

## **The Geopolitics of US-Poland Relations Under President Trump**

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### **Abstract**

The article analyzes the contemporary factors that contributed to US-Poland relations under President Trump. Both the United States and Poland had their fair share of troubles with the EU. For Poland, issues range with compliance over the rule of law, adherence to common EU values and the refugee resettlement and migration policy. For the US, issues with the EU under the Trump presidency formed a larger part of the changing US policy towards the transatlantic alliance. The article argues that while both the United States and Poland find common interests in defense, energy security and their estranged relationship with Germany, Poland's economic engagement with the EU, in particular with Germany, forces Warsaw at best to find a balance between its main economic partner the EU and its security ally the United States. For the US, its relationship with Poland under the Trump presidency, falls in line with its policy of prioritizing bi-lateral relationships in the EU, thereby undermining the EU-NATO multilateral dynamics.

**Keywords:** Poland, United States, Germany, Geopolitics.

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### **1. Interduction**

The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new chapter in US-Poland relations. Washington supported the cause of Poland's accession to NATO in 1999 and backed its entry into the European Union in 2004. Warsaw, on the other hand, was among the few countries in Europe to show solidarity and champion the cause of US counterterrorism efforts by contributing large deployments of troops to both US-led coalitions in Iraq and the NATO-led missions in Afghanistan. In particular, Poland's decision to send troops to Iraq, which albeit was strongly criticized by the Polish society at home, solidified the claim that among the new states of Europe, Warsaw was emerging as the closest ally of the United States. For Poland, the strategic rationale of supporting the United States was based on the thinking that the US acted with greater willingness to use military force as compared to Western European countries and therefore was less likely to hesitate when faced with an option of taking strong decisions that involved military action and carried the risk of escalation into a large-scale conflict.

That strategic rationale has stayed as a fundamental principle of Polish foreign policy and has been carried forward by the current PiS leadership. Poland has focused on prioritizing American involvement in European security, more important forging deeper security ties with the US, at the same time emphasizing the primacy of nation-state over the transnational EU. By many in the US, Poland has long been viewed as an important country to develop ties with. Given its size, demographics and geostrategic location, American policymakers have considered Poland as a strong regional power in Central and Eastern Europe. Given the two decades of positive relations, US-Poland bilateral engagement today extends to areas like shared NATO capabilities, counterterrorism, missile defense, economic growth, energy security and regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe to name a few (U.S. Department of State, 2019). In addition, in response to the Russian activities in Ukraine, following the events of 2014, Poland championed the cause of stationing the largest US military deployment as part of NATO's international initiative to secure Europe's border with Russia while also bidding for permanent presence of US troops on its territory (Schreer, 2019:10).

Poland's engagement with the United States has seen a strong boost especially under the leadership of President Andrzej Duda and the party in

support PiS (Prawo I Sprawiedliwosc) with its Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński. This has coincided with the strain in the relationship between Warsaw and Brussels over issues ranging from the rule of law to refugee and migrant resettlement quotas. Some scholars have argued that the ruling party and its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, have led the country to a 'fierce battle with the European Union to regain its sovereignty and, together with it, its "dignity" (Gouez,2019:5; Bunikowski,2018:278).

More important in the last few years, the current Polish government has seen its relationship with Germany take a hit, over the latter's gas pipeline project- Nord Stream 2 and the refugee policy, to both of which Poland objects. The US President Donald Trump, on the other hand, criticized Germany for its minimal defence spending and contribution to the NATO budget, trade surplus with the US and a complex economic relationship with Russia highlighted by the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project which the US is highly critical of. While both the US (under Trump) and Poland had a strained relationship with Germany for different reasons, they had one common factor, which was to undermine Germany's role as a key power in the bloc.

Given these considerations, it becomes important to analyze the US-Poland relationship from the viewpoint of the changing dynamics of relationships within the EU. The paper analyzes the common factors that contribute to US-Poland relations, encompassing their common interests in defence and energy security and their relationship with Germany. The paper would thus argue that, while Poland's friction with the EU compels it to have a deeper engagement with the US, Poland's economic interest in the EU forces Warsaw's at best to find a balance between its main economic partner and its emerging security ally. For the US under President Trump, the relationship with Poland, falls in line with its policy of prioritizing bi-lateral relationships with the countries in the EU, thus undermining the EU-NATO multilateral dynamics.

## **2. US and Poland Issues with the EU**

Both the US and Poland have their fair share of troubles with the EU. While for Poland the issues are about, implementing domestic policies, adhering to the common EU rules and values, and prioritizing national sovereignty over submitting to collective EU policies, for the US the issue with the EU

represents a change in the foreign policy towards the transatlantic alliance which began taking shape long before President Trump came to power.

The Polish government came under fire for the reforms it introduced to its judicial system. In December 2017, the Polish government brought about several changes to the National Council of the Judiciary, which performs the duties of selecting and appointing candidates as judges by the President of the Republic. The new changes gave the power to the government to control the appointment of the judges to the Supreme court. It also led to the establishment of the Disciplinary Chamber the purpose of which is to investigate, prosecute and settle disciplinary charges against ordinary judges in Poland (ESI,2019:4). The power to appoint members to this Disciplinary Chamber solely rests in the hands of the Minister of Justice- Zbigniew Ziobro. In fact, since becoming the Minister of Justice, Ziobro has accumulated a lot of power. He not only has the power to appoint members to the disciplinary chamber and open investigations (if need be) against any ordinary judges, but he also has the power to appoint and dismiss court presidents. The power to appoint court presidents directly impacts how judges perform their duties. Court presidents have significant influence over the judges. They can assign specific judges to certain assignments; can determine the manner of their participation and even dismiss heads of divisions and their deputies. Managing court president gives the justice minister the power to manage and control the judges. In addition to that, since March 2016, having merged the positions of the prosecutor general with that of the ministry of justice, Zbigniew Ziobro also acts as Poland's Prosecutor General (ESI,2019:4-5). This has given him and the PiS party tremendous influence over the judiciary- more important- over the rule of law. While the Polish government has claimed that the reforms were introduced to rebuild public trust in the judicial system and rid the courts of communist-era holdovers, the EU viewed the move as undermining the common value upon which the European Union is formed (The Chancellery of the Prime Minister,2018:7).

At the beginning of 2016, the European Commission launched a dialogue with the Polish government to assess the rule of law situation. However, as negotiations failed, the Commission triggered Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union, which allow the EU to suspend certain rights from a member state that violates the EU's founding values, including the rule of

law (Gostyńska-Jakubowska,2018). Bowing to the October 2018 European Court of Justice ruling, the Polish legislature voted in November to repeal the law that lowered the mandatory retirement age for Supreme Court justices from 70 to 65 years. While the European Commission welcomed the move, it also made it clear that the measure alone would not resolve the broader standoff with Warsaw. For the EU, making Poland adhere to the rule of law is fundamental to upholding the meaning of the Copenhagen Criteria of EU accession and Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union which emphasize the rule of law as a common value for all EU member states (Rech,2018:335).

It is also important for the EU to ensure that national courts across the member states recognize the judgements of courts as fair and upholding the utmost values of law. If judges in member states were to doubt the judgements of any member states' judicial procedures, then the entire legal order on which the EU rests is challenged (ESI,2019: 3).

It is interesting to note that Poland is challenging the core values of the same organization for which it had only recently become part of by making several changes to its democratic processes. However, a closer look at the country's behavior demonstrates a stark difference between the ideas that Poland has for the bloc and what its western European counterparts argue for. The PiS is sceptical of European integration and sees it as a threat to Poland's sovereignty and national identity. Several scholars have commented on the behavior of Poland under the Kaczyński's government. Bunikowski in his paper has argued, Kaczyński's ideas can be summarized in the following way: Polish politics is demoralized. The politicians/officials/ elites are corrupted (including morally) and serve their own or foreign interests. The judges are morally corrupted. Society is economically polarized, and many members of society are excluded. International corporations 'drill' the Polish economy and society. This means that Poland needs spectacular reforms to be strong, sovereign, just and rich (Bunikowski,2018:294).

Nyysönen, on the other hand, has argued that a 'illiberal turn' is not deviance but about prestige: an attempt to distinguish oneself from the 'West' and dominance of the current EU (Nyysönen,2018:259). PiS supports the idea of a leaner Europe- where control and responsibility for most policy decisions rest in the hand of the state (Stratfor,2018). This view is contrary

to what Germany argues for. Berlin wants to preserve the status quo (liberal order) in European integration as it has several underlining interests. Due to its close economic relationship with Central and Eastern European countries, Germany wants to maintain cooperation with the region, so that its supply chains are not disturbed. It wants the bloc to produce and consume its surplus products. This forces Berlin to find the right balance between protectionism and economic liberalism within the single market which could only happen if the current status quo is maintained (Buras and Janning,2018:6). Furthermore, cooperation and coordination with the EU member states is required to address security threats in southern and eastern Europe in the form of migration, refugees, and Russia's policy in Ukraine. Besides the rule of law, the EU and Poland have been at odds over the issue of the resettlement of refugees. Before the 2015 parliamentary elections, which saw the victory of the PiS, the then incumbent ruling government led by Civic Platform, agreed to receive, and resettle migrants as per the relocation scheme proposed by the EU commission. The then Polish government agreed to accept 7000 refugees (Narkowicz,2018:358). However, with the change in the government, resulting from the election victory of the Law and Justice party, Poland's political response toward the refugee crisis changed. The PiS had campaigned on anti-refugee rhetoric, vociferously opposing any quota scheme proposed by the EU. For the PiS officials accepting refugees was seen as a threat to Poland's national identity and its traditional values. Hence, after coming to power, the PiS pulled back from the earlier commitments made by the Civic platform led government and opposed any further ideas on accepting the shared quotas of refugees. While it can be argued that the EU relocation scheme could be seen as unfair on part of the Central and Eastern European nations, given their largely homogenous populations and lack of experience in dealing with foreigners, the vehement opposition on display by the PiS hinted to the notion of the decision being an imposition from Brussels (Narkowicz,2018: 358-359). The following quote from President Andrej Duda, while speaking at an economic conference in Krynica a day before the EU parliament met to discuss the refugee quota proposal, captures this dynamic: "I won't agree to a dictate of the strong. I won't back a Europe where the economic advantage of the size of a population will be a reason to force

solutions on other countries regardless of their national interests” (Dowd, 2016:129).

Poland’s stance resembles the rhetoric of Hungarian President Viktor Orbán for whom the influx of refugees into Europe undermines the continent’s Christian roots and tighter control of border would be necessary to save the country from being overrun by refugees (Kalmar,2020:7-8). The refusal to take and resettle refugees become a major sticking point in Poland relations with Germany. The opposition to the refugee policy is in contrast to Merkel’s view of Europe. After all, it was Merkel, who passionately championed the cause of accepting refugees.

Moreover, the Polish government also raised the issue of history with Germany. In an interview with the state-run Polskie Radio in June 2018, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, renewed demands for Germany to pay compensation for Poland's wartime losses incurred by Germany (DW,2018). Former Polish Defense Minister Antoni Macierewicz echoing the same concern stated that “communist-era Poland was a ‘Soviet puppet state’, whose decision at the time could no longer still be valid. Germans need to “pay back the terrible debt they owe to the Polish people” [37].

While Germany claimed that the issue was settled with reference to the 1953 treaty under which Poland relinquished its rights to compensation, the issue raised by the PiS revoked the sense of troubled history between the two neighbours.

In February 2018, the Polish government passed the Holocaust law which became the source of international tension. The law prescribed fines or imprisonment (although the clause for imprisonment was later removed after much international pressure), for publicly and falsely ascribing responsibility or shared responsibility to the Polish state or people for crimes committed by Nazi Germany (Santora,2018). The Polish government claimed the law was a step in the right direction to defend Poland’s reputation. However, the law added fuel to the debate on whether Germany was trying to rewrite history and place the blame for the Holocaust on Poland.

It is no doubt that the discord between Poland and Germany has grown in recent years. According to a survey conducted by the Körber Foundation, “German-Polish Barometer 2018”, 44 per cent of Germans concluded that their country’s relationship with Poland was bad, while only 29% of the

surveyed Germans liked their neighbouring country (Institute of Public Affairs,2018). It is interesting to note that the downturn in Germany-Poland relations is further compounded by the changing US policy towards the transatlantic alliance. In a rally in June 2018, President Trump stated, 'EU was set up to take advantage of the United States'(Galindo,2018). President Trump was particular in showing disdain towards German Chancellor Angela Merkel, criticising her for Germany's lack of contribution to the NATO budget, limited support to US military operations in Iraq and Syria, the trade surplus with the US and a complex economic relationship with Russia. President Trump also targeted Angela Merkel for her refugee policy attacking her in a tweet, 'The people of Germany are turning against their leadership as migration is rocking the already tenuous Berlin coalition. Crime in Germany is way up. Big mistake made all over Europe in allowing millions of people who have so strongly and violently changed their culture!'(Durden,2018).

Furthermore, President Trump had even asked French President Emmanuel Macron to leave the EU to get better bilateral trade deals with the United States. After having scrapped the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and Transpacific Partnership (TPP), President Trump ramped up trade issues with the EU by imposing new US tariffs on steel and aluminium and announcing further formidable tariffs on European cars (Hübler and Herdecke,2020:690).

President Trump also challenged NATO by calling the organisation obsolete and no longer serving America's interests. Trump also pulled out of the climate change accords and the Iran nuclear deal, undermining attempts by the European allies to be in the agreements. And on the eve of meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump called the European Union a "foe" (Maegan Vazquez,2018). Such kind of language and foreign policy choices were not reminiscent of any US President in the past. The message that came out of Washington under Trump seems to be equating America first with Europe alone.

Indeed, that message was heard loud and clear by all European allies, however, the reaction to Trump's policies were not the same. Contrary to western European leaders who had opposed Trump's verbal attacks and policies targeting the liberal order in Europe, Poland remained reluctant to criticize the Trump administration and at times was even enthusiastic in its



bilateral engagement. This is due to three main reasons: a) A positive perception of the Trump administration, b) the Russian threat and c) Energy geopolitics.

### **3. Positive Outlook towards Trump Administration**

Contrary to the views of other EU member states like France and Germany, Poland's views, and ideas and its responses to Trump's foreign policy choices remained different. The prevailing notion in Germany for instance about the Trump presidency was to defend the liberal order in Europe and strengthen Europe's resilience in the face of changing US policies. For German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas the way in which Europe could respond to Trump's America First policy was by showing common strength and building a more united Europe (Buras and Janning, 2018:7). The Polish response, on the other hand, was much more cautious and pragmatic. Polish leaders focused their energy on observing the changes and embracing the opportunities of the new political reality that emerged within the transatlantic alliance. Therefore, while Germany echoed the call for a more united Europe, Poland remained pragmatic in strengthening its relationship with the US. This difference in perception towards the Trump Presidency also had a lot to do with how Poland had perceived Donald Trump and his policies.

Indeed, President Trump personally visited Warsaw in July 2017. The fact that Trump chose Warsaw for his first major address in Europe is worth noting. Places in presidential addresses are the container for histories and memories. As Rebecca M. Townsend has argued, President Trump, Address uses an oppositional interpretation of the physical locale, traces of previous presidents' rhetoric, and retellings of parts of Polish history to support Poland's right-wing government's anti-immigrant and nationalist policies. Notable as well for its absences, this address fails to bolster democratic principles like the rule of law or the independence of a judiciary. His use of Polish history enacts a victimage ritual that, rather than ameliorating guilt, fosters resentment among the Polish people of non-white, non-Catholic immigrants, or refugees' (Townsend, 2018:85).

Throughout his speech, Trump praised Poland for its struggle and spoke highly of the Polish administration which resonated well with the Polish audience (The White House, 2017). Similarly, Trump also mentioned Poland as a key ally in his September 2018 speech before the UN General

Assembly. Ideological similarities can also be drawn between the Trump administration and the nationalist and populist PiS government in Poland. Furthermore, Trump's persistent difference with Angela Merkel- whom the international press declared as the last defender of the liberal order in Europe also found support in the rhetoric of Polish government's differences with the German Chancellor. Interestingly, while western Europe lamented over Trump's victory in the US presidential elections, Polish authorities saw Trump's victory as a continuing political trend that began in Warsaw in 2015 (Buras and Janning,2018:8). Similarly, one can also assess that while the European leaders were boggled with the idea of America First policy and Trump's attitude towards transatlantic allies and the damage it would cause to the security architecture in Europe, the Polish government rejected such narrative that focused on US's unpredictability and instead worked on cultivating bilateral security ties with the US.

Initially, the Polish government was concerned about the possibility of an American-Russian rapprochement following the build-up to the Trump-Putin Helsinki meeting, nevertheless no such thing happened and the positive trend in US-Poland relations continued. Donald Trump's policy on Russia and a burgeoning security partnership with Poland assured Warsaw, that its security interest best aligned with Washington.

### **3-1. A Security Partner**

Warsaw views its partnership with the US primarily through the security lens. The geographical location of Poland has been a determining factor in the country's foreign and security policy (Zięba,2019:7). Historical experiences demand Poland to be strong and calculative to hold its ground in European geopolitics. The geopolitical fear of being dominated by Germany and Russia, given its history of being divided by various European empires and being caught in the crossfire between the Soviet Union and the Third Reich during World War II, cannot simply be ignored (Roucek, J.S, 1948:424-427). Today the geopolitical threat may not be as strong, but Poland is still economically reliant on Germany with most of its trade with its economically strong western neighbour. On the other hand, Russia's actions in Ukraine, have once again stoked fears among security planners that they cannot overlook the growing security concerns and simply be reliant on NATO or European guarantees.

The Ukrainian crisis marks a crucial turning point in Poland's relations with

the West and Russia. Ukraine is an important country from the Polish security point of view. As Justyna Zajac argued, Ukraine in the orbit of Western influences strengthens Poland's security, while Ukraine under the influence of Russia weakens that security considerably (Zajac,2016:137). This underlining significance of Ukraine has determined Warsaw's foreign policy in the face of the crisis in 2014. Right from the outset, Poland was sympathetic towards the Ukrainian government and demanded solidarity from its western allies against what it perceived to be an aggressive Russian foreign policy. Warsaw's pro-Ukrainian stance led to the further worsening of its relations with Russia, at the same time, highlighting that the Russian actions in Ukraine were taken as a serious threat to its territorial security. As a result, in the following years, Poland took various measures to enhance its defence capabilities, strengthen NATO's eastern flank and more importantly improve and strengthen its military relationship with the US (Zajac,2016: 137-139). Poland had been sceptical of the initial western European response to the Ukrainian crisis as its request for a permanent NATO detachment along the eastern borders were met with opposition and scepticism from western European partners, primarily Germany, who preferred a diplomatic solution to the crisis (Bieńczyk-Missala,2016:108). Adding to the scepticism was also the belief that NATO's military preparedness was weak insofar as Russia's anti-access/area-denial capabilities could easily prevent NATO from quickly deploying its troops in a conflict situation (Buras and Balcer,2016). From Warsaw's security point of view, the argument was that if Russia's actions in Ukraine were not successfully deterred it carried the risk of sweeping across Central and Eastern European regions thus contributing to Russia's hybrid warfare strategy towards the region (Buras and Balcer,2016). However, the Russian threat did not resonate with the same intensity in western capitals as it did in Poland. While Central and Eastern European countries voiced for boosting military security, western European states, focused on nonmilitary means, as a way of resolving the conflict with Russia. Put another way, for Germany the leading power in Europe- the problem of Russian aggression competed against other growing challenges, for instance, Brexit, the refugee crisis, terrorism, and economic instability within the eurozone. Therefore, emphasizing diplomacy, Germany pushed the idea of negotiations which culminated in the Normandy format talks resulting in the Minsk agreements.

Poland's continuous efforts of amplifying the Russian threat did not result in either drastically enhancing the security along the eastern front, nor did it result in getting Germany on board to formulate a military response towards Russian aggression (Yoder,2018:562-564). The apprehension by Germany and its insistence on Ostpolitik as an approach for its engagement with Russia drew considerable criticisms from European partners, who criticized Berlin for valuing economic interest over security concerns. In this regard, Poland was left with few options but to enhance its security ties with the United States. When Polish President Andrzej Duda raised the request for establishing a permanent US military base in Poland or buying American military equipment, there was a certain security logic that defined his actions. That logic is, having American troops on Polish territory. Not only would it increase Poland's security but in case of an attack (from Russia), the US would automatically provide allied military aid (Zięba,2019:116). Therefore, engaging with the United States provided Poland the chance to solidify and strengthen its security relationship and also improve its military capabilities.

### **3-2. Energy Geopolitics**

Perhaps an even more significant issue for both the US and Poland remained the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and the energy geopolitics that surround it, especially when seen with Poland's insistence for the Three Seas Initiative and the United States tacit support to it. In June 2015, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, E.ON, Wintershall, Shell and OMV signed a memorandum of intent with Russian Gas giant Gazprom for the expansion of the Nord Stream pipeline. The proposed energy expansion plan (Nord Stream 2) would double the capacity of Russian supplies, thereby drastically reducing the dependency on the existing Ukrainian transit pipeline network (Siddi,2016:671). The entry point for the pipeline into the Baltic Sea is at the Ust-Luga area of the Leningrad Region. The pipeline then stretches across the Baltic Sea finally connecting Greifswald in Germany, an area close to the exit point of the Nord Stream 1. The total capacity of the Nord Stream 2 is estimated at around 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year. Combined with the Nord Stream 1, the two pipelines will deliver around 110 billion cubic meters of gas per year. [38]



(Source: Gazprom,2020)

German officials have so far have downplayed the geopolitical relevance of the pipeline project and instead focused on the economic aspect of it. According to former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who is the chairman of the board of Nord Stream AG and Rosneft, ‘the EU can make savings on carbon dioxide emissions by switching to gas instead of a coal-fired generation of electricity(Johnson,2019). For Germany, the pipeline project is a cost-effective way of securing its vital energy needs. It also forms an important part of its Energiewende policy of making a transition to complete renewable energy (Trivun,2019). For Russia, the project will enable it to deliver gas directly to Germany bypassing the existing pipelines that run through Ukraine. In other words, Nord Stream II would deprive Ukraine of the transit fees that it would otherwise get from the use of existing transit routes. This has led to arguments that Nord Stream II, along with other Russian pipelines, Nord Stream 1 and Blue Stream would make Ukraine strategically vulnerable exposing it to Moscow’s political blackmail. These projects would ensure that Russia’s dependence on Ukraine for energy transit would no longer be a constraining factor in its policies towards the country (Umbach,2018:2).

Opponents of Nord Stream 2 including Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine, and the United States, have criticised the project as a geopolitical tool aimed at making Europe more vulnerable to Russian interests. Through this project, they argue, Moscow has gained considerable political and economic

leverage in its engagement with Germany and others who will be dependent on Russian gas, thereby exposing them to supply cut-offs and price manipulation techniques by Russia (Congressional Research Service,2020). The Trump administration even demanded that Germany abandon the project citing concerns about growing Russian influence in Europe. However, there was another reason behind Trump's actions. President Trump wanted European countries to buy American gas. From the Trump administration's point of view, importing LNG from the US was a viable option to meet the growing natural gas demand and decrease dependency on Russia. And since the US already had a working relationship with most countries in the region there was to be no reason to think otherwise. To accomplish its goal of becoming an energy exporter to Europe, the Trump administration even threatened sanctioning companies involved in the pipeline project under the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019 (PEESA), enacted as part of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (Congressional Research Service,2020). It is difficult to imagine sanctions or the threat of it would necessarily stop either Germany or Russia from completing the project. However, sanctions dealt a serious blow to the transatlantic alliance, marking a profound escalation in regard to relations with Germany (Erlanger,2019).

This worked well for Poland as it shared most of the concerns as the US on Nord Stream 2. Poland had long intended to break its dependency on Russian energy supplies. To that end, it has looked to diversify its sources of imports as much as possible. In recent times, Poland has struck major energy deals with Norway and Denmark and has also looked to the US to meet its energy needs. With regards to Nord Stream 2, Poland response is mooted in the Three Seas Initiative which warrants a closer look.

Launched in 2016, Three Seas Initiative brings together 12 Central and Eastern European Countries located between the Adriatic, Black and the Baltic Sea to improve connectivity through infrastructure projects. The main idea behind this project is to develop infrastructure for energy and transport along the north-south axis in the region (Thomann,2019:31-32). As argued by Piotr Buras, Poland's ambition through this project is to 'not only strive for full gas independence from Russia but wants to become an energy hub in Central and Eastern Europe itself, providing for real gas diversification in the region' (Buras,2017). Poland already has a working LNG terminal near

the seaport of Świnoujście. The capacity of this terminal at present is around 5 billion cubic meters, however, Warsaw is seeking investment to expand the capacity to 7.5 billion cubic meters [45]. Świnoujście port is of enormous value to both the US and Poland. The first major shipment of US LNG arrived at this port in June last year as part of the 24-year contract signed between the Polish Oil and Gas company and Cheniere Marketing International. Poland's PGNiG has also signed another 20-year contract with US-based firm Venture Global LNG to purchase liquefied natural gas with deliveries starting in 2022 [43]. Speaking about growing energy cooperation with the United States, President of PGNiG, Piotr Wozniak stated, "Our portfolio of contracts with U.S. suppliers covers over 9 billion cubic meters of natural gas after regasification annually that is more than we import from Russia. Such a volume strengthens Poland's energy security, but also gives us the opportunity to actively participate in LNG trading on the global market" (LNG World News, 2019).

This mutual convergence of interest led President Trump to declare United States support for the Three Seas Initiative. It can therefore be argued that Poland through its engagement with the United States and with projects like the Three Seas initiative wants to project itself as a major power in Central and Eastern European region. Even though, Warsaw emphasised that the initiative was not against, Germany or the Nord stream 2, deterioration in the relations between the EU and Poland and more specifically between Warsaw and Berlin, made the Three Seas initiative more of a geopolitical idea, similar to the historical idea of Intermarium, only this time around-leveraging possible US interest's in the region (Istok et al, 2018:20).

#### **4. Conclusion**

##### **Balancing Economic and Security Interest**

That Poland and the US would be more amenable to security and energy issues fits the general trend in US-Poland relations. The United States has made significant military deployments in Poland and assured support in the event of Russian aggression. The US has not only continued to fulfil its commitments to the NATO budget but has also assured to increase the budget of the European Deterrence Initiative from \$4.8 billion in 2018 to \$6.5 billion in 2019 (Buras and Janning:11). The US military presence in Poland which is considered as the cornerstone of Polish defence includes a military hub in Powidz, a rotational heavy brigade in Zagan, the Redzikowo

base of the European Phased Adaptive Approach designed to provide support to the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System (AAMDS) and occasional aerial and naval patrols in the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, the 2018 US National Defence Strategy defined Russia as a strategic adversary which falls in line with the threat perceptions in Warsaw. On his visit to Washington in September 2018 Polish President Andrzej Duda even requested a permanent US Army presence by offering \$2 billion in contribution towards the base's construction (Hunzeker and Lanoszka, 2018). Given these initiatives and US foreign policy towards Russia, it is natural to argue that the US is indispensable for Poland's security.

Besides, thinking from an economic perspective, the US represents one of the few viable options that Poland has to reduce its economic dependency on trade with Germany. Poland remained clogged in the German supply chain, which limits its manoeuvrability. According to World Bank statistics for 2017, Germany was the leading imports and exports destination for Poland. Poland exported roughly US \$ 60,210 million worth of goods to Germany while importing goods worth US\$ 49,469 million (World Bank, 2017). Poland's trade relationship with Germany at present is tightly interconnected. Poland sells parts or semi-finished goods to Germany. Germany packages those into finished products and exports worldwide. One recipient of those finished goods is Poland itself. About 40 per cent of Poland's imports from the EU and 30 per cent of its global imports come from Germany (Geopolitical Futures, 2018). Moreover, Poland is the largest net beneficiary of EU funds and would continue to need EU funding to facilitate its economic growth and the common market to sell its products.

Thus, such high-level dependence on trade with Germany means Poland has little scope of manoeuvring. An economic break with Germany would cost Poland a lot more and would be a bigger threat to the Polish state than any Russian move. Friction between the United States and the EU in particular Germany over trade and other issues places Poland in a difficult position as supporting one over the other undermines its interests. Therefore, the current level of economic dependency compels Warsaw to find a balance in its engagement with both the US and the EU. For the US under the Trump presidency, its partnership with Poland was in line with its strategy of prioritising bilateral relationships over collective commitments to transatlantic organisations. As the US, plans to cut down its global military



presence it would look to have deeper meaningful relationships with countries that serve its interest without overpaying financially. It is in this regard that, the U.S. is investing in the defence of Eastern Europe from the Baltic countries to Romania, as part of its strategy to contain Russia. Poland thus benefits from the new change in US policy towards the region.



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