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Israel: Note that the Sleeping Transatlantic Giant is Waking Up

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After years of a weakening transatlantic alliance, exacerbated by President Trump's four years in office, strategic cooperation between the European Union and the United States is likely to resume. This cooperation is necessary to tackle the coronavirus crisis and its consequences, as well as the geopolitical and technological changes that have occurred over the last two decades. The renewed dialogue between the two sides of the Atlantic will have implications for several other actors in the international arena, primarily Russia and China, as well as for actors on the regional level, including Turkey and Iran. Israel is also advised to consider the implications of the apparent change. Israel would do well to take into account the emerging changes and formulate its positions accordingly, particularly given that the US administration and the European Union will present coordinated stances on issues of importance to it.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc three decades ago started a process of the United States distancing from Europe and a weakening of the partnership between them. This trend was accelerated during the Trump presidency. Underlying this change was a lack of a strategic threat to European countries and the United States, along with the available option of implementing policies in various international frameworks and organizations as a substitute for bilateral dialogue. In addition, American willingness to use military force to advance goals and interests contrasted with the European aversion to this recourse, and the US made a geostrategic and economic pivot to Asia in the face of China's rise. Under a thin layer of "business as usual," substantial disagreements arose between the countries on both sides of the Atlantic. While Europe continued to perceive the international legal system, institutions, and diplomacy as cornerstones of the international order, the United States preferred a separatist course of action, which sees international mechanisms and tools as an obstacle to policy implementation, and traditional partners more enemies than partners in the making and implementation of policy centered on prioritizing American interests. The displeasure of European leaders with the conduct of the United States and President Trump was accompanied by contempt for the President and their tendency to keep their distance – even before the concept of "America first" was incorporated into the international discourse.

However, the election of Joe Biden to the presidency increases the likelihood of a resumption of the strategic dialogue between Europe and the United States, which is essential to any successful confrontation with the challenges and dangers posed to values and interests, as defined by the EU and the incoming US administration. This was reflected in the [official platform](#) of the US Democratic Party and by the President-elect during and after the election campaign. The European Union also issued a proposal for a transatlantic agenda and global cooperation that takes into account the changing geopolitical and technological power relations in the international arena. The framework formulated by the EU Commission was announced in [EU-US: A new transatlantic agenda for global change](#), and was joined by the recommendations of a taskforce in [NATO 2030: United for a New Era](#).

At the base of the transatlantic partnership is a common set of values, founded on respect for human rights and freedoms, gender equality, minority rights, the rule of law, democracy, and multilateralism, which in economic terms relies on a free market and regulated and fair international trade. The European side proposes to include a common approach to a range of global and regional issues in this agenda. The EU has prioritized the fight against the coronavirus outbreak and the ensuing economic crisis as well as the green agenda; technological issues; trade; standards for democratic order and the strengthening and expansion of democracy.

These principles are strategically and ideologically challenged by various countries and movements, most notably China and Russia. Both have demonstrated in recent years a growing assertiveness in the international arena, threatening stability in various regions around the world. In the opinion of the NATO member states, the organization has the resilience and economic and technological strength to meet the challenges, but to do so it must strengthen the coordination between them and agree on a platform and agenda for joint action.

Israel must carefully consider its own positions on issues where there is agreement in principle between the United States and Europe. Among them:

Values: The adherence by Europe and the United States to the values of democracy, human freedom, the rule of law, and the international legal and institutional systems as a basis for joint transatlantic action may pose a challenge to several countries, including Israel. Indeed, Israel is increasingly seen among various groups in the liberal wing in the US and in Europe as often breaching this value system. For several years now, this view of Israel among several EU member states, compounded by Israeli government policies on West Bank settlements, has eliminated political dialogue on the most senior level. The renewal of transatlantic dialogue and the likelihood of US-EU cooperation may heighten

Israel's negative image in Washington regarding its democratic steadfastness and commitment to individual rights and the rule of law.

The Iranian nuclear program: The EU praised President-elect Biden's intention to return to the framework of the nuclear agreement with Iran (JCPOA) and emphasized that the agreement was adopted by the Security Council Resolution 2231 with the consent of the United States. Germany, France, and Britain have welcomed Biden's intention to return to the JCPOA and rescind the sanctions imposed by President Trump, in exchange for Iran's return to full compliance with the terms of the agreement. Biden and the JCPOA's European partners have stated that a return to the agreement will be a starting point for further discussions on some related issues, as well as others that are not addressed within its framework – such as Iran's missile program and its regional activity. The United States commitment to the JCPOA, in contrast to Israel's position, caused significant damage to US-Israel relations and the sharpened dispute between Israel and the EU. Therefore, and in view of Biden's intention to return to the agreement, Israel must formulate an informed position that takes into account the lessons of the campaign against the United States joining the agreement (in 2015, under President Obama); the implications of the United States 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA, which prompted a series of Iranian violations of the terms of the agreement; and the US policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran, which Biden appears to oppose. Continuation of the current Israeli policy will create a confrontation with the incoming administration and with the European Union – or will just be ignored.

The political process between Israel and the Palestinians: While the Democratic Party and the European Union agree on the imperative of a two-state solution, their positions on the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not entirely identical. Contrary to the EU's position, the Democratic platform does not mention the 1967 borders. It recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (without a separate reference to the eastern part of the city), while stipulating that the status of Jerusalem is a topic for negotiation in discussions on a permanent status agreement. For its part, the EU treats Jerusalem as one entity and the eastern side as part of the territory occupied by Israel in 1967. The EU opposes Israeli settlements in the West Bank; the Democratic Party platform opposes their expansion.

Alongside the differences with the United States, which will have significance if and when Israeli-Palestinian negotiations resume, the EU recommends joint action with the administration to establish the necessary conditions for significant progress in the political process, especially by working together to revive the Middle East Quartet. In a dialogue with the US administration in the context of the political process, the Israeli government will need to present a comprehensive outline for progress that will address

sensitive issues such as further construction in existing settlements, as well as proposals for improving the economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Sweeping Israeli opposition to individual actions, such as the resumption of US funding for UNRWA or discussions within the Quartet, if not accompanied by a list of constructive proposals, could lead to tensions with the administration.

The Eastern Mediterranean region: On both sides of the Atlantic, the recognition that Turkey is becoming a strategic nuisance has grown. A European-American dialogue on the issue of Turkey is a framework that will be convenient for Israel, which prefers that its own bilateral disagreements with Turkey do not command international attention. However, Israel has no interest in creating the impression that it is pushing for deterrence and sanctioning measures against Turkey.

In conclusion, Joe Biden's entry into the White House is an opportunity to open a new page in the transatlantic relationship. It is too early to assess the extent of the anticipated change in US policy, but it is expected that alongside disagreements, the United States will make an effort to coordinate positions with the EU on a number of issues that will shape the geostrategic reality of the coming decades, some of which are highly relevant to Israel. Israel would do well to take into account the emerging changes and formulate its policies accordingly, particularly given that the US administration and the European Union will likely present coordinated positions on issues of critical importance.