Polis

Analysis

Assessing the Impact of the Trump Presidency on European Security

December, 2024

About Polis Analysis

Polis Analysis is a provider of high-quality analysis of global politics with teams based in the heart of political capitals including London, Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Istanbul, Washington D.C., and New Delhi. Our next-generation team of experts bring a fresh and innovative approach to political analysis, which is delivered in an impartial, fact-based, and accessible way.

The political media space is a crowded field. However, media coverage of international politics is increasingly polarised and partisan in recounting stories. Even those consultancies that provide rigorous analysis instead of sensationalist media coverage deliver it to the exclusive preserve of big corporates and wealthy clients. At Polis Analysis, we do things differently. Our next-generation team is uniquely placed to deliver a new way of covering global politics. We don't simply recount political stories; we analyse them to explain their significance to your life.

Acknowledgements

The Polis Analysis team would like to extend their appreciation to the dedicated individuals whose collective efforts have made the publication of this report possible. We are indebted to the vision and expertise of our Founder and CEO Thomas Barton and our Advisory Board who have made this endeavour possible. We express our sincere gratitude to the analysts who put this report together– Edward Stoppard and Tom Heyes, whose research and insights have helped curate informative articles for our readership.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the editors of the report – Sehej Sethi, Lillia Cavallaro and Jaye Sergeant Cantürk, whose meticulous attention to detail and editorial expertise have played a vital role in ensuring the quality and readability of our content. We also extend our sincere thanks to Sean Moran, Aminata Condé, Zsigmond Tar, Joshua Tyler, Harry Wells, and Richard Lyndon Williams for helping to publish and publicise this report.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The election of Donald Trump presents several key challenges to European security, particularly concerning Ukraine, NATO, the European Union (EU), and the United Kingdom (UK). This report explores the potential implications of a Trump presidency across these four critical areas.

The first section examines the potential consequences of a Trump presidency on the ongoing War in Ukraine. It evaluates how U.S. military assistance might be affected, considers the impact it could have on the outcome of the war, and explores broader international repercussions.

The next section assesses the implications for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This includes an analysis of the Trump administration's potential influence on the alliance's future, as well as America's commitment to its NATO membership and collective security guarantees.

The report then investigates the security repercussions for the European Union. It focuses on how Trump's presidency could influence European defence spending, strategic cooperation, and the EU's broader role in regional and global security.

Finally, the report considers the potential ramifications for the UK. It examines the future of the UK's "Special Relationship" with the United States, the impact on its security ties with the EU, and the influence of U.S. policy on British defence spending and strategy.

By addressing these issues, this report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges posed to European security by Donald Trump's presidency and the policy decisions it may entail.

Edward Stoppard & Tom Heyes

Analysts
Polis Analysis

Consequences for Ukraine

Edward Stoppard

What is Happening?

On 5 November 2024, Donald J. Trump won the 2024 US presidential election, becoming President-elect and soon, following his inauguration in January, the 47th President of the United States. One of the chief foreign policy issues of the election was the ongoing war in Ukraine. Whereas Democratic candidate Kamala Harris fought the election on continuing the Biden administration's firm support for Ukraine, the Trump-Vance campaign questioned the US commitment to the Eastern European country.

Vice President-elect J.D. Vance made his stance on the conflict clear in February 2022, declaring that "I don't really care what happens to Ukraine one way or another." Meanwhile, Donald Trump has openly mocked Vlodomyr Zelensky's requests for further military assistance, calling the Ukrainian president at a campaign rally "the greatest salesman of any politician that's ever lived", and complaining that "[e]very time he comes to our country, he walks away with $60 billion."

Along with this open questioning of the United States' support for Ukraine, the Trump-Vance campaign stated they would seek to end the conflict. Donald Trump repeatedly claimed he "will have a settlement within 24 hours" and "prior to taking the White House". The current President-elect, however, failed to expand on how he would do this, stating only that "there's a very easy negotiation to take place, but I don't want to tell you what it is because then I can't use that negotiation."

J.D. Vance, however, has suggested what the outlines of a possible settlement could look like. Speaking on Shawn Ryan's podcast, the "Shawn Ryan Show", Vance remarked that a Trump peace deal "probably looks … like the current line of demarcation between Russia and Ukraine, that becomes like a demilitarized zone." In addition, Ukraine would "retain its independent sovereignty" and receive some assistance for rebuilding. The country, however, would have to give Russia a "guarantee of neutrality", essentially foregoing any possibility of Ukraine joining NATO or (as Vance described) any "allied institutions", a vague term but likely meaning organisations such as the European Union (EU).

Ukrainian Context:

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. The invasion escalated an already existing conflict in the Donbass region which had begun following the Maidan Revolution and Viktor Yanukovych's removal from power, leading to separatists forming breakaway governments (the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics) which were tacitly backed by the Russian Federation.

Assistance from foreign powers has been crucial in the war. According to the BBC, Western nations have donated over $100bn in military aid to Ukraine - including weapons, equipment, and financial assistance. The single largest contributor has been the United States, with the Kiel Institute estimating US military aid to total $59.9bn. This has helped to outfit Ukrainian forces with tanks, aircraft, and personnel equipment.

On the other hand, it is harder to quantify the total amount Russian forces have received. Iran has been accused of and sanctioned for supplying Russia with ballistic missiles. China too has not been beyond suspicion, with Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell claiming in September that China was undertaking a "very substantial effort … to help sustain, build and diversify … the Russian war machine." One country whose assistance has been easier to track is North Korea. On 18 June 2024, Russia and North Korea signed the North Korean–Russian Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, a mutual defence pact which outlined their growing strategic partnership. As a result of this, North Korea has supplied Russia with conventional arms (notably up to reportedly 8 million artillery shells) and possibly over 10,000 troops to expel Ukrainian soldiers holding out in the Kursk region.

Despite having received these levels of material support, the war has not tilted in Ukraine's favour. The conflict has remained mostly concentrated in Ukraine, with Russian forces occupying almost 18% of the country's landmass. The Ukrainians have lacked major success in the conflict since the counter-offensives in eastern and southern Ukraine in late 2022. A failed summer offensive by Ukrainian forces in 2023 has also been followed by steady Russian gains which have continued despite Ukraine launching diversionary attacks into the Kursk Oblast, a region of Russia bordering Ukraine. Reports from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) - an American public policy think tank specialising in defence - recently suggested that Russian troops are now advancing at their fastest rate since February 2022, with the Russian army claiming it had captured 235 sq km of Ukrainian territory in one week, a record for 2024.

What is in it for you?

For readers, a Trump Presidency concerning the war in Ukraine could have security implications for Ukraine, Europe, and the globe.

For Ukraine, the most immediate consequence of the Trump Presidency will likely be a withdrawal of US aid. Given that the US contributions make up the majority of military assistance, this could have a powerful and negative impact on Ukraine's warfighting ability, forcing upon Ukraine a choice between total defeat or a negotiated settlement involving ceding territory to Russia. In April 2024, the Director of the CIA, William Burns, attested to this, warning that "the picture is a lot more dire" for Ukraine without US aid. Even Zelensky himself suggested this, recently telling Fox News that "[i]f [the US] will cut [military aid], I think we will lose."

In addition to constraining Ukraine's sovereignty politically, this would have likely economic impacts, for instance, preventing Ukraine receiving the economic benefits of EU membership. Ukrainians from occupied areas would also be unable to return home, while those still there would be separated from family, lose democratic and human rights, and be forced to become increasingly russified. This phenomenon is already apparent in occupied areas such as Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, where people must accept Russian passports to access essential services.

This would have then have knock-on effects for the continent, most notably in eastern Europe and the former Soviet satellite states. If the actions of a Trump administration effectively reward Russia with a "victory" in Ukraine - either through Ukraine's military defeat due to a lack of US aid or a Trump-negotiated settlement to Russia's benefit - it could embolden Vladimir Putin to press further territorial claims. Countries such as the Baltic states and Moldova could come under threat. Experts at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), for example, warned that whilst little will happen immediately, "[t]he [Kremlin's] next target is … probably in the Baltic states." Vlad Gheorghiță, Romania's Chief of Defence, meanwhile warned that "[i]f [Putin] wins in Ukraine, the main target will be the Republic of Moldova." An expansion of hostilities in eastern Europe after Ukraine would leave readers in the region having to handle the threat to life of Russian aggression as well as the economic and social damage such a conflict would bring.

For global readers removed from the events unfolding in Europe, a Trump presidency's approach to Ukraine would still have worldwide implications. Most notably, this would be the message it could send if it follows through on the aforementioned policies. For example, this would effectively signal to a nation like China, which has its own expansionist agenda, that the US is relinquishing its role as 'world policeman' and will not interfere, giving the green light to these countries to pursue their goals. The lack of deterrence this could cause could lead to conflict. This fear is particularly acute in Taiwan, where many fear acquiescence to Russia in Ukraine may set a precedent which encourages China to think it could invade without the US coming to Taiwan's defence - increasing the chance of conflict. An invasion of Taiwan would have a devastating impact on the global economy, as the country is the linchpin of the global semiconductor industry - which are essential components in a multitude of modern technologies, such as the laptops we work on and the phones we scroll and make calls from.

What happens next?

In the short run, the Biden administration will continue to supply Ukraine with weapon systems and increase Ukraine's freedom to employ them in the run-up to Trump's inauguration, given he no longer has to worry about the domestic political considerations of aid to Ukraine. Since the election, the Biden administration has already approved Ukraine to use anti-personnel landmines and US-made Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to strike targets deep within Russia, with Ukraine claiming on 20 November to have hit an arms depot 110km (70 miles) inside Russian territory. According to reports, the Biden administration is already rushing to cancel $4.65bn in debt owed by Ukraine to the US. Given the short time frame, however, there will be a limit to what the current US government can achieve in this regard.

In the longer term, even after Trump's inauguration, Ukraine's war effort will continue for some time. European states will likely attempt to double down on their support for Ukraine to make up for the expected withdrawal of US support. Sources have already reported, for instance, that the possibility of sending troops into Ukraine has been discussed by the UK and France. It is unlikely, however, that the European states will be able to compensate wholly for the loss of US material and financial assistance, and this will have a detrimental effect on Ukraine's military capacity - which is already struggling as it is with equipment and manpower shortages. If the Trump administration follows through on the comments made during the election campaign, Ukraine may be forced to cede territory to Russia and abandon its ambitions of joining NATO and the EU.

References:

[1] Adams, P., Armstrong, K. (2024) 'Biden allows Ukraine to strike inside Russia with missiles', *BBC News*, November 17 2024
Accessible:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c789x0y91vvo

[2] Balmforth, T., Harmash, O. (2024) 'Ukraine hits Russia with US ATACMS missiles for first time on war's 1,000th day', *Reuters*, November 20 2024
Accessible:
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-marking-1000-days-russian-invasion-eyes-end-war-next-year-2024-11-18/

[3] BBC (2024) 'Ukraine weapons: What arms are the US, UK and other nations supplying?', *BBC News*, November 18 2024
Accessible:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-62002218

[4] Drummond, M. (2024) 'What are the anti-personnel landmines the US is sending to Ukraine and why are they banned by more than 150 countries?', *Sky News*, November 20 2024
Accessible:
https://news.sky.com/story/what-are-the-anti-personnel-landmines-the-us-is-sending-to-ukraine-and-why-are-they-banned-by-more-than-150-countries-13257091

[5] Faulconbridge, G., Kelly, L. (2024) 'Russia accelerates advance in Ukraine's east', *Reuters*, November 26 2024
Accessible:
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-advances-ukraine-fast-pace-moving-into-kurakhove-analysts-say-2024-11-26/

[6] FP Staff (2024) 'Biden administration rushing to waive $4.6 bn of Ukraine's debt ahead of Trump presidency', *Firstpost*, November 21 2024
Accessible:
https://www.firstpost.com/world/biden-administration-rushing-to-waive-4-6-bn-of-ukraines-debt-ahead-of-trump-presidency-13837346.html

[7] Gargan, E., Gutiérrez, P., Kirk, A. (2024) 'How Ukraine has faced its worst month on the battlefield in two years – visualised', *The Guardian*, November 4 2024
Accessible:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2024/dec/04/how-ukraine-faced-worst-month-battlefield-in-two-years-visualised

[8] Garamone, J. (2024) 'Pentagon Says 10K North Korean Troops in Kursk Oblast', *U.S. Department of Defense*, November 4 2024
Accessible:
https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3955757/pentagon-says-10k-north-korean-troops-in-kursk-oblast/

[9] Goryashko, S. (2024) 'We need to be ready for war with Putin, Romania's top general says', *Politico*, February 1 2024
Accessible:
https://www.politico.eu/article/we-need-to-be-ready-for-war-with-putin-says-romanias-top-general/

[10] Hlushchenko, O. (2024) 'Trump calls Zelenskyy "the greatest salesman in history"', *Ukrainska Pravda*, September 24 2024
Accessible:
https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2024/09/24/7476469/

[11] Hoorman, C., Vincent, E., Ricard, P. (2024) 'Discussions over sending European troops to Ukraine reignited', *le Monde*, November 25 2024
Accessible:
https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/11/25/discussions-over-sending-french-and-british-troops-to-ukraine-reignited_6734041_4.html

[12] Kiel Institute for the World Economy. "Ukraine Support Tracker." Accessed December 9, 2024.
Accessible:
https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/

[13] Klingner, B. (2024) 'North Korea Sent 8 Million Artillery Shells to Ukraine. Next Up: Troops', *The Heritage Foundation*, October 30 2024
Accessible:
https://www.heritage.org/china/commentary/north-korea-sent-8-million-artillery-shells-ukraine-next-troops

[14] Lau, S. (2024) 'US accuses China of giving 'very substantial' help to Russia's war machine', *Politico*, September 10 2024
Accessible:
https://www.politico.eu/article/united-states-accuse-china-help-russia-war-kurt-campbell/

[15] Lopez, C. (2024) 'Iran Gives Russia Short-Range Missiles, While U.S., Partners Expect to Keep Bolstering Ukrainian Air Defense', *U.S. Department of Defense*, September 10 2024
Accessible:
https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3901774/iran-gives-russia-short-range-missiles-while-us-partners-expect-to-keep-bolster/

[16] Lucas, E. (2024) 'Game Plan: After Ukraine', *Center for European Policy Analysis*, November 3 2024
Accessible:
https://cepa.org/article/game-plan-after-ukraine/

[17] Melkozerova, V. (2024) 'Fact-checking J.D. Vance's statements on Ukraine', *Politico*, July 16 2024
Accessible:
https://www.politico.eu/article/jd-vance-europe-russia-ukraine-donald-trump-kyiv-vp-pick-policy-us-elections-ohio-aid-war/

[18] Nava, V. (2023) 'Trump: I will end Ukraine war in 24 hours but I won't tell you how', *New York Post*, March 27 2023
Accessible:
https://nypost.com/2023/03/27/trump-i-will-end-ukraine-war-in-24-hours-but-i-wont-tell-you-how/

[19] Pomeroy, G. (2024) 'Zelensky says Ukraine will lose war if US cuts funding', *BBC News*, November 20 2024
Accessible:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckglpy95nxwo

[20] Reuters (2024) 'North Korea ratifies landmark mutual defence treaty with Russia', *Al Jazeera*, November 12 2024
Accessible:
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/12/north-korea-ratifies-landmark-mutual-defence-treaty-with-russia

[21] Sullivan, H. (2023) 'Russia 'systematically' forcing Ukrainians to accept citizenship, US report finds', *The Guardian*, August 3 2023
Accessible:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/03/russia-forcing-ukrainian-passports-us-report

[22] van Brugen, I. (2024) 'JD Vance Floats Donald Trump Deal To End War in Ukraine', *Newsweek*, September 13 2024
Accessible:
https://www.newsweek.com/jd-vance-floats-donald-trump-deal-end-russia-ukraine-war-1953302

[23] VOA News (2024) 'CIA director: Ukraine could lose war against Russia without US aid', *VOA*, April 18 2024
Accessible:
https://www.voanews.com/a/cia-director-ukraine-could-lose-war-against-russia-without-us-aid-/7576437.html

Trump's Hostility Towards NATO

Edward Stoppard

What is Happening?

Donald Trump's re-election challenges the structure and continuation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Trump has a history of criticising the organisation, questioning its efficiency, its relevance, and its costliness to the United States.

During the 2016 US presidential election and his first term in office, Trump repeatedly voiced these criticisms. Speaking to the Washington Post's editorial board in March 2016, Trump complained that NATO was "costing us a fortune" and forcing the US government into "borrowing all of this money". He also attacked the organisation's relevance, describing it as "obsolete" and "designed for the Soviet Union", and as such not cut out for modern security concerns. Finally, he questioned the alliance's efficiency and the commitment of America's European partners, describing the organisation as essentially lopsided and overly dependent on American spending. In 2018, for example, he tweeted that the fact the US was "spending far more on NATO than any other [c]ountry" was "not fair, nor … acceptable".

These criticisms, however, went beyond solely rhetoric, and during his first term as president, Donald Trump clashed with leaders from other NATO states. Matters notably came to a head at the 2018 NATO Brussels Summit, where Trump arrived late to a meeting which included the leaders of major NATO countries (including the likes of the UK, France, and Germany) and demanded that European states contribute more to defence spending by January 2019, or he would withdraw the US from NATO. Trump himself would confirm that this had taken place, bragging to a rally in Charleston, West Virginia in 2018 that he had effectively cowed Europe with the threat and got them "paying up" as a result.

It appears that in the time since, and with the world in a more troubled place than during his first presidency, Trump may not have changed his views significantly. In a rally in South Carolina in February 2024, Trump controversially stated that if, hypothetically, he was to become president and Russia attacked a NATO country, his primary concern would be that country's defence spending. If it did not pay enough, a "delinquent" as Trump put it, he "would not protect" them and in fact "encourage them [Russia] to do whatever they want." The President-elect then doubled down on his view

in an interview with NBC's 'Meet the Press', claiming he would only stay in NATO if "they're paying their bills".

Accordingly, with Trump set to become the 47th president of the United States, the future of NATO is called into question.

NATO Context:

NATO was founded in 1949 when 12 states from Europe and North America signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, DC. The alliance was established to counter the growing threat and military power of the Soviet Union, which had expanded its influence exponentially over much of central and eastern Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. The year prior, several of these signatories (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) had signed the Treaty of Belgium much to the same effect. NATO would go on to play a vital role during the Cold War and grow to encompass more nations including Spain, Turkey, Greece, and then West Germany.

Today, NATO has developed into an alliance of 32 nations with numerous former Warsaw Pact countries (the USSR's answer to NATO) having joined the partnership in the decades following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. NATO has since been involved in numerous conflicts around the world including in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Despite these military operations, defence spending in the alliance fell. As the Cold War and the Soviet threat ended, so did the pressing need to maintain large military budgets. Many countries - particularly in Europe - began to cut defence spending to prioritise other areas. This was the so-called "peace dividend" popularised by US President George H. W. Bush and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the close of the Cold War.

As a result of falling defence spending, in 2014, NATO countries agreed to set a minimum target of contributing 2% of their GDP to military spending to keep the alliance at an acceptable level of readiness. Despite this, many repeatedly failed to meet their targets. Despite comprising over 30 countries, less than ten NATO members met their spending targets each year between 2014 and 2022. It was only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine that spending levels rose, with the number of NATO countries expected to meet the 2% goal expected to be 23 in 2024. The mood in Europe has consequently changed. As summarised by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in March 2024, the feeling across Europe is that "[t]he post-war epoch is gone. We are living in new times: in a pre-war epoch."

The biggest spender and the single largest military power, however, remains the United States. In 2024, the US devotes the third-largest amount of GDP to defence, behind only Estonia and Poland, and accounts for 63.7% of all defence spending in NATO. Where the rest of the organisation combined allocates $430bn to defence, America contributes $755bn alone. The sums highlight the importance of America's continued membership and the reliance other NATO countries place on US military power.

What is in it for you?

The dynamic between the incoming Trump presidency and NATO could have serious ramifications for Europe's economy and security.

For readers in Europe, the biggest impact will be the change in US posture toward its European allies, most notably in defence spending. Whereas previous US administrations have called for the European states to burden a larger share of military expenditure, President Trump may continue the bullish and aggressive behaviour he exhibited in the first administration based on his recent comments. Even though European states contribute more than they were ten years ago, that some NATO allies have not been meeting the minimum target of 2% of GDP may not be accepted by Trump. Trump's threats, coupled with his campaign's dubious stance on Ukraine and European security, will likely lead European countries to begin contributing more to defence than they otherwise would have (similarly to what happened in Trump's first presidency) as NATO members both attempt to convince the President-elect of the vitality of the alliance and prepare for the possible withdrawal of US support if they are unsuccessful.

However, in a 2024 report by CESifo Network, a global research network funded by the State of Bavaria, researchers concluded that issuing new debt or raising taxes to fund this rise in defence spending may "come with severe economic costs and do not seem a sustainable solution for most countries." As a result, the only practical way the funds could be raised would be by "shift[ing] money in the governmental budgets from other expenditure categories towards defence", with the report suggesting this could be done by "reallocat[ing] the peace dividend back from social spending towards defence spending." Figure 13 in the report shows that most European governments could meet the 2% NATO target if they find around 1% of savings in other policy areas of government spending. However, as the report notes, defence spending equating to 2% of GDP may not guarantee a sufficient enough build up to prepare NATO countries for war, perhaps requiring further resources to be divested from elsewhere to be funneled into defence. If this was to happen it could have a significant effect on readers in Europe as their governments - many of whom are dealing with complex fiscal conditions - allocate more resources to defence, meaning fewer for other areas (such as health, welfare,

infrastructure, or economic investment) which in peacetime have a more direct impact on citizens.

There is also the additional prospect of conscription. 10 European countries already have the draft, with Latvia the latest to introduce mandatory service in 2023, and the idea has begun to be floated by politicians in several major European states. In Germany, Friedrich Merz, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union and frontrunner to become chancellor in Germany's snap elections in February - was quoted by the Times stating that, "[w]e are aiming for a gradual reintroduction of conscription." In Italy, Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini's League party submitted a bill in April to the Chamber of Deputies proposing a mandatory six-month period of military or civilian service for all young people aged between 18 and 26. Croatia has already pledged to implement a limited form of conscription - with two-month compulsory military service - which is set to begin 1 January 2025. Accordingly for European readers, with conscription growing in popularity in political circles across the continent, there is the possibility that as part of their efforts to militarise, their countries may turn to conscription to raise the numbers needed to properly outfit their armed forces. This could result in either the reader, their friends, or a member of their family being pressed into service, which could have detrimental effects on conscript's career prospects and education.

What happens next?

Following the result of the US presidential election, the most important event for US-NATO relations will be the success or failure of the next NATO summit which will be held at The Hague between 24–26 June 2025. Topics of discussion will likely include developing a new NATO-Russia strategy, originally agreed to in 2024, and the potential publication of NATO's first commercial space strategy. Dick Schoof, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, has already extended an invitation to the President-elect to attend the annual meeting. It is unlikely that Trump would take any drastic action over NATO before this meeting.

The presumptive US ambassador to NATO who will also attend the summit will be Matthew Whitaker, who was recently appointed by Donald Trump on 20 November. Whitaker briefly served as United States Attorney General between 2018 and 2019 as United States Attorney General in the first Trump administration. In what could be a more positive sign for NATO, Whitaker previously stated that America would always "spend more than our fair share to make sure democracy and freedom is defended worldwide" during an episode on Fox News's "Fox and Friends" in 2019. As speculated by Joe Barnes writing for the Telegraph, this appointment may be welcomed by other

member states and help ease tensions between the incoming President and other NATO leaders at what could be a tense summit.

References:

[1] Barnes, J. (2024) 'Trump's Nato pick said US 'will spend more than its fair share' on defence', *The Daily Telegraph*, November 20 2024
Accessible:
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/us/politics/2024/11/20/trumps-nato-pick-admits-us-should-spend-more-on-defence/

[2] Booth, R. (2024) 'Another European country to reintroduce compulsory military draft as tensions soar', *The Independent*, August 21 2024
Accessible:
https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/europe/croatia-military-draft-russia-conscription-b2598298.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[3] Bureau of Public Affairs (1999) 'NATO Chronology, 1947-1999', *Department of State*, March 12 1999
Accessible:
https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/nato_fs_chron.html

[4] Cameron, H. (2024) 'Five Things Donald Trump Has Said About NATO', *Newsweek*, November 13 2024
Accessible:
https://www.newsweek.com/five-things-donald-trump-said-about-nato-1985307

[5] Dorn, F., Potrafke, N., Schlepper, M. (2024) 'European Defence Spending in 2024 and Beyond: How to Provide Security in an Economically Challenging Environment', *cesIFO Network*, January 2024
Accessible:
https://www.cesifo.org/DocDL/EconPol-PolicyReport_45_European_Defence_Spending.pdf

[6] Easley, M. (2024) 'NATO looks to publish first commercial space strategy in 2025', *DEFENSESCOOP*, October 10 2024
Accessible:
https://defensescoop.com/2024/10/10/nato-commercial-space-strategy-2025/

[7] FitzGerald, J. (2024) 'Trump says he would 'encourage' Russia to attack Nato allies who do not pay their bills', *BBC News*, February 11 2024
Accessible:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-68266447

[8] Freisleben, S. (2017) 'A guide to Trump's past comments about NATO', *CBS News*, April 12 2017
Accessible:
https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-nato-past-comments/

[9] Garamone, J. (2019) 'A Short History of NATO', *U.S. Department of Defense*, April 2 2019
Accessible:
https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1803445/a-short-history-of-nato/

[10] Hansler, J., Rabinowitz, H., Sullivan, K. (2024) 'Trump announces Matthew Whitaker as his pick to be US ambassador to NATO', *CNN*, November 20 2024
Accessible:
https://edition.cnn.com/2024/11/20/politics/matthew-whitaker-trump-pick-ambassador-nato/index.html

[11] Huseynova, N. (2024) 'Dutch PM invites Donald Trump for NATO summit', *Caliber.Az*, November 12 2024
Accessible:
https://caliber.az/en/post/dutch-pm-invites-donald-trump-to-nato-summit

[12] Lau, S. (2024) 'US and Europe to clarify NATO's future relationship with Russia', *Politico*, October 11 2024
Accessible:
https://www.politico.eu/article/us-europe-clarify-nato-future-relationship-russia/

[13] MacAskill, E. (2018) 'How Trump's Nato summit meltdown unfolded', *The Guardian*, July 12 2018
Accessible:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jul/12/how-trumps-nato-summit-meltdown-unfolded

[14] Moody, O. (2024) 'German leadership frontrunner wants to bring back conscription', *The Times*, December 5 2024
Accessible:
https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/germany-conscription-army-fight-olaf-scholz-6qlqf7fvc

[15] NATO (2014) 'Wales Summit Declaration', *NATO*, September 5 2014
Accessible:
https://www.nato.int/cps/cn/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

[16] Nicholas, P. (2024) 'Trump details sweeping changes he'll carry out on day one and beyond in an exclusive interview', *NBC News*, December 8 2024
Accessible:

https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-details-sweeping-changes-ll-carry-day-one-exclusive-interview-rcna182858

[17] Peretti, A. (2024) 'Italian far-right Lega files bill for mandatory military service', *EURACTIV*, May 22 2024
Accessible:
https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italian-far-right-lega-files-bill-for-mandatory-military-service/

[18] Public Diplomacy Division (2024) 'Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024)', *NATO*, June 17 2024
Accessible:
https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf

[19] Tusk, D. (@donaldtusk) (2024) 'The post-war epoch is gone. We are living in new times: in a pre-war epoch. This is why NATO and solidarity between Europe and America are more important than ever before.', *Twitter*, March 9 2024
Accessible:
https://x.com/donaldtusk/status/1766448028427182382

[20] Varga, J. (2024) 'The 4 EU countries changing conscription rules as UK urged to bring back National Service', *Daily Express*, April 5 2024
Accessible:
https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1885167/eu-countries-changing-conscription-rules-ukraine-war

[21] NATOSource (2018) 'Trump Confirms He Threatened to Withdraw from NATO', *Atlantic Council*, August 23 2018
Accessible:
https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/trump-confirms-he-threatened-to-withdraw-from-nato/

Consequences for the European Union

Tom Heyes

The long-held assumption that the United States would be the ultimate guarantor of European security was shaken during President Donald Trump's first term in which he threatened to withdraw from NATO unless European countries increased their defence spending. Fears surrounding the implications for European security of a second Trump presidency have returned following his re-election. His pick for Defence Secretary, Pete Hegseth, and his Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, are indicative of the foreign policy Trump is set to pursue. Hegseth has questioned NATO's value to the US, while Gabbard has been critical of US support for Ukraine. On Ukraine, Trump has promised to "end the war in 24 hours" by forcing Russia and Ukraine to negotiate a settlement.

In contrast, most European countries believe a deal with Russia would leave Ukraine, and Europe more widely, vulnerable to future Russian aggression and argue that it is up to Ukraine to decide when to seek a political settlement. Europe, however, would struggle to supply the aid Ukraine needs to keep fighting if the US withdrew support. More broadly, the US' strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific suggests that Europe will be required to increase its share of the burden of European security.

What is happening?

In response to these risks and the potential for greater divergence between the US and EU on defence and security matters, attention has returned to the concept of "strategic autonomy". The term rose to prominence after being championed in a 2017 speech by French President Emmanuel Macron and again in 2019, when President Trump threatened to withdraw from NATO and President Macron called the alliance "brain-dead". However, the outbreak of full scale war in Ukraine in 2022 had led to renewed calls for European governments to take the goal of strategic autonomy seriously. The re-election of President Trump will perhaps be the impetus European governments and the EU needs to take action at the scale required to achieve strategic autonomy. This would have the dual benefit of both encouraging the US to maintain its commitment to Europe under President Trump and acting as insurance in case the US disengages from the continent.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU has initiated several programs to improve European defence cooperation and support the development of strategic autonomy. These programs primarily coordinate and support the building of defence production and industrial capacity in order to reduce the reliance on US weapons and capabilities, provide munitions for Ukraine, and re-build the stockpiles necessary for major conflict. The EU's Strategic Compass, adopted in March 2022, provides a shared strategic vision for defence and security to focus the efforts and investments of member states. Beneath this umbrella, the EU has adopted regulations to increase ammunition production and support common procurement – which is more cost-effective, and in March 2024 published a "European Defence Industrial Strategy" to scale-up production and acquire the capabilities that European militaries are overly reliant on the US to provide. Finally, The European Peace Facility was also established, which provides financing for member states' aid to Ukraine and EU missions. The European Peace Facility is an off-budget funding mechanism for military operations and assistance as the EU budget itself cannot be used on spending with military or defence implications

These programs were established in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but many see these efforts doubly necessary in light of the incoming Trump administration, whose statements have undermined faith that the US would act in the defence of Europe and/or would force Ukraine to agree to a deal with Russia that would leave itself and Eastern NATO members at heightened risk. Recent reports by the "Centre for European Reform" and "Politico", however, have warned that European governments may rush to buy favour with Trump, who has frequently expressed a transactional view of foreign affairs, by bilaterally agreeing weapons deals with the US, which would undermine European common procurement initiatives and the development of the industrial capacity needed to achieve true strategic autonomy.

Foreign policy divisions within the bloc may also prove barriers to further defence cooperation and integration. For example, Hungary, and others including Slovakia, have stalled funding and been vocal opponents of aid for Ukraine, and could impede efforts to agree to investments in defence at the European level – which would require the common agreement of member states. Fear that one member, or a handful, may prevent action could discourage EU members from agreeing to integrate their forces under EU structures that require unanimity to make decisions.

France and Germany, Europe's largest economies, are also key to greater EU action. Germany, despite its recent boost to defence spending under Chancellor Scholz's "zeitenwende" policy, can largely be seen to have put its own economic interests first – buying large quantities of cheap Russian gas prior to the full-scale invasion and pursuing relatively close relations with China. The recent collapse of Germany's ruling coalition government in recent months and the resignation of Michel Barnier's

government in France after his loss of a no-confidence vote may also distract President Macron and Chancellor Scholz from defence issues to focus on their domestic political troubles. French and German financial and defence-industrial strength would be key to any serious attempts to develop European defence capabilities, but at a time of political challenge, their leaders are likely to be reluctant to boost defence spending at the expense of social programs. These tensions are evident in Germany, where, following the US election, 73% of Germans agreed that Germany should increase its defence spending, but a majority still do not support Germany playing a leading role in European defence. In France, the far-right and far-left parties that united to bring down Barnier's government and performed strongly in the recent legislative election are also opposed to strong support for Ukraine.

EU defence programs also suffer from excluding the UK, Europe's largest defence spender. The limitations of EU structures for defence are illustrated in the creation of defence initiatives outside them, including joint Italian-British-Japanese and French-German-Spanish fighter jet development programmes and the formation of the Joint Expeditionary Force – a UK led rapid response force composed of Northern European countries. The EU's defence industrial strategy focuses on building-up Europe's stockpiles and capabilities by investing in European production rather than increasing exports from outside the bloc, as this will put funds back into the EU economy and lessen the risks of relying on third countries. Yet some think tanks and industry leaders, including the Carnegie Endowment for Peace and the CEO of Saab (a major Swedish defence firm), argue these measures are motivated more by protectionism and the economic interests of countries with large defence industries than by a desire to build-up Europe's military capabilities.

What happens next?

The incoming Trump administration will put pressure on EU countries to increase their defence spending, particularly the 7 that fall short of NATO's 2% of GDP requirement, which include Italy and Spain, in order to maintain the US' commitment to Europe and NATO. In turn, the increase in capability as a result of higher spending and the concern that the US can no longer be completely relied upon to defend Europe, might suggest that the Trump presidency will push European countries closer to achieving "strategic autonomy". Since the invasion of Ukraine, European countries have reassessed their security environment and committed to investing in defence. It is likely that the Trump administration will encourage this trend and that European countries will be more prepared for major conflict, but achieving full strategic autonomy in the next 4 years or seeing the creation of significant EU defence structures still appears improbable.

Trump's overall foreign policy outlook is well-known and he will have greater freedom to enact his vision during his second term due to the absence of establishment national security figures such as John Bolton (Trump's former National Security Advisor) and General Jim Mattis (Trump's former Secretary of Defence) who previously curtailed some of his ideas. However, the questions of how Trump will deal with the Ukraine war and/or the kind of peace deal he will accept are still open and will have major implications for European security. Many argue that pushing Ukraine to cede occupied territory to Russia will create future security risks for Ukraine and Europe, as Russia may not honour the agreement and attack Ukraine again at a later date or question the willingness of NATO to defend Eastern Europe - which increases the possibility of conflict. Other options, including Europe making up the US shortfall in aid to allow Ukraine to keep fighting, or European forces acting as peacekeeping forces to keep Russia from re-attacking, would put significant pressures on European defence budgets and capabilities.

References:

[1] Austin, S, November 2024, Can European Security be 'Trump-proofed', LSE
Accessible:
https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2024/11/27/can-european-security-be-trump-proofed/

[2] Besch, S, March 2024, Understanding the EU's new defence industrial strategy, Carnegie Endowment
Accessible:
https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2024/03/understanding-the-eus-new-defense-industrial-strategy?lang=en

[3] Bond et al., November 2024, Can Europe navigate Trump 2, Centre For European Reform
Accessible:
https://www.cer.eu/insights/can-europe-navigate-trump-2

[4] Dempsey, J, April 2024, Will Macron's vision for European defence gain traction, Carnegie Endowment
Accessible:
https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2024/04/judy-asks-will-macrons-vision-for-european-defense-gain-traction?lang=en

[5] Dempsey, J, April 2024, Scholz's visit to China confirms Germany's political weakness, Carnegie Endowment
Accessible:
https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2024/04/scholzs-visit-to-china-confirms-germanys-political-weakness?lang=en

[6] European Council, November 2024, EU cooperation on security and defence
Accessible:
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/

[7] Franke, U, Varma, T, July 2019, Independence Play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy, European Council on Foreign Relations
Accessible:
https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Independence-play-Europes-pursuit-of-strategic-autonomy.pdf

[8] Greene, S, November 2024, Europe's Trump Problem, CEPA
Accessible:
https://cepa.org/article/europes-trump-problem/

[9] Korber Stifung, 2024, The Berlin Pulse 2024/25
Accessible:
https://koerber-stiftung.de/en/projects/the-berlin-pulse/2024-25/

[10] Pfeifer, S, Foy, H, April 2024, Saab chief warns against EU defence protectionism, Financial Times
https://www.ft.com/content/5db7c8a5-84c5-4400-a52a-67f4eb2039cc

[11] Politico, November 2024, Trump's in. Here's what it means for Europe
Accessible:
https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-washington-us-elections-win-2024-kamala-harris-europe-russia/

[12] Van Rij, A, November 2024, Trump and his growing number of European allies threaten the European project, Chatham House
https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/11/trump-and-his-growing-number-european-allies-threaten-european-project

Impact on the United Kingdom

Tom Heyes

A less engaged US would likely lead to a closer security partnership between the EU, its members, and the UK. They share a common fear that Russia would seek to capitalise on a situation in which the US is less reliably committed to the defence of all NATO members and/ or one in which the US withdraws military aid to compel Ukraine to negotiate with Russia. The worry that Russia may attack an Eastern European NATO member if the deterrence of collective defence is weakened is evident in recent warnings by military and political leaders, including Germany's defence minister, NATO's Secretary General, and the head of the British Army, that NATO needs to be prepared for conflict with Russia within 5 years.

What's in it for you?

The combined pressures of the war in Ukraine and its wider implications and the need to convince President Trump that Europe is "paying its fair share" towards European defence increases the likelihood that the Keir Starmer's government will raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP during this Parliament. Previously, the Conservatives had pledged to raise spending to 2.5% by 2030 while Starmer committed to this figure but had not put a timescale on it. Raising defence spending would necessarily require cuts from other departments and services, a tax rise, or increased borrowing. The general consensus between the Conservatives and Labour on defence and foreign policy issues, particularly when it comes to Ukraine, further contributes to the likelihood of a medium-term increase in defence spending. A renewed focus on defence and the need for greater self-reliance, may also contribute to job creation in the UK defence industry. On a more abstract level, Trump's presidency risks undermining the deterrence, created through the commitment to collective defence, that NATO argues helps maintain peace, either rhetorically or materially. The UK already has troops positioned in the Baltic and is committed to come to their defence, meaning a Russian attack on the Baltic states would be highly likely to lead to war between UK and Russian forces, with the potential for escalation, and social and economic that this entails.

What happens next?

Despite some of Trump's rhetoric, it appears that the US withdrawing from NATO entirely is relatively unlikely, although a reduction in forces stationed in Europe and the doubts surrounding the US' adherence to collective defence remain distinct possibilities. In any case, an increase in UK defence spending appears likely, either to keep Trump on side and maintain the US presence in Europe, or to attempt to plug some of the capability gaps left by the US and maintain deterrence if the US reduces its commitment. This pressure to raise spending can already be seen in recent calls by NATO's Secretary General Mark Rutte for members to raise defence spending to 3% of GDP to prepare for the possibility of conflict with Russia.

The election of the new Labour government in the UK has created an opportunity to reset relations between the UK and EU, which had frayed under the Conservatives. The Trump presidency is likely to further encourage closer collaboration between the UK, EU, and its members on defence and security matters, due to their shared interests in maintaining US support for NATO and a credible deterrence against Russian aggression. As one of Europe's two nuclear states and the only one that commits its nuclear forces to NATO, as well as one of the alliance's leading conventional powers, US disengagement from NATO would necessarily increase the UK's role and importance in the alliance and could lead to closer defence cooperation with European allies.

Despite the potential disruption that a second Trump presidency brings, it is likely that there will also be continuity in key areas of the US-UK "special relationship", particularly on nuclear weapons and intelligence-sharing. The UK and US have an especially close partnership in these areas, with the UK relying on the US to maintain its nuclear weapons and the two countries sharing intelligence as part of the Five Eyes alliance (an intelligence sharing partnership between the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). Despite possible internal disruption to the US intelligence community under the Trump administration, it is likely that the US and UK's uniquely close intelligence relationship will continue.

References:

[1] Arnold, E, February 2024, The possible Trump effect on UK national security and what to do about it, RUSI
Accessible:
https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/possible-trump-effect-uk-national-security-and-what-do-about-it

[2] Brown, L, December 2024, UK must raise defence spending to counter Russia, says NATO chief, the Times

Accessible:
https://www.thetimes.com/world/russia-ukraine-war/article/uk-defence-spending-russian-threat-nato-x57jmn70q

[3] Chalmers, M, March 2024, Bracing for 2025: The UK and European security under a Trump presidency, RUSI
Accessible:
https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/occasional-papers/bracing-2025-uk-and-european-security-under-trump-presidency

[4] Coleman, C, October 2024, Strategic defence review – in focus, House of Lords Library
Accessible:
https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/strategic-defence-review/

[5] Jessett, W, et al., October 2024, The new approach to the UK Strategic Defence Review: Tests for success
Accessible:
https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/new-approach-uk-strategic-defence-review-tests-success

[6] Lewis, P, O'Sullivan, O, July 2024, A new SDR should make increased UK defence spending count, Chatham House
Accessible:
https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/07/new-sdr-should-make-increased-uk-defence-spending-count

[7] Urban, J, November 2024, Donald Trump's America will be a different type of partner for the UK, Institute for Government
Accessible:
https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/donald-trump-partner-uk

Support Polis Analysis

As a social impact start-up run by volunteers, Polis Analysis depends on subscribers to our Polis Intelligence Briefing to finance our organisation. To ensure we can continue to deliver accessible, fact-based analysis to thousands of readers in over 100 countries without the need to compromise our editorial independence and include ads, we need your financial support.

Polis Analysis Ltd
Bank: **Monzo**
Account Number: **33421319**
Sort code: **04-00-04**
IBAN: **GB10 MONZ 0400 0433 4213 19**

Please note that Polis Analysis retains copyright and full editorial control over any written research it produces, irrespective of funding.

If you would like to partner with Polis Analysis, please get in touch at hello@polisanalysis.com.

polisanalysis.com

Polis
Analysis