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Europe in the Balance:

America First, Multilateralism as Soft Balancing and the Atlantic Alliance

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Abstract

Is President Trump's "America First" foreign policy jeopardizing the post-WWII multilateral world order? Is it a break with past US policy and a breach of the cooperative relationship between the United States and its Atlantic Alliance partners? This analysis critically assesses these questions and proposes that consideration of differences in national interests is vital. Europe's preference for multilateralism or a dovish foreign policy and the US's more unilateral and hawkish foreign policies are the natural consequence of relative power differences. The available policy choices for any state are the result of relative capabilities: strength allows for greater foreign policy flexibility, autonomy and hawkishness. To test these contentions, new measures of a state's hawkishness, dovishness and relative power are created covering about forty-eight democracies for the post World War II period. The findings suggest that there are indeed significant differences between the United States and other democratic states in the effect of hawkishness on the use of coercion and that power preponderance is a primary determinant factor in state behavior. Powerful states have greater policy flexibility but for weaker states, multilateralism is the optimal strategy.