration's perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA by using a critical discourse analysis.

Trump administration (2017 – 2021)

An analysis of the discourse in the Trump administration shows that it fits within the classical skeptical US position as articulated by Madeleine Albright. As discussed in the literature review, this position focusses on retaining NATO dominance within ESA, as this would benefit European security while maximizing the US's ability to project power into Europe. Additionally, three other important elements explain this position: (i) a perceived sentiment of European freeriding within NATO, (ii) a perception that the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor poses a threat to NATO and (iii) the risk perception of duplication of NATO capabilities. Notably, Trump himself should be viewed in a category separate from the people in his administration, due to his confrontational and non-cooperative attitude towards the EU. In general, it can be concluded that the Trump administration viewed this development as a threat to their overall strategic interests and considered the rise of the EU as a military power a threat to their hegemonial position in the world order.

The overall context in which Trump came to power is relevant here. During his presidential election campaign, Trump gave a speech on 27 April 2016 in which he outlined his foreign policy plans (Trump, 2016a). Trump implied that under his administration the US would focus on a form of classical US isolationism by saying 'America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration' (Trump, 2016a). Focusing on his perspective on ESA, some other elements come to light which can be considered as his main focal points for Europe: 'The countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defense – and, if not, the U.S. must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves' (Trump 2016a).

Deriving from this discourse is the skeptical position of the Trump administration with regard to the defence spending by European countries, which it perceived as European freeriding in NATO; incidentally, the same sentiment was shared by earlier administrations, as discussed in the literature review. This element is one of the most important notions held with

regard to ESA (especially by Trump himself) and had a negative impact on the perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor. Evidence of this can be found in Trump's first important speech related to ESA, given at the NATO headquarters on 25 May 2017, in which he remarks that 'NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations, for 23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying (Trump, 2017a) referring to the pledge of NATO members to commit to spending 2% of their 'gross domestic product by 2024' (Trump, 2017b) as agreed upon at the Wales summit in 2014 (NATO, 2014).

This perceived European freeriding contributed to skepticism in the Trump administration regarding the EU as a more autonomous security actor, as these European countries 'don't pay up' for NATO in the first place (Stoltenberg & Trump, 2019). Other examples of this discourse can be seen in Trump's speech in Poland in 2017 in which Trump states that 'Europe must demonstrate that it believes in its future by investing its money to secure that future' (Trump, 2017c) or in the official discourse of the administration in the National Security Strategy (Trump, 2017b).

Another significant contributor to US skepticism is the way that Trump exacerbated the US-EU security relations. The tensions started during Trumps election campaign, in which he called NATO 'obsolete' and Brussels a 'hell hole' (Trump, 2016b). In an interview with the New York Times, he suggested that the US might not defend the Baltic NATO-members in a hypothetical Russian attack (Trump, 2016c). This shocked Europe and created tensions within the EU (Broome, 2016), also because it fueled European fears about a future without American willingness to protect their continent (Brattberg & Valášek, 2019, p.7). Later in 2018, Trump initiated a trade war against the EU by imposing tariffs on imports of steel and aluminium, which characterized Trumps relationship with the EU during his presidency (Dimitrova, 2019).

Not all US administration officials surrounding Trump shared his perspective on the US relationship with its NATO partners and the EU. At times efforts were made to undo the damage inflicted by Trump's confrontational and non-diplomatic rhetoric. Two good examples can be found in the official discourse presented by the administration itself: speeches given by Vice-President Pence in February 2017. The first was at the Munich Security Conference on 18 February 2017, in which Pence (unlike Trump) assured Europe of the US's 'unwavering' support to NATO (Pence, 2017a). The second speech came two days later, at the Council of the European Union in Brussels, where he tried to restore US-EU relations by expressing 'the

strong commitment of the United States to continued cooperation and partnership with the European Union' (Pence & Tusk, 2017). This was in stark contrast with Trump's earlier discourse during his election campaign and later on during his presidency.

On the whole, the Trump administration barely ever mentioned the EU in the context of ESA, and mostly in a non-cooperative way. An illustrative example can be found in the National Security Strategy of the Trump administration in 2017 (Trump, 2017e) in which the term 'European Union' is just mentioned twice, and both times in a non-cooperative context (Trump, 2017e). Importantly, the Trump administration viewed China as its number one priority in power politics (Trump, 2017e), while portraying 'the revisionist powers of China and Russia' as one of the biggest threats to American interests. No attention was paid to how US-EU cooperation could play a role in addressing those threats however (Trump, 2017e). This underlines that in the perception of the Trump administration, the EU played no role in defending the US-led world order against powers like Russia and China as it perceives it as a threat to the US hegemonial position.

Diving deeper into this discourse, evidence of the argument that this perspective fits in with the traditional, skeptical stance of the US as articulated by Madeleine Albright can be found. In this position the Trump administration perceives the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor to be a 'competitive' threat to NATO and the US's hegemonial position in the world order while causing risks of duplication of NATO capabilities. Starting off, when analyzing the press conference by Secretary of Defense Mark Esper in Brussels on 24 October 2019 it becomes clear that the Trump administration is negative, rather than positive, with regard to EU defence cooperation initiatives like the establishment of permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) (European Council, 2022): 'There are a lot of concerns by the United States and our other non-E.U. partners about the direction of PESCO', 'We think it's heading in the wrong direction' (Esper, 2019). Further evidence can be found in the press conference of 13 February 2020, at which Secretary Esper illustrated this observation while clearly repeating the '3D' elements as formulated by Madeleine Albright in 1998: 'We need to pursue efforts that complement NATO activities and bolster trans-Atlantic cooperation, not ones that are competitive or duplicative' (Esper, 2020a). In a press conference two days later, this sentiment is clearly repeated while it also elaborates on the administration's perspective on the EU Defence Fund (EDF): 'we agree as an alliance, no duplication, no efforts that draw resources. And it has come up frequently as the EU considers

EDF and PESCO, nothing that creates and obstacle for trans-Atlantic cooperation. And EDF and PESCO are particular concerns of non-EU countries' (Esper, 2020b).

Relevant in this context is a letter leaked to the Spanish daily El Pais, written by the US undersecretaries for Defense Ellen Lord and Andrea Thompson to the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, on 1 May 2019 (Lantier, 2019). In this leaked letter a different tone is used with a clear message 'The United States is deeply concerned that approval of the EDF regulations and PESCO general conditions risks', 'reversing the considerable progress we have made over the past several years in advancing NATO-EU cooperation.' (Lord & Thompson, 2019). Importantly, this letter sketches the communication with the EU behind the scenes and illustrates the US perception of the rise of the EU as a military power as a threat to their hegemonial position in the world order, which is even more critical than the administration's public discourse. Furthermore, Albright's '3D' elements are repeated again: 'risks EU capabilities developing in a manner that produces duplication, non-interoperable military systems, diversion of scarce defense resources, and unnecessary competition between NATO and the EU.' (Lord & Thompson, 2019).

Consequently, an analysis of the Trump administration's perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor leads to the conclusion that it dovetails with the classical, skeptical position taken by the US position regarding EU defence cooperation as articulated by Madeleine Albright in 1998 (Albright, 1998). This position focusses on retaining NATO dominance within ESA, partly because the US wants to maximize its ability to project power into Europe. This skepticism can furthermore be explained by the Trump administration's perception of European freeriding in NATO which, as the literature review shows, has been an ongoing theme for decades. This diminishes possible support for EU defense initiatives as the European states have to 'pay up' for NATO first, before any support is even conceivable. Additionally, this position can be explained by the administration's perception that this development would be a 'competitive' threat to NATO while causing risks of duplication; this clearly matches the '3D' elements as formulated by Albright. On top of all this comes Trump's own perspective on US-EU relations and the tensions his perspective created, which had a negative impact on this perspective as well. What is happening below the surface, however, is the core perception within this administration which perceives this development to be a threat to the US hegemonial position in the world order.

Coming back to the literature review, this perspective contradicts the argument that the rise of the EU as a security actor in this day and age would mean a support to the overall US strategic interests in a changing world order. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the international strategic context has to be filtered and interpreted by individual government officials translating it into foreign policy. As a result, all the factors described above, in combination with important internal domestic variables like identity politics, played into this interpretation process. Although some administration officials surrounding Trump had a different perspective on the US-EU relations, on the whole the Trump administration clearly did not support the development of the EU towards becoming a more autonomous security actor. That development was perceived as a threat to the hegemonial position of the US in the world order and its efforts to defend that US-led world order against rising powers like China and Russia.

Chapter 5: The perspective of the Biden administration

The following chapter makes an overall assessment of the perspective of the Biden administration on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA by using a critical discourse analysis.

Biden administration (2021 – 15 October 2022)

Where US-EU relations during the Trump administration were characterised by tensions, the Biden administration tried to restore these relations, fuelled by Biden's belief in the importance of multilateral cooperation. This argument can be illustrated by the words Biden chose for his opening sentences in his first foreign policy speech on 4 February 2021: 'America is back. Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy'. Later in the same speech he went even further by saying 'America's alliances are our greatest asset, and leading with diplomacy means standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies and key partners once again' (Biden, 2021a). More specifically, Biden addressed the relations with the EU in his second speech at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference on 19 February: 'The United States will work closely with our European Union partners' (Biden, 2021b).

Analysing the Biden administration's perspective on this US-EU relationship it becomes clear how these relations play a role in the overall US grand strategy. Coming back to the literature review, the dynamics within power politics started to change during the last two decades in which the US-led world order and hegemonial position has been increasingly challenged by rising powers like China (Allison, 2017; Scobell, et al., 2020). Within this changing strategic context, it is argued that the rise of the EU as a geopolitical power now signifies support to the overall strategic interests of the US rather than a threat against them. After all, the US has had to shift its geopolitical focus towards Asia and could use a strong ally (Bergmann, M., Lamond, J. & Cicarelli, 2021, p.14-16). It is within this context that the Biden administration continues to view the rise of China as the number one priority in geopolitics, as did the Trump administration (Trump, 2017e). What has changed, however, is the role which the EU plays within this process: more of an equal partner within the multilateral system rather than a competitor. In this, Biden picks up where the Obama administration left off. Importantly, Biden is convinced of the need for multilateral cooperation (especially with

the EU), unlike the Trump administration. Evidence of this analysis can be found in the discourse resonating with findings of the literature review. An illustrative example can be found in Biden's speech at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference: 'we must prepare together for a long-term strategic competition with China. How the United States, Europe, and Asia work together to secure the peace and defend our shared values and advance our prosperity across the Pacific will be among the most consequential efforts we undertake' (Biden, 2021b). This 'long-term strategic competition with China' (Biden, 2021b) was later specified by Biden's Secretary of State, Blinken, in his first major foreign policy speech describing it as 'the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century' (Blinken, 2021a).

Analyzing the specific role for Europe in this 'test', it becomes clear that the Biden administration sees an important role for Europe: 'Our alliances are what the military calls force multipliers. They're our unique asset', 'So we're making a big push right now to reconnect with our friends and allies', 'because our combined weight is much harder for China to ignore' (Blinken, 2021a). This vision was again laid out in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance: 'We will recommit ourselves to our transatlantic partnerships, forging a strong, common agenda with the European Union and the United Kingdom on the defining issues of our time' (Biden, 2021c).

It should be noted that there may have been additional political reasons for this positive discourse, as they serve domestic political purposes as well by counterweighing Trump's confrontational politics. In doing so the Biden administration presents itself as a constructive and cooperative international partner, in stark contrast with the Trump administration. This could be considered a tactic for electoral gains as Biden presents himself as the opposite of Trump. This can be demonstrated by a famous essay which was written by Biden during his election campaign, called 'Why America Must Lead Again'. Here, he sets out his foreign policy vision, which includes restoring US 'credibility and influence' abroad, which according to Biden was squandered by Trump (Biden, 2020).

Focussing on this partnership within the security realm, it furthermore becomes clear that the Biden administration – in contrast to the Trump administration – is positive about the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor. Evidence of this can be found in Biden's discourse on EU defence cooperation at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference: 'I welcome Europe's growing investment in the military capabilities that enable our shared defense' (Biden, 2021b). This development was affirmed later at the U.S.-EU

Summit Statement on 15 June 2021, in which the EU and the US laid out their 'Renew Transatlantic Partnership' (U.S. Government, 2021).

When analysing this statement, it shows that the Biden administration wants to stimulate the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor in order to serve the US overall grand strategy on issues like its rivalry with China. This can be illustrated by the intention of both institutions 'to closely consult and cooperate on the full range of issues in the framework of our respective similar multi-faceted approaches to China, which include elements of cooperation, competition, and systemic rivalry' (U.S. Government, 2021). More specifically, in this statement several significant cooperative measures between the US and the EU are presented in order to further stimulate the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor by, for example, planning to: 'launch a dedicated dialogue on security and defense and pursue closer cooperation in this field', 'commit to work towards an Administrative Arrangement for the United States with the European Defence Agency' and 'work jointly to raise the level of NATO-EU ambition' (U.S. Government, 2021). A month later this list of concrete cooperative measures between the US and the EU with regard to European security was expanded, when National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan announced, 'a new U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council' (Sullivan, 2021).

Another important factor in this perspective on the development of the EU becoming a more autonomous security actor within ESA has to do with the threat coming from Russia. As discussed in the literature review, the relationship between Russia and the rest of ESA has been a defining factor in the developments of the newly constructed European security architecture after the end of the Cold War. Since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2014 this defining factor only gained more importance, impacting the perspective of the Biden administration on ESA as well. It is therefore important to look at the context in which thousands of Russian troops started to mass along the Ukrainian borders around April 2021, making a close relationship between the US and the EU even more urgent (Bielieskov, 2021). This enhanced urgency is reflected in the U.S.-EU Summit Statement on 15 June 2021 in which both institutions announced 'to establish a U.S.-EU high-level dialogue on Russia' (U.S. Government, 2021). A significant contextual element in this prelude to the full-scale Russian war on 24 February 2022 furthermore consists of an essay which was published by Putin on 12 July 2021. In it, he posits that 'true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia' as 'we are one people' – a clear argument for his narrative that Ukraine belongs

to Russia (Putin, 2021). When looking at a reconstruction of events by the Washington Post, it furthermore becomes clear that US intelligence underscored these words and were increasingly warning Biden and his administration that summer that Putin was planning this full-scale war in Ukraine leading to the definite conviction in October 2021 that this full-scale war would happen (Harris, et al. 2022). It is therefore interesting to look at the discourse of the Biden administration since that period and at differences within its rhetoric with regard the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor.

Analysing the discourse since the period of July 2021, it is clear that the discourse of the Biden administration on the EU as a more autonomous security actor has grown even more positive and supportive. This is evidenced by a press conference on 2 September 2021 given by some major defence officials of the Biden administration in which they were asked about the development of an independent EU military force and reacted positively (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021a). The same month this commitment to EU defence cooperation was repeated on the highest level when Biden gave a joint statement with President Macron (Biden & Macron, 2021). In October 2021 Secretary of Defense Austin furthermore repeated this commitment (Austin, 2021). This relative shift can be explained by a sequence of events: the Russian threat, the European blowback after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the diplomatic crisis with France over a submarine deal all contributed to this shift, rendering the US-EU security partnership more important than ever (Harris, et al. 2022; Bachelier & Pajon, 2022). Moreover, although this Russian threat was not perceived as a threat for the US hegemonial position within power politics, it did contribute to the Biden administration realizing that it could not defend the US-led world order on its own. They realized they needed the EU as a partner, also in a military context, to face multiple geopolitical threats coming their way, the main threat to their hegemonial position coming from China. This is important as it became almost unavoidable for the Biden administration to deny this reality and the coinciding necessity of enhancing their support to the rise of the EU as a military power.

When, on 24 February 2022, Putin decided to start the full-scale war in Ukraine, the security dynamics within Europe obviously changed significantly, which also impacted the US perspective on ESA. As discussed in the literature review, the Biden administration played an important role in supporting Ukraine and keeping unity both within NATO and in the whole of Europe (Dempsey, 2022). This is indicative of their perspective on ESA and what role the US

should play in it. Proof of this can be found in the National Security Strategy published on 22 October 2022, in which this US perspective on ESA is described (Biden, 2022). It also sets out the Biden administration's perspective on the EU as a more autonomous security actor within these shifted dynamics. The document shows that, although the dynamics within power politics have shifted significantly since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, the views of the Biden administration have generally remained unchanged (Biden, 2022). They follow the administration's conviction back in 2021 that Russia eventually would start a full-scale war in Ukraine. Then, already, the discourse became more supportive, as from their perspective US-EU security relations became even more important as the reality that the US needed a partner in times of multiple geopolitical threats became almost undeniable (Harris, et al. 2022). When looking at the other discourse of the Biden administration on ESA since 24 February 2022 (U.S. Government, 2022a; U.S. Government, 2022b; U.S. Government & European Council, 2022; Biden & Von der Leyen, 2022; U.S. Department of Defense, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2022), the same conclusion can be drawn. There is a subtle change in the discourse, however, at it becomes clear that US-EU security relations and the value the Biden administration attaches to these relations have become even stronger in the light of the severity coming with the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine and its consequences. This can be illustrated by statements like the EU being 'an indispensable partner', 'we support efforts to foster EU unity' (Biden, 2022) or the joint readout by the United States and the European Council underscoring 'the importance of enhancing transatlantic security and defense, including through robust NATO-EU cooperation as described in the EU's Strategic Compass' (U.S. Government & European Council, 2022).

In conclusion, the Biden administration's views of the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor are a continuation of the policy of the Obama administration. In this process the Biden administration is supportive of that development, considering it beneficial for the overall US strategic interests on issues like their rivalry with China or the transatlantic relations in general. The Biden administration therefore stimulates this development by boosting cooperative measures with the EU. Furthermore, the prelude to the Russian full-scale war in Ukraine since 2021 and start of the full-scale war itself have contributed to this position as well. The US supports EU defence development as the US-EU security partnership has become increasingly important to the US with the growing realization since 2021 that the US needs a partner in times of multiple geopolitical threats, a reality which

became almost undeniable since 2021 and definitely since the start of the full-scale war. This change in perspective is meaningful for, primarily, two reasons. First, by supporting EU defence initiatives in its discourse the Biden administration has contributed to a strategic context within which EU defence policies can emerge more easily. After all, European politicians are inclined to follow the US on security issues due to the historical European security dependence on the US (Brattberg & Valášek, 2019, p.13-14; Kunz, 2020). Second, this supportive discourse has led to actual steps of enhanced cooperative security measures, contributing to the further development of the EU as an autonomous security actor as well. Finally, it can be concluded this change can be explained by two core reasons as seen in this thesis. First, the severity of the international (strategic) context can dictate foreign policy leading to a situation in which it became almost unavoidable for the Biden administration since 2021 to further support the rise of the EU as a military power in the light of it facing multiple geopolitical threats. Second, however, when analysing this change, it furthermore can be concluded that government officials have to interpret this context. In this process other factors like domestic political interests play an important role as well, leading to different perceptions on the same strategic context in which the Trump and Biden administrations operate and translate their perception into foreign policy.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

When Putin started the full-scale war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Brussels finally woke up from a geopolitical hibernation. This historic turning point has made the debate about the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA more urgent than ever. As the US still is an important security provider for the European continent and European concerns about a future without the US willing to protect their continent have grown, as detailed in Chapter 4, it is important to understand where the US stands on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor within ESA. That is why, by using a critical discourse analysis, this thesis has examined whether the US perspective on that development has changed under the administrations of Trump and Biden, and if so, how.

The conclusion is that the discourse has shifted from one in which the EU was barely mentioned, and then mostly in a non-cooperative way, to a discourse of positivity and cooperative measures to strengthen the EU as an autonomous security actor. An important factor was the growing conviction of the Biden administration that Putin would start a full-scale war in Ukraine since the summer of 2021. This led to enhanced support within US foreign policy for the further development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor as the administration's appreciation of the US-EU security partnership grew and the reality that the US needs a partner in times of multiple geopolitical threats became almost unavoidable. Thus, this increased support already began before the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. However, the severity of that full-scale war reaffirmed the necessity of close US-EU security relations, leading to even more emphasis on the importance of the partnership in the Biden administration's discourse.

An important background to this change in perspectives is the shift in power dynamics during the last decades, which changed the overall strategic context for US foreign policy under both administrations. As discussed in the literature review, those power dynamics started to change when the unilateral US-led world order in the post-Cold War period began to change into the multipolar world order that has started to emerge since the last two decades, with rising powers like China are challenging the US hegemonial position. As discussed in this thesis, the US dominated ESA in the initial period after the Cold War through NATO, with the US as the sole hegemon of the international world order. Within this world

order the rise of the EU as a security actor posed a possible threat to US dominance within Europe and its ability to project power through NATO. As these dynamics changed, it is argued that the rise of the EU as a security actor can now be considered supportive to the overall US strategic interests in its rivalry with countries like China and Russia. These changed strategic interests of the US mean that the Biden administration now again – in line with the Obama administration's stance – supports the EU's development as a more autonomous security actor. Other factors that may contribute to this position have to do with domestic political reasons, as Biden's conviction of the importance of multilateral cooperation and the coinciding position of the US as a constructive and cooperative international partner diametrically opposed to Trump's confrontational and non-diplomatic international politics. Thus, Biden makes the clear political statement that he is the opposite of Trump in these matters.

Conversely, the Trump administration's perspective should be viewed as a continuation of traditional American skepticism about EU defence initiatives, as articulated by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1998. The Trump administration, just like Albright, perceived the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor as a threat on multiple levels: competition and risk of duplication between NATO and the EU, a possible threat to NATO dominance within ESA, and to the possibilities for the US to maximize its ability to project power into Europe. Additionally, the Trump administration's perception of European freeriding within NATO and other factors like domestic political variables focusing on identity politics may explain this skepticism as well. Furthermore, the Trump administration perceived the rise of the EU as a military actor as a threat to the US hegemonial position in power politics. Finally, it should be noted that Trump's personal perspective, in comparison to those held by others in his administration, was often in a category of his own; his confrontational and non-cooperative attitude towards the EU in general and his transactional view with regard to international politics made him more skeptical.

Overall, it may be concluded that the US perspective on the development of the EU as a more autonomous security actor has changed from a skeptical and critical perspective under the Trump administration to a supportive and stimulating perspective under the Biden administration. There are two core reasons explaining these changes.

First, individual government officials have to filter and interpret the international (strategic) context in which other elements like domestic political factors play a role as well.

This leads to differing perceptions within these administrations as to how they perceive the international context, resulting in a different translation into foreign policy. Both administrations were operating within the same strategic context in power dynamics, in which the US hegemonial position is being increasingly challenged by developments like the rise of China and increasing threats coming out of Russia. Nevertheless, this thesis has shown different outcomes in US foreign policy with regard to the EU as a military actor, demonstrating that individual leadership and the coinciding perception of this context matter. In sum, both administrations looked through different lenses when looking at the same international (strategic) context in power politics. On the one hand, the Trump administration only focussed on NATO and individual European countries, while perceiving the EU as a competitor and threat to its hegemonial position and ability to defend the US-led world order. On the other hand, the Biden administration perceives the EU as more of an equal partner in its overall grand strategy to defend the US-led world order in its rivalry with countries like China and Russia.

Second, this thesis has shown that in certain circumstances interpretation and perception must bow to the hard reality of the international (strategic) context, which can dictate foreign policy as well. Coming back to the research question, this reason partly helps to explain the enhanced support of the Biden administration in 2021 to the rise of the EU as a military actor as it was almost impossible to deny the threat coming out of Russia. With these events it became nearly unavoidable for the Biden administration to deny that it needed the EU as a partner – also in the military context – in order to defend their world order and hegemonial position with the multiple geopolitical threats coming its way, the most important one coming from China.

This change in foreign policy is meaningful as it has contributed to a strategic context within which EU defence policies can be realized more easily as European politicians are inclined to follow the US on security issues due to the historical European security dependence to the US. At the same time, it has also led to actual steps of enhanced cooperative US-EU security measures contributing to the further development of the EU as an autonomous security actor. Currently, the war in Ukraine is taking a toll on the transatlantic efforts of keeping unity within ESA. Although the momentum is there right now, great strides towards the EU becoming a significant security actor as discussed in this thesis still seem to be lacking. This momentum can certainly change with a newly elected US president in 2024 who could

interpret the international context in a different way, but equally with changes in geopolitics as seen this year with the start of the Russian full-scale war. It remains to be seen what choices European leaders will make for the future of European security. What is sure, however, is that the nature of these choices will be historic.

Openings for future research

As this research has only used public source material as presented by both administrations themselves, there were limitations in unravelling the deeper perspectives within these administrations and the context which drives them. A more comprehensive view, obtained by an analysis of internal memos or internal meetings, would therefore be valuable for further research. Finally, as seen in this thesis, the process of US government officials interpreting the international strategic context plays an important role in the outcome of foreign policy. It would therefore be valuable to examine such processes more deeply, which leaves an opening for future research.

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