

# Washington Square Citizens League

Discussion Forum

7:00-8:15 pm

Tuesday, April 22, 2025

## **Donald Trump Upends U.S. Foreign Policy**

Lynn Miller, moderator

*In the brief period since he began his second term as President, Donald Trump has radically altered many of the long-standing practices in American politics, both at home and abroad. Our focus in this discussion session is on his impact on our foreign policy. We'll attempt to assess the nature and breadth of those changes generally, but with particular attention to shifts as they relate to the ongoing war being waged by Russia against Ukraine.*

*Here are a number of articles from periodicals that should help inform our discussion. You have no doubt had access to others. There will surely be news accounts that have appeared in the days since I prepared these materials, so by all means, let's inform ourselves in those as well.*

### ***America First is a contagious condition***

**Donald Trump's resentful, show-me-the-money approach to statecraft is catching on**

THE ECONOMIST, Mar 6th 2025

High-minded Americans fear that President Donald Trump will make a pariah of their country. Ask foreign governments about Trumpian statecraft and they offer an opposite concern. When other countries ponder the basic elements of an America First foreign policy—indifference to liberal values, scorn for global rules and norms, and a cold-eyed focus on the national interest—a surprising number of them worry: this is going to catch on.

The Telegram has just spent a week in Washington and New York. He found veteran envoys reeling after America voted with Russia against its European allies on a UN resolution about Ukraine. An Asian diplomat says that the international order faces “a moment of extreme danger”.

In her Senate confirmation hearing, Mr Trump's nominee for UN ambassador, Elise Stefanik, signalled America's desire to narrow that world body's work back down to its “founding mission of international peace and security”. The same diplomats worry that an America First approach is contagious. European countries that once took a lead in funding peacekeeping missions and humanitarian programmes are telling partners that, with Mr Trump pulling support from Ukraine, and with their own voters turning against overseas aid, the priority is projects that advance their national interests. Britain has just diverted much of its aid budget to defence spending. The

Netherlands government announced that: “From now on, Dutch interests will take precedence in our country’s development policy.” Trade, security and migration were cited as core Dutch concerns.

Envoys describe middle powers—countries like Brazil, Malaysia or South Africa—becoming much more active in proposing solutions to conflicts or global crises. Often, their approach eschews the moral certainties of old-school Western interventionism, preferring consensus-building and compromise. Some “muscular” new arrivals on the global centre-stage are ready to throw their weight around and advance a transactional, ultra-realist approach with no patience for liberal values. Turkey and Gulf Arab states such as the United Arab Emirates are cited as examples.

Within America, principled critics of Mr Trump’s diplomacy point to his administration’s chaotic cuts to overseas aid programmes and predict that lives will be lost, shredding American soft power built up over decades as the world’s largest humanitarian donor. To opponents, Mr Trump’s pitiless approach to peacemaking in Ukraine undermines America’s credibility as Europe’s security guarantor. Most simply, Mr Trump’s contempt for global agreements and multilateral bodies creates gaps that rivals can fill. When his government repudiates climate-change agreements, questions arms-control treaties or threatens to quit or defund various UN bodies, all eyes turn to China, the autocratic giant that believes its destiny is to lead a multipolar world order.

Mr Trump’s worldview has few defenders in the embassies and foreign missions of Washington and New York. A diplomat from a close ally calls his foreign-policy instincts “reptilian”. For all that, a striking number of governments share much of Mr Trump’s bleak analysis about the ways of the world. Some admit that America has earned surprisingly little soft power by donating tens of billions of dollars to such programmes as PEPFAR, a scheme to treat and prevent HIV, [notably in Africa](#). An African diplomat concedes that, in his continent, it is common for politicians to accuse Western donors of delivering finger-wagging lectures, while China is praised for offering loans to build roads. “Africans by and large do not consider aid to be a benign instrument. They consider that it sets up a power dynamic between giver and recipient.” Part of the explanation, says the diplomat, lies in self-interested behaviour by local elites. At election times, “politicians say: vote for me because this road was built. More than: vote for me because I worked with PEPFAR.”

Europe is stunned by Mr Trump’s bullying of Ukraine. Many middle powers see reality crushing the “pipe-dream” of continued Ukrainian defiance of Russia, its nuclear-armed neighbour. “As countries without the clout to wage wars, we know that these conflicts always end around a negotiating table,” says a diplomat from the global south. “The Ukrainians were playing with American chips and now the Americans have taken the chips off the table.”

### **Going back to a transactional, unstable world**

Optimists talk of a multipolar world order that respects each country’s own values, in a welcome break from decades of Western meddling and bossiness. They describe groups of countries tackling climate change and other challenges, in coalitions of the willing and regional groups. Pessimists worry about a looming clash between rich and poor countries. There is much talk of giving developing countries a larger say in global institutions. But if poorer countries expect this to lead to huge transfers from the rich world, as reparations for colonialism or climate change,

they are about to be disappointed. “If the debate centres on ‘show me the money’, we are setting ourselves up for failure,” worries the Asian diplomat. As Western donors walk away, they may not be replaced. An emissary from an emerging power recently asked a Chinese counterpart whether China would step up if America stops funding the un. “Absolutely not,” came the reply.

In ten years the un could be reduced to a skeleton, suggests Richard Gowan of the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based conflict-prevention ngo. Technical agencies that oversee international standards or intellectual property may survive, as might stripped-down humanitarian agencies to help the neediest. The un General Assembly could become an anti-Western talking-shop. “The old architecture is crumbling,” reckons a high-ranking diplomat. Mr Trump’s wrecking ball is speeding the collapse.

## ***Shredding the Postwar Order***

April 24, 2025

[Fintan O’Toole](#)

Donald Trump is reshaping relations between Europe and the US more dramatically than at any time since World War II.

[April 24, 2025 issue](#) , New York Review of Books

On March 9 Poland’s minister of foreign affairs, Radosław Sikorski, posted on X about an apparent threat by Elon Musk to deny Ukraine access to the Starlink satellite system it uses to guide its military drones. Musk, whose company SpaceX operates Starlink, had written that Ukraine’s “entire front line would collapse if I turned it off.” Sikorski noted that

Starlinks for Ukraine are paid for by the Polish Digitization Ministry at the cost of about \$50 million per year. The ethics of threatening the victim of aggression apart, if SpaceX proves to be an unreliable provider we will be forced to look for other suppliers.

US secretary of state Marco Rubio weighed in to admonish Sikorski: “Say thank you because without Starlink Ukraine would have lost this war long ago and Russians would be on the border with Poland right now.” (He is presumably unaware that Poland already shares a border with Russia’s Kaliningrad exclave.) Musk posted his own reply to Sikorski: “Be quiet, small man.”

Such boorishness had by then ceased to be shocking. Imitation is the tawdriest form of flattery: Donald Trump’s courtiers signal their devotion by inflicting his mode of puerile bullying on allied governments. Rubio’s “Say thank you” was an obvious attempt to curry favor with Trump by emulating Vice President J.D. Vance’s haranguing of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office on February 28: “Have you said thank you once?” Musk’s “small man” mimicked Trump’s familiar mode of insult—once aimed at “Little Marco” himself. The infantilization of America’s domestic politics has spread to its international relations. In Trump’s boys’ club, disdain for Europe is an important signifier of belonging: as Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth assured Vance in a Signal message of March 14, inadvertently leaked to *The Atlantic’s* Jeffrey Goldberg, “I fully share your loathing of European free-loading. It’s PATHETIC.”

What was nonetheless remarkable in this instance was the target. Poland is arguably the most pro-American foreign country on earth. In a Pew survey conducted in thirty-four countries across six continents last year, 86 percent of Poles said they held a favorable view of the US—higher than anywhere else, including Israel, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Trump’s demand that

European members of NATO should spend more on defense has already been met by Poland—its military expenditure as a proportion of GDP is now more than twice as high as NATO’s official target of 2 percent and very close to the 5 percent that Trump proposed in January. Much of that outlay is on American arms and missile defense systems. In 2022 and 2023 Poland signed deals to buy more than \$6 billion worth of Abrams tanks, and it has become the first European country to deploy them.

This love of America has deep roots in large-scale Polish immigration to the United States, in Woodrow Wilson’s support for the renaissance of an independent Polish state at the end of World War I, and in Ronald Reagan’s backing of the dissident Solidarity movement in the 1980s. The Polish sense of obligation helps explain the country’s steadfast political and military participation even in this century’s greatest American folly, George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003. Though most Americans have probably forgotten this, after the fall of Saddam Hussein one of the four occupation zones into which Iraq was divided was under Polish control. Among other motives, this was Poland’s way of reciprocating a century of American friendship.

In Trump’s first term, it was he who was saying thank you to Poland. In July 2017 Trump addressed a large and audibly adoring crowd in Warsaw’s Krasinski Square:

We salute the Polish people for being one of the NATO countries that has actually achieved the benchmark for investment in our common defense. Thank you. Thank you, Poland. I must tell you, the example you set is truly magnificent, and we applaud Poland. Thank you.

Trump also assured the crowd that their country was at the heart of a transatlantic alliance for which he seemed to have boundless enthusiasm:

A strong Poland is a blessing to the nations of Europe, and they know that. A strong Europe is a blessing to the West and to the world. One hundred years after the entry of American forces into World War I, the transatlantic bond between the United States and Europe is as strong as ever and maybe, in many ways, even stronger.

How did we get from there to here? How did Trump’s fulsome praise for Poland as the best-behaved child in the European family transform into his sidekicks’ open contempt? How did Trump himself get from desire for “a strong Europe,” identification with “the West,” and commitment to “the transatlantic bond” to a historic sundering of that bond? Trump has shocked America’s European partners by betraying Ukraine and openly siding with Russia. There has been, as Poland’s prime minister, Donald Tusk, put it on March 7, a “profound change of American geopolitics,” and Europeans are having to come to terms with what it means for themselves and the world.

In trying to understand Trump, mere ignorance must always be given its due. His sense of grievance about NATO and the European Union is at once deep and vague. He thinks, as he told the London *Times* in January 2017, that the EU is just a German front: “You look at the European Union and it’s Germany. Basically a vehicle for Germany.” He seems to believe that NATO and the EU are effectively the same organization. John Bolton, who served as his national security adviser in 2018 and 2019, recalls in *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir*:

Trump criticized Jean Claude Juncker [then president of the European Commission] as a vicious man who hated the United States desperately. Juncker, said Trump, sets the NATO budget, although he did not describe how that was accomplished.

More startlingly, Trump seems to confuse the percentage of GDP that NATO members spend on their own defense with what he persistently calls their “contributions” to NATO. Bolton recalls Trump threatening that the US would lower its “contributions” to the same level as Germany’s. He was referring to Germany’s failure to live up to its commitment to spend 2 percent of GDP on defense. But, as Bolton puzzled, this commitment

is not about “contributions” to NATO, but about aggregate defense spending. Whether Trump ever understood this, and simply misused the word “contribution,” I could never tell. But saying he would reduce the US “contribution” to Germany’s level implied the US would drop its defense expenditures from over 4 percent of GDP by some 75 percent, which I don’t think he meant.

Yet the haziness of Trump’s knowledge of Europe and of the transatlantic alliance offers a false comfort—if Trump doesn’t really know what he’s doing, he may just as easily stumble back into the arms of “the West.” While Trump’s grasp on reality may be unsteady, he has fixed ideas and unchanging instincts. It is those obsessions and impulses that are now reshaping relations between Europe and the US more dramatically than at any time since the end of World War II.

It should be acknowledged that the underlying tensions in those relations long predate Trump’s political ascendancy. While the cold war endured, Europe remained the primary locus of America’s confrontation with the Soviet Union, and US power provided Europe’s bulwark against a Soviet invasion. Paradoxically, however, the end of the cold war, which might have been expected to weaken US engagement with European security, actually deepened it. NATO has gradually doubled its membership from sixteen countries in 1990 to thirty-two now. The US thus accumulated commitments in principle to go to war with anyone who attacked Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Baltic states, Albania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Croatia, Montenegro, even North Macedonia.

There is an underlying contradiction here: the threat receded, but American deterrence expanded. One might go so far as to say that NATO grew precisely *because* the threat it was intended to counter had apparently vanished—the US could make promises of protection to all and sundry because those assurances seemed increasingly abstract. Would Americans have committed themselves to defend North Macedonia if they believed there was the remotest possibility of its actually being invaded? A broad seam of fiction runs beneath the surface of this landscape. Europeans were, for the most part, happy to keep it buried and hope for the best. They were living, quite literally, with a false sense of security.

Equally, everyone in Europe knew that the US could go rogue. It did so in 2003 when it illegally invaded Iraq. The neoconservatives who dominated the Bush administration openly repudiated the idea that the US should be bound by international laws and institutions. Fundamental to this view is the belief, articulated most clearly by Robert Kagan in a seminal 2002 essay called “Power and Weakness,” that only puny nations have to subscribe to multilateral processes or norms. The Europeans love those organizations and conventions because they are weak. The US, as an exceptionally powerful force, has no need of them. This creed is entirely ahistorical—after victories in World Wars I and II and then again in the cold war, the extremely powerful US was actively involved in the creation of much of the nexus of global governance. But the intellectual and emotional grip of that idea is strong—not even Democratic presidents have sought, for example, to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

Neoconservatives embraced the idea of American global hegemony, even of America as an empire, but they tempered it with one crucial qualification: as Kagan and William Kristol put it in *Foreign Affairs* in 1996, “It is precisely because American foreign policy is infused with an unusually high degree of morality that other nations find they have less to fear from its otherwise daunting power.” This claim is innately absurd—the old European empires, particularly the British and the French, also presented themselves as moral missionaries rather than predatory conquerors. But even on its own terms, the claim depends entirely on the goodwill and decency of American presidents. It should not have taken Trump to disabuse Europeans of the notion that those presidents would always be essentially benevolent. But he has ripped away this cloak of morality. That fiction, too, has been exposed for what it is.

In these respects, Trump can be said to have forced Europeans into a belated confrontation with reality. In 2018, when Trump pulled out of the nuclear deal that the US and the EU had jointly made with Iran, Tusk, who was then president of the EU’s council, tweeted, “Looking at latest decisions of @realDonaldTrump someone could even think: with friends like that who needs enemies. But frankly, EU should be grateful. Thanks to him we got rid of all illusions.” Yet some illusions die hard, and the arrival in the Oval Office of the old Atlanticist Joe Biden resuscitated the fantasy of the ever-stronger “transatlantic bond.”

If Trump did no more than walk away—as he often threatened to do in his first term—from America’s commitments to Europe, he could even claim to have delivered a salutary dose of shock treatment. But he is not walking away from Europe; he is trampling all over it. His regime has not lost interest in Europe; it has developed a malevolent interest in destroying the EU.

Trump’s antipathy toward Europe’s institutions is not just one of his whims. It is intertwined with another part of his mentality: distorted ideas of masculinity. At least since 2003 and the American right’s furious reaction to French and German criticism of the invasion of Iraq, antagonism toward Europe has been shaped by a highly sexualized binary opposition of American masculine potency to European feminine feebleness. Kagan, in “Power and Weakness,” wrote that “Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus”—echoing the title of John Gray’s best-selling book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. In 2003 in these pages, Timothy Garton Ash noted a reliance by American anti-Europeans on similar stereotypes:

The American is a virile, heterosexual male; the European is female, impotent, or castrated. Militarily, Europeans can’t get it up. (After all, they have fewer than twenty “heavy lift” transport planes, compared with the United States’ more than two hundred.)... The word “eunuchs” is, I discovered, used in the form “EU-nuchs.”

It should be no surprise that Trump, Musk, and Vance view Europe through this same lens, as emasculated and therefore easily bullied.

Yet as is the way of fragile hypermasculinity, there is also the ultimate fear: How humiliating is it to be screwed by those whom you are destined to screw? Europeans were shocked in late February when Trump declared that “the European Union was formed in order to screw the United States. That’s the purpose of it, and they’ve done a good job of it.” He was merely repeating what he has said before. In 2020 Bob Woodward reported in his book *Rage* on a conversation with Trump: “The president brought up the European Union, which he felt had also been ‘ripping us off for years’ and been ‘formed to screw the United States.’”

In this darkly masochistic fantasy, the EU is no less threatening than China. Bolton recalls that, in a meeting with German chancellor Angela Merkel, “Trump also used a line I later heard countless times, that ‘the EU is worse than China except smaller,’ adding that the EU was set up to take advantage of the US.” In an interview on Fox News in July 2018, Trump said something similar. Maria Bartiromo asked him, “Would it be better to actually have our allies together to go against China instead of pushing back on our allies?” Trump replied, “Excuse me—the European Union is possibly as bad as China, just smaller. OK? It’s terrible what they do to us.” Thus swaggering virility morphs into a Victorian melodrama of feminine vulnerability—America is the naif taken advantage of by a predatory EU that has had its wicked way with her.

This anxiety goes so deep that when Trump has to list America’s enemies, it is the EU that first comes to mind. In 2018, before traveling to an infamously sycophantic summit with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, Trump was asked by CBS News to name his “biggest foe globally right now.” “Well,” he said, “I think we have a lot of foes. I think the European Union is a foe, what they do to us in trade. Now you wouldn’t think of the European Union, but they’re a foe.” As so often with Trump, it is hard to distinguish petty personal grievances from epoch-making political decisions. In the 2017 interview with the London *Times*, he claimed that the EU had prevented him from developing his golf course in Ireland:

I own a big property in Ireland, magnificent property called Doonbeg, what happened is I went for an approval to do this massive, beautiful expansion...but I learnt a lot because I got the approvals very quickly from Ireland and then Ireland and my people went to the EU to get the approval—it was going to take years—that was a very bad thing for Ireland....

I found it to be a very unpleasant experience.

This isn’t what happened, but in Trump’s mind there is little distinction between real and perceived slights. And this imaginary unpleasantness still weighs on him—in a press conference with the Irish taoiseach, Micheál Martin, in the White House on March 12, he spent two minutes repeating his tale of woe about the EU and Doonbeg.

Politically, Trump’s hostility toward the EU first manifested in his enthusiastic support for Brexit. During his 2016 campaign he was anxious to identify himself personally with Britain’s decision to leave the EU. “Many people,” he tweeted just after the British referendum of June 23 that year, “are equating BREXIT, and what is going on in Great Britain, with what is happening in the US. People want their country back!” In August he doubled down: “They will soon be calling me MR. BREXIT!” At that time right-wingers in both Europe and the US hoped that Brexit was a harbinger of the collapse of the EU itself. Trump expressed this in the *Times* interview: “I think people want, people want their own identity, so if you ask me, others, I believe others will leave.”

In Trump’s first term his belief that the EU is a “foe” on a par with China (and far below Russia) bubbled up from time to time but largely remained latent. It could even—as in his Warsaw speech—be completely buried under Atlanticist boilerplate. But with Trump, nothing goes away. In his second term, his anti-Europeanism is not merely free from restraint by remnants of the old military and foreign policy establishments—it is egged on by those around him.

To answer the question of what happened to turn Trump’s lavish praise for Poland in 2017 into his henchmen’s supercilious sneering of 2025: three things have changed. They are Trump’s impeachment in 2019 over his attempted shakedown of Zelensky (as well as the Mueller report earlier that year into Russia’s interference in the 2016 US election); a much more aggressive

desire to interfere in European domestic politics in support of far-right and neofascist parties; and Trump's new alliance with Big Tech.

Trump's admiration for Putin may be of long standing, but by his own account he now sees the Russian president as a brother-in-arms with whom he fought side by side against common enemies. "Putin went through a hell of a lot with me," he said on February 28. "He went through a phony witch hunt where they used him and Russia. Russia, Russia, Russia, ever hear of that deal?" On the principle that my friend's enemy is my enemy too, Poland (for obvious reasons one of the European countries most fearful of Russia) is cherished no longer. Ironically, the same military buildup that made Poland a darling for Trump in 2017 now makes it an unwelcome obstacle to Putin's revived imperialism.

Secondly, Poland made the mistake of ditching a hard-right Catholic nationalist government (which was in office during Trump's visit in 2017) for Tusk's centrist coalition. The new Trump administration, far from disengaging from Europe, is much more interested in reshaping it in its own image. Musk and Vance are openly interfering in European democracies to support far-right nationalist parties and to undermine the EU from within. In a speech at the Munich Security Conference on February 14, Vance acted out a pretend slip of the tongue: "I look to Brussels, where EU commiss—commissars..." This flip from "commissioners" to "commissars" gave oily utterance to a message that cannot yet be fully articulated: the transfer of American enmity from Russia to the present equivalent of the Communist menace—the EU. Somewhat more subtly, Vance quoted Pope John Paul II: "Do not be afraid." The Polish pope used this phrase at his inauguration in 1978, and it was understood at the time to be a challenge to Soviet hegemony over his homeland. Vance was again twisting words to substitute one tyrannical regime for another: the EU as the new Soviet Union.

Trump and his allies have clearly decided that the best way to destroy this new enemy is to subvert it by throwing America's weight behind far-right movements within its member states. On the day of his speech in Munich, and just nine days before Germany's federal election, Vance held a meeting at his hotel with Alice Weidel, leader of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland party, whose very name references a Nazi slogan ("Alles für Deutschland"). Meanwhile he refused to meet with Germany's elected chancellor, Olaf Scholz. In his speech he called for an end to the so-called firewall, the refusal of Germany's democratic parties to make deals with the AfD: "There's no room for firewalls." The instruction was clear: not only should Germans "not be afraid" to vote for the AfD, but the far right should be invited into government after the election.

This open subversion of the EU is closely related to the third big change: Trump's partnership with the American tech and social media giants. Much of Vance's speech in Munich was made up of lies about and wild exaggerations of European attempts to protect democracy and social freedoms from disinformation and abuse. In another world, his claims would be risible: that Scotland has threatened to prosecute people for "even private prayer within their own homes," that the EU supported the annulling of elections in Romania and might do the same in Germany, that the EU intends to shut down social media "the moment they spot what they've judged to be, quote, 'hateful content,'" and that German police "have carried out raids against citizens suspected of posting anti-feminist comments online." None of these assertions is remotely true, but they all have a political point: the EU is a tyranny because it wants to impose some regulation on America's social media companies. The commercial interest of those companies in being



allowed to disseminate toxic material dovetails perfectly with the Trump administration's interest in supporting the far-right and pro-Russian movements that spread hatred and disinformation.

What, though, will all of this achieve? The administration's assault on the EU is clumsily counterproductive. This time Trump really has "got rid of all illusions" in Europe about America's intentions. Whatever happens in Ukraine and however changeable Trump's whims prove to be, the designation of the EU as an enemy power has created an irreversible logic. It is not just that Europe can no longer assume that the US is benign—it must reckon with the possibility that it will be actively malign. By so openly seeking to destroy the EU, Trump is forcing it to prove that what does not kill it will make it stronger.

The misogynistic imagery essential to the anti-European mentality of the American right is not marginal to this miscalculation. It supports the default assumption that the EU, being effeminate, is innately weak and that it will break under pressure from manly America. But the world does not conform to such idiotic prejudices. The EU has all the problems of a complex, rules-based, and highly consensual multilateral organization. Yet it is also inherently dynamic, growing as it has from a small club of six Western nations to a conglomeration of twenty-seven countries with a combined population much larger than that of the US.

There is an obvious precedent for Trump getting Europe wrong. Instead of being a harbinger of doom for the EU, his beloved Brexit is such an obvious mess that it has had the effect of consolidating the EU; even the far-right parties in France and Italy that flirted with Frexit and Italexit no longer do so. It is amusing that the notorious Project 2025 agenda for the second Trump administration laments that "in the wake of Brexit, EU foreign policy now takes place without UK input, which disadvantages the United States, given that the UK has historically been aligned with many US positions." Almost a decade on from Brexit, the current, much more concerted attempt to undermine the EU will have far greater repercussions for the US.

Those consequences were immediately apparent in the response of the incoming German chancellor, Friedrich Merz, to Trump's betrayal of Ukraine and open alliance with Putin: "My absolute priority will be to strengthen Europe as quickly as possible so that, step by step, we can really achieve independence from the USA." He warned that those who put "America First" risk making their motto "America Alone." Merz is a conservative and is—or was until last month—an Atlanticist. But he knows, as almost all European leaders do, that the postwar period of European history has now definitively ended.

In the short term the effective withdrawal of American security leaves the EU's eastern flank (especially the small Baltic states) dangerously vulnerable to Putin's aggression, and the trade war that Trump seems determined to start will weaken both the American and the European economies. Yet in Europe's reaction to those threats, the future shape of its independence is already becoming discernible. Britain will move back toward Europe. EU countries will rapidly increase their spending on armaments—but they will also ensure that those weapons are made in Europe rather than America. The EU as a whole will borrow large amounts of money to fund collective military spending—the European Commission has already decided to raise up to €150 billion to boost the EU's defense industries.

This in turn has potentially profound long-term economic implications. As Gideon Rachman has suggested in the *Financial Times*:

The issuance of common European debt is not just a way of raising money for defence. It also offers the chance to build up the euro as an alternative to the dollar as a global reserve currency. The capriciousness of the Trump administration means that there is a considerable global appetite for an alternative to US Treasuries as a safe asset.

Trump and his circle are taking a huge gamble—that they can bring down the EU and replace it with a refurbished Russian sphere of domination in the East and a patchwork of authoritarian nationalist states in Western and Central Europe. It is far more likely that they are creating a more unified and independent EU over which America will have increasingly diminished influence. America Alone will find that isolation is not so splendid.

### *America's status is intertwined with Ukraine's fate*

Regardless of whether one believes the conspiracy theory that Donald Trump is a Russian asset, Americans need to rise up and demand he cease acting like one.

Opinion, Published March 8, 2025, Philadelphia Inquirer

[Donald Trump's treatment of Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office on Feb. 28](#) indicates that the 47th president plans to hand the United States its most humiliating defeat since Japan conquered the Philippines, our largest colony, in [1942](#).

Too few Americans realize Vladimir Putin's three-year invasion is just the latest phase in a struggle that the Russian strongman has waged against us since he took power in 2000. If the United States abandons Ukraine, it will jettison its world standing and grow less able to check foreign threats to its security and economic health.

Putin toiled originally as a career officer of the KGB — the ruthless security organization dedicated to the preservation of the Soviet Union (USSR), or [what Ronald Reagan called the "Evil Empire."](#)

America and the West triumphed in the Cold War in 1991, and the Soviet Union dissolved before the year's end, which resulted in independence for [the 14 republics, in addition to Russia, that comprised the Soviet Union](#), along with several other states the Red Army overran during World War II. Those events left Putin seething with rage, and he [swore vengeance on the U.S.](#), which he held primarily responsible for the USSR's collapse.

Ukraine's war is America's war, and both nations' welfare depends on the outcome.

Russia's leaders judged that they [were locked in a perpetual war with the United States and NATO](#). Russia lacked the military and economic might to risk a direct showdown with superpower America, but Putin found a viable strategy in "gray zone" or hybrid conflicts. This approach included espionage, sabotage, covert attacks on computer networks, propaganda aimed at undermining faith in democracy, and unconventional operations by forces Russia pretended were not acting under its orders.

One of Putin's chief goals is to demonstrate that the U.S. lacks the resolve to sustain its allies. In 2008, Putin tested the West by [invading Georgia](#) to intimidate that former Soviet republic from joining NATO.

Six years later, Putin deployed Russian special forces and various surrogates to [seize the Crimean Peninsula](#), which belonged to Ukraine. He proceeded to nibble away at eastern portions of Ukraine until he launched a [full-fledged invasion](#) on Feb. 24, 2022.

Putin's decision to wage an open war was a colossal blunder. The Russian army turned out to be poorly trained and poorly motivated, mauled repeatedly by outnumbered and outgunned Ukrainians.

This provided President [Joe Biden](#) with an opportunity to weaken his country's archenemy at bargain rates. [According to the BBC](#), 95,000 people fighting for Russia have died, with potentially more than 20,000 additional deaths for those serving in militias in the Donbas republics. Ukraine claims that more than [46,000 Ukrainian soldiers](#) have been killed since the start of the war and that there have been [390,000 injuries on the battlefield](#). Not one American soldier has died.

Russia is badly hurt and cannot long endure such punishment, provided Ukraine's friends stand firm.

Unfortunately, President Trump is in the process of throwing away a cost-efficient American victory, along with this country's coveted position as leader of the free world.

World War II taught the United States that it needed allies to project its power to the far corners of the globe and reduce American casualties by sacrificing their own sons and daughters on countless battlefields. What MAGA adherents call "America First" will result in America alone, a decaying superpower with few or no friends and diminished access to the distant markets on which our prosperity depends.

Ukraine's war is America's war, and both nations' welfare depends on the outcome.

Regardless of whether one believes the conspiracy theory that Trump is a Russian asset, Americans need to rise up and demand he cease acting like one — and do what is necessary to promote the cause of freedom and a safer world.

## ***More than 30 nations will participate in Paris planning talks on a security force for Ukraine***

BY JOHN LEICESTER, March 10, 2025

PARIS (AP) — Military officials from more than 30 nations will take part in Paris talks on the creation of [an international security force for Ukraine](#), a French military official said Monday.

Such an international force would aim to dissuade Russia from launching another offensive after [any ceasefire in Ukraine](#) comes into effect.

The long list of participants in Tuesday's discussions will also include Asian and Oceania nations that will join remotely, the French official said. The international makeup of the meeting offers an indication of how broadly [France and Britain](#) — which are working together on plans for the force — are casting their net as they aim to build what the French official described as a coalition of nations "able and willing" to be part of an effort to safeguard Ukraine [in the event of a ceasefire](#).

The French military official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the blueprint for the force that is shrouded in secrecy and the Paris talks that will consider it.

The force being envisaged by France and Britain would aim to reassure Ukraine and deter another large-scale Russian offensive after any ceasefire, the official said. It could include heavy weaponry and weapons stockpiles that could be rushed within hours or days to aid in Ukraine's defense in the event of a Russian attack that shatters any truce, the official said.

### [Macron says a proposed European force for Ukraine could 'respond' if attacked by Russia](#)

The French-British blueprint will be presented to military officials from more than 30 nations in the first part of Tuesday's talks, the official said.

The talks' second part will include "more precise and concrete" discussions where the participants will be invited to say whether and how their militaries might be able to contribute, the official said.

"It's not, 'This is what we need,'" the official said. "It's more, 'What are you bringing to the pot?'"

The official stressed, however, that the ultimate decision on whether nations take part in the force would be taken at a political level, by government leaders.

Army chiefs or their representatives from nearly all of the 32 nations of the NATO military alliance will attend the Paris talks — with the notable exception being the United States.

The official said the United States wasn't invited because European nations want to demonstrate that they can take responsibility for a large part of the post-ceasefire security framework for Ukraine.

Also attending will be the chiefs of staff of Ireland and Cyprus and a representative from Austria — all nations that are not NATO members but are in the European Union.

Australia and New Zealand, which are Commonwealth nations, as well as Japan and South Korea, will listen into the talks remotely, the official said.

Ukraine will be represented by a military official who is also a member of the country's security and defense council.

## ***As our allies have stood with us, we must stand with Ukraine***

I remember how, a day after 9/11, the ships of our allies began assembling in the Arabian Sea to support us. Likewise, we need to support Ukraine.

Opinion by Joe Sestak, For The Inquirer, March 13, 2025

Wearing the cloth of our nation for 31 years has allowed me to witness some extraordinary moments.

After America was attacked on 9/11, I had command of an aircraft carrier battle group of 12 American ships headed for the northern Arabian Sea. That moment, when we as a nation had been singled out in an unprecedented attack, was fraught with distress and anxiety, and many felt very alone in a world that had changed so radically from one moment to the next.

But we were not alone out on the Arabian Sea. Waiting to meet us was an international armada of 22 foreign ships: Japan (operating outside the Sea of Japan for the first time since World War II),

the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Poland, Greece, New Zealand, Canada, and other allies had assembled there for battle — the only time NATO has invoked Article 5, on the day after 9/11.

As Italy's ship set sail to join us, its minister of defense spoke for all when he explained, with a touch of humor, why they were there. "Many may think of us Italians primarily as lovers," he said, "but America has been attacked, and we will be there for them."

Our "shipmates" have been there for us, even if we didn't call on them to be. Canada hid our embassy escapees in its ambassador's family home during the Iranian revolution — at great risk to the safety of its own diplomats.

Or when we suddenly needed a network of supply routes from Baltic and Caspian Sea ports to the Afghanistan War, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia stepped up — because our frontline warriors (the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. State Department) had been there working to develop and strengthen relationships with them since the Cold War ended.

Even the crown prince of Tonga once reminded me how his nation had proudly repaired damaged U.S. Navy warships during World War II.

And then there were the 42 nations that joined the first Gulf War spearheaded by the United States, and the 48 that joined us for the tragic misadventure of the second.

I believe alliances we have forged globally highlight America's greatest power — its power to convene, to bring nations and peoples together for a common cause — and has long been recognized as serving more than simply our own interests.

When World War II ended, America did something never achieved before: We brokered over 75 defense agreements, treaties, alliances, and coalitions for our own security, sure, but also for the security of our global partners. Together, we won the third world war — the Cold War — without firing a shot at an adversary who had threatened, "We will bury you."

This world concord, which we led, provided not only for increased safety but for increased economic prosperity. It took great men and women who understood that to have global open markets meant maintaining a dialogue in multilateral organizations that adhered to global rules that reflected our values. Beyond ensuring economic freedom and vigor, our universal values have earned us the unbreakable admiration of our allies and partners — something Russia and China have long envied.

As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has noted, our own story as a nation began with a Revolutionary War that brooked no half-measures, only full independence would do. But even then, we weren't abandoned without recourse to alliances. The French resolved to stand alongside us for seven long years of conflict. Not only did France provide us millions in its livre currency, 63 warships, 12,000 troops, and tons of military supplies, but it was also a French general who prompted our national survival at the decisive victory at Yorktown.

It was Gen. Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, who convinced a reluctant George Washington to leave New York for Yorktown, where the French navy would block a British retreat to its own fleet offshore. Once there, Washington gave operational control of America's troops to Rochambeau, who commanded the combined French and American forces to win our nonnegotiable war of freedom. Today, in honor of an ally's lead in winning our

survival as a nation, the sculpture closest to the Oval Office is not of an American, but the Frenchman, Rochambeau.

This is why Ukraine's president spoke of our storied history, from the Battle of Saratoga to the Battle of the Bulge, as embodying the meaning of Ukraine's own battle for survival today, each conflict a courageous step in a long war for independence — alongside indispensable allies. It is our turn now to lock arms with Ukraine — standing together against Vladimir Putin's invasion.

### ***'Now we are fighting against a dictator supported by a traitor'***

Europeans grasp the threat the growing Trump-Putin alliance poses to Western security.

by [Trudy Rubin](#) | Columnist, March 23, 2025, Philadelphia Inquirer

One of the most electrifying shocks of the new Donald Trump era is how quickly the president has moved to ally with the Kremlin against Europe — and the security of the United States.

Let me repeat. Trump is eagerly courting Vladimir Putin, who has made clear in speeches and deeds he detests America and its NATO partners and wants to undermine them.

Eighty years after World War II ended, Moscow is carrying on a campaign of sabotage and assassination against NATO allies. Yet, Trump has unilaterally brought an aggressor Russian state in from the cold, ending its diplomatic isolation and promising sanctions relief.

The White House has enthusiastically chosen to give aid and support to America's enemy, which is the definition of *treachery*. Trump is openly allied with the wrong side.

Yet, to Americans, consumed at home with White House madness, the threat posed by a U.S. embrace of Putin may be less obvious than it is to Europeans. They must cope with Russia's cutting of underground cables, cyberattacks, sabotage against warehouses and railways, and assassinations, plus the spillover from the Ukraine war.

So I think it's important for sane Americans to pay attention to how Trump's behavior is perceived across the pond, where allied leaders have watched with astonishment as Trump lines up with Moscow against them. That includes U.S. votes alongside Russia at the United Nations, and Vice President JD Vance's stunningly pro-Putin, anti-European democracy speech at last month's Munich Security Conference.

It also includes Trump's Tuesday phone call to Putin, which, according to the U.S. readout, was focused on the "huge upside" of "an improved bilateral relationship between the United States and Russia," including "enormous economic deals." There are even hints the U.S. will press for the reopening of the last undamaged Nord Stream 2 pipeline, bringing Russian gas back to Europe and reversing the continent's costly effort to wean itself off of energy dependence on Moscow.

The intensity of European fears needs to be better understood in America. For that, I'm reprinting parts of a recent speech (with my emphasis in bold) by a French senator, Claude Malhuret, who is also a former head of Doctors Without Borders. The speech went viral on the internet because it lays out what many Americans have been thinking but didn't know how to summarize.

Here are Malhuret's words:

“Europe is at a crucial juncture of its history. The American shield is slipping away, Ukraine risks being abandoned, and Russia is being strengthened. **Washington has become the court of Nero: an incendiary emperor, submissive courtiers, and a buffoon on ketamine tasked with purging the civil service.**

“**This is a tragedy for the free world, but it’s first and foremost a tragedy for the United States.** Trump’s message is that being his ally serves no purpose because he will not defend you, he will impose more tariffs on you than on his enemies, and he will threaten to seize your territories while supporting the dictators who invade you.

“**The king of the deal is showing that the art of the deal is lying prostrate.** He thinks he will intimidate China by capitulating to Russian President Vladimir Putin, but **China’s President Xi Jinping, faced with such wreckage, is undoubtedly accelerating his plans to invade Taiwan.**

“**Never in history has a president of the United States surrendered to the enemy. Never has one supported an aggressor against an ally, issued so many illegal decrees, and sacked so many military leaders in one go.**

“**This is not a drift to illiberalism; this is the beginning of the seizure of democracy. Let us remember that it only took one month, three weeks, and two days [in 1933 for Hitler] to bring down the [German] Weimar Republic.**

“I have confidence in the solidity of American democracy, and the country is already protesting. But in one month, Trump has done more harm to America than in the four years of his last presidency. **We were at war with a dictator [Putin]; now we are fighting against a dictator supported by a traitor [Trump].**

“Above all: **make no mistake. The defeat of Ukraine would be the defeat of Europe ... Putin’s goal is to return to the Yalta Agreement, where half the continent was ceded to Stalin.**

“**What Putin wants is the end of the world order the United States and its allies established 80 years ago, in which the first principle was the prohibition of acquiring territory by force.**

“**The Trumpian vision coincides with Putin’s: a return to spheres of influence, where great powers dictate the fate of small nations.**

“Greenland, Panama, and Canada are mine. Ukraine, the Baltics, and Eastern Europe are yours. Taiwan and the South China Sea are his.

“At the Mar-a-Lago dinner parties of golf-playing oligarchs, this is called ‘diplomatic realism.’

“We are therefore alone. But the narrative that Putin cannot be resisted is false. Contrary to Kremlin propaganda, Russia is doing poorly.

“With interest rates at 21%, the collapse of foreign currency and gold reserves, and a demographic crisis, Russia is on the brink. **The American lifeline to Putin is the biggest strategic mistake ever made during a war.**

“The shock is violent, but it has one virtue. The Europeans are coming out of denial. They understood in a single day in [Munich](#) that the survival of Ukraine and the future of Europe are in their hands and that they have three imperatives.

“First, accelerate military aid to Ukraine to compensate for the American abandonment.

**“Second, demand that any agreement include the return of kidnapped children and prisoners, as well as absolute security guarantees.**

**“Finally, and most urgently because it will take the longest, we must build that neglected European defense, which has relied on the American security umbrella since 1945, and which was shut down after the fall of the Berlin Wall.** The task is Herculean, but history books will judge the leaders of today’s democratic Europe by its success or failure.

**“We must convince public opinion in the face of war weariness and fear, and above all in the face of Putin’s collaborators on the far-right and far-left.**

**“They say they want peace. What neither they nor Trump says is that their peace is capitulation, the peace of defeat, the replacement of a [Charles] de Gaullian Zelensky by a Ukrainian [Philippe] Pétain under Putin’s thumb.**

“Is this the end of the Atlantic alliance? The risk is great. But in recent days, [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky’s public humiliation and all the crazy decisions taken over the past month have finally stirred Americans into action.

“The fate of Ukraine will be decided in the trenches, but it **also depends on those who defend democracy in the United States, and here, on our ability to unite Europeans and find the means for our common defense, to make Europe the power it once was and hesitates to become again.**

**“Our parents defeated fascism and communism at the cost of great sacrifice. The task of our generation is to defeat the totalitarianisms of the 21st century. Long live free Ukraine, long live democratic Europe.”**

Let me add, “And long live the democratic United States.”

## ***Trump’s whims are overriding the national interest***

### **Foreign-policy realists will struggle to explain America’s sharp turn**

THE ECONOMIST, Mar 13th 2025

When envoys of President Donald Trump travel the world making promises, demands and threats, do they speak for America’s national interest? Or are they travelling partisans, representing the ambitions and prejudices of the 47th president, and—to be generous—of the 77m voters who returned him to office?

For allies and adversaries around the world, these are not idle questions. For decades no other country has wished to defy, for long, the unified will of America. To be sure, elections came and went, handing power to Democrats and Republicans in turn. Big policies changed. Wars began and ended. Globalisation enjoyed broad support among leaders of both parties, until it did not. But some core American interests were enduring.

That continuity raised the stakes for any challenger thinking of testing them. America’s leadership of military alliances in Europe and Asia, while costly, allowed it to project power worldwide and to pen in such would-be rivals as Russia and China. The global reach of its companies helped American operating systems and technologies—and the norms embedded in some of them—set international standards.



In foreign policy, especially during the cold war, successive presidents took a selective approach to moral principles that they called universal. For all that, most aspired to a world order secured by shared liberal democratic values, rather than by conquest.

The second Trump presidency marks the end of that America. Mr Trump has returned to office showing a belief in power and taste for domination that would not shame a 19th-century Russian tsar. That sets hard tests for his most eloquent defenders, starting with Marco Rubio, his secretary of state. Mr Rubio is a late convert to Trumpism after years as a hawkish Republican senator. On March 11th, during meetings with Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia, Mr Rubio scored a win for conventional diplomacy. After days of grumbles from Mr Trump that Ukraine is an obstacle to peace, Mr Rubio secured a Ukrainian offer of a 30-day ceasefire, which will now be put to Russia.

But Mr Rubio's job has been revealingly unconventional since he took office. He has an uneasy relationship with radicals in his boss's inner circle, such as Elon Musk, the technology billionaire who wants America to quit NATO and cut European allies loose. Mr Rubio has a hard task: to convince foreign governments to take seriously his president's impatience with the status quo, while at the same time signalling that a Trumpist America will in time be a more reliable partner for the world, just as soon as the American people are confident that their interests are being put first.

In his confirmation hearing in the Senate, Mr Rubio described an "unmistakable mandate" from American voters who elected Mr Trump to pursue foreign policies that make America safer, stronger and more prosperous.

As secretary of state Mr Rubio has defended his president's eagerness to end Russia's isolation and stop the war in Ukraine. He emerged from earlier talks with his Russian counterpart in Saudi Arabia, waxing lyrical about "incredible opportunities that exist to partner with the Russians". Echoing Mr Trump's impatience with allies, he has publicly chided Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, for showing insufficient gratitude to America.

In common with other prominent Republicans who have embraced Trumpism, Mr Rubio casts his tough talk as old-school realism. He calls on critics to "grow up" and understand that the world is a dangerous place, so that all governments should coldly pursue their abiding, long-term security and commercial interests.

The problem with this claim is that American policy, notably towards Russia, looks anything but abiding and long-term. It has spun through 180 degrees since Mr Trump won re-election, leaving Republican grandees like Mr Rubio scrambling. In 2022 Senator Rubio called for America to stand by Ukraine—not as an act of charity, but in its self-interest. "The world will become a very scary place if we allow thugs like Putin to invade sovereign nations without severe consequence. We must be clear and unyielding in our support for the Ukrainian people's fight against a merciless tyrant," Mr Rubio declared. Two years before the invasion of Ukraine he warned political leaders being courted by Russia to remember that "Putin is always working an angle for himself".

Now these former Russia hawks serve Mr Trump, who has blamed Ukraine for provoking its invasion. On March 7th, after Mr Trump paused help for Ukraine, the president was asked about the increase in Russian attacks on Ukraine. Mr Putin wants the war to end and is "doing what anybody else would do", he replied.

## When interests collide

The realist school cannot plausibly claim that American national interests reversed on the day of Mr Trump's inauguration. Even talk of business deals with Russia make little sense: America is energy-rich and Russia's main exports are oil and gas. What changed was the man in the Oval Office. Mr Trump is a longtime Putin apologist. As a property developer, he reportedly cut lucrative deals with Russian investors. In his inner circle, Vice President J.D. Vance, Mr Musk and others are advocates for hard-right, pro-Russian, anti-immigrant political parties in Europe.

Trump defenders praise him as a disrupter. But in foreign policy, he is doing something much more destructive. He is breaking decades-old understandings about America's enduring interests, and replacing them with his own personal preferences. In consequence, foreign governments are being asked to weigh their own interests against Mr Trump's whims. As the leader of the world's most powerful country, Mr Trump will often get his way, for now. But he is squandering political capital he did not accrue. The costs will be paid by his successors. ■

## *In NATO talks, Trump team puts onus on Europe to defend itself*

Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrived at NATO to reassure the alliance about Trump's intentions but warn that it can't rely so heavily on the United States anymore.

By [Ellen Francis](#) and [Missy Ryan](#), April 3, 2025, Washington Post

BRUSSELS — Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered a message of reassurance to his NATO counterparts on Thursday, but also a warning: President Donald Trump remains committed to the alliance, but only if Europe shoulders the burden of its own defense as America turns elsewhere.

In his first visit to NATO headquarters since joining Trump's Cabinet, Rubio said the U.S. president — who has long voiced skepticism about the 32-member bloc and suggested the United States might not come to the defense of allies — was “not against NATO.”

“He's against a NATO that does not have the capabilities that it needs to fulfill the obligations that the treaty imposes upon each and every member state,” Rubio said. “... This is a hard truth, but it is a basic one that needs to be said now.”

As the United States seeks to step up its response to China's military rise, Trump has said NATO allies should raise [defense spending](#) to 5 percent of annual economic output, which would require a transformational leap for many European nations and is well above what the United States itself spends.

Rubio's challenge to NATO foreign ministers came as European nations adjust to dramatic swings in U.S. foreign policy under Trump and as the continent's key military powers map out how they might replace U.S. responsibilities at NATO to head off a sudden American retreat.

The two-day Brussels meeting represents a high-stakes moment for allies on both sides of the Atlantic who are grappling with the reality that some of their core priorities may irreconcilably diverge. Among the European questions as they size up Trump's intentions is whether his attempt to broker a swift [end to the war in Ukraine](#) will hand Moscow a victory that could embolden Russia for years to come.

Rubio's messages are unlikely to quash questions about the future of the alliance, as the Trump administration excludes Europe from its talks with Russia, threatens to [take Greenland](#) from a NATO ally and levies double-digit [tariffs on the European Union](#). And while Rubio's record suggests support for traditional allies, other top officials, including [Vice President JD Vance](#) and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, have [excoriated Europeans](#).

The widening rifts have sped up discussions, involving France, Britain, Germany and others, on eventually replacing U.S. responsibilities at NATO. They want to keep the alliance's most powerful member engaged, while ensuring that any U.S. military drawdown will be coordinated on a timeline that allows them to bolster their defenses, said five European and NATO diplomats familiar with the discussions.

But the diplomats, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive negotiations, said it would take at least five to 10 years and a lot of money to backfill advanced U.S. capabilities. A more muscular European role could involve providing a bigger share of troops to defend the continent, taking over more command-and-control responsibility and developing weapons systems long supplied by the United States.

Other European countries are wary of going it alone or pitching Trump officials a phased handover, concerned that it could encourage them to pull back faster — or as one diplomat described it, “that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

With less from America, “it would under any circumstances be a very different NATO,” said Camille Grand, a former NATO official [who has advised](#) on how European powers can be a stronger “pillar” in the alliance. “We’ve moved from a pure denial,” he said of the European view on U.S. disengagement. “We don’t know whether it’s going to happen in an orderly fashion or fast or chaotically, but it’s going to happen.”

### **Doing the homework**

American officials say the Trump administration has not yet made any decisions about the potential reallocation or reduction of U.S. troops in Europe or U.S. participation at NATO, but the desire to cut costs and downsize U.S. military headquarters has reinforced expectations that Washington will curb its military footprint on the continent.

“We need to engage them in a conversation on timeline and capabilities. The homework is being done in a number of countries,” said a European diplomat. “When we’ve done that, we’ll see if we can convince others to try to shape this with the U.S. rather than wait for it to land on us in a tweet during the night.”

He said policymakers should “fight the notion that we need to replace every U.S. plane or soldier with a European.”

“We should be agile and think, what are the military effects we need to be able to produce very quickly,” he added.

Across the continent, countries that already ramped up defense spending in recent years are promising to pour hundreds of millions of euros into a military buildup and develop their own systems.

But it would take Europe many [years to build up](#) advanced capabilities such as intelligence gathering, heavy airlift, midair refueling aircraft, air and missile defense, and long-range

precision weapons. The United States also operates air and naval bases across the continent, where up to [100,000 troops have been stationed](#) since Russia's 2022 invasion of

A NATO diplomat said replacing U.S. capabilities boils down to spending much more on defense, one area where the Europeans have found common ground on messaging with Trump. He said a reduction of some U.S. troops would not deal a major blow, as long as a solid presence remains to "still have credible deterrence."

But other European allies are cautious to even discuss presenting Washington with a plan, some out of habit after decades of dependence on U.S. command in military operations. Others out of fear: Countries near Russia's borders worry that a U.S. retreat would leave them vulnerable.

Officials concede that under the U.S. security umbrella, European governments diverted spending away from defense to other priorities, but also note that Washington had always urged NATO allies against developing independent capabilities outside the U.S.-led structure.

European officials can foresee taking over posts in NATO's command structure that have long been held by U.S. officers, but most agree that the role of NATO's top commander should stay in U.S. hands: the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, known as SACEUR. "The last American to leave Europe should be SACEUR," the NATO diplomat said.

The current commander, Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli, is on a three-year term that ends this summer, fueling questions about the Trump administration's plans.

### **An attack on one**

European discussions are "quite stark behind closed doors when the U.S. isn't there," said Michael Carpenter, who served as a senior White House official for Europe during the Biden administration. "They're talking about the fact that Europe can no longer rely on the United States," he said, and seeing the U.S. as a power "that they need to contend with in some ways as an adversary, and in some way as an unreliable partner."

On Thursday, Rubio dismissed what he called "hysteria and hyperbole" about a feared American pullback from NATO. But he also cited the continent's affluence.

"This is a collection not just of partners and allies, but of advanced economies, of rich countries, who have the capability to do more," he said. "We understand that's a trade-off. We have to do it every single year in our country. I assure you that we also have domestic needs, but we've prioritized defense because of the role we played in the world, and we want our partners to do the same."

European diplomats said their U.S. counterparts have given reassurances about the commitment to NATO's mutual defense clause — underpinned by the deterrence of having a substantial U.S. nuclear arsenal based on the continent.

Still, for allies like Denmark, which is grappling with Trump's threat to take Greenland, by force if necessary, the promise of NATO's Article 5 — that an attack against one is an attack on all — starts to feel hollow.

Ivo Daalder, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO, said Thursday's meeting represented a challenging moment for Rubio, a strong supporter of the alliance in Congress and co-sponsor of a 2023 law that sought to prevent a U.S. president from unilaterally pulling out of NATO.

A second European diplomat said many here see Rubio as having a view of the transatlantic relationship that is less fueled by the disdain than others in Trump's national security team have shown. But, the diplomat conceded, it's hard to know how much sway Rubio holds with the president.

"He has to be careful that he doesn't say anything, either publicly or, frankly, privately, that gets leaked that in any way contradicts the president's main message," Daalder said. Rubio, he predicted, would to "try to walk that very fine line" of remaining aligned with the administration while "clearly having a more traditional view."

As Trump upends decades of U.S. policy on Russia, European policymakers are seeking to understand to what extent the new administration shares their dark assessment of Russian ambitions on the continent.

Despite U.S. reassurances about sticking by NATO, European diplomats have watched with horror as Trump administration officials clashed with Kyiv while sometimes [echoing the Kremlin's rhetoric](#).

In Brussels, they will again convey to Rubio their red lines for concessions they fear would leave Russia emboldened at their door — such as accepting Moscow's demands to curb the NATO posture in Eastern Europe or to scale back the Ukrainian military.

"We're not at the negotiating table yet. That's hard to swallow, but that's a fact of life," the NATO diplomat said. "We of course have elements where we say this is the baseline and don't go below it."

## ***Russia plays for time in Ukraine ceasefire talks***

### **A Black Sea deal starts sinking as soon as America announces it**

THE ECONOMIST, Mar 26, 2025

As American spooks tell it, Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky may be willing to talk about ending their war, but they are not ready to stop fighting. "Both leaders for now probably still see the risks of a longer war as less than those of an unsatisfying settlement," concluded an annual threat assessment by America's 18 intelligence agencies published on March 25th.

That helps explain why President Donald Trump's promise to end the war between Russia and Ukraine (within a day, as he used to say) is proving difficult. His officials say they have achieved "epic" results. In fact the deal is being whittled down with each round of shuttle diplomacy. Russia seems intent on imposing conditions at every stage as its forces grind on.

Take the progress thus far. On March 11th America and Ukraine proposed an immediate and unconditional 30-day ceasefire. On March 18th Russia narrowed that to halting aerial attacks on energy infrastructure and shipping in the Black Sea, with details to be worked out. On March 25th America announced an agreement to "ensure safe navigation", but it was immediately thrown into doubt. Russia insisted it would not be enacted until a Russian state bank was reconnected to the swift payment system. The eu, in turn, said that would not happen until Russia withdrew from Ukraine (swift is based in Belgium).

In any case, the Black Sea deal would alleviate only a minor problem. Western sanctions already exclude Russian exports of food and fertilisers. And Ukraine has already re-opened its maritime trade corridor by fighting back the Russian navy and sending cargo through the territorial waters of friendly states. At best, if the accord prevents attacks on ports, facilities in Mykolaiv, a Ukrainian port, could reopen and insurance rates could fall a bit. Russia might enjoy easier terms for exports.

Ukrainian and European officials worry that America is moving to ease sanctions against Russia without real concessions. A White House statement promised to “help restore Russia’s access to the world market for agricultural and fertiliser exports, lower maritime insurance costs, and enhance access to ports and payment systems for such transactions”.

Kremlin-huggers in Washington seem to have the upper hand. Sticks have been applied mostly to Ukraine, which for a time was cut off from the flow of American weapons and intelligence. Russia is being offered mainly carrots: the Americans speak of recognising its annexation of territory, and denying Ukraine nato membership or security guarantees. Officials are drawing up options to lift sanctions.

In a revealing interview on March 21st Steve Witkoff, America’s envoy for Ukraine, said he sought not just an end to the war but a new geopolitical pact with Russia. It would include co-operation on oil and gas production in the Arctic, exports of liquefied natural gas, artificial intelligence and handling Iran. “Who doesn’t want to see a world like that?” he asked. He mocked European countries for rushing to arm Ukraine and fortify themselves, trying “to be like Winston Churchill”. The fear that Russia would attack the rest of Europe, he claimed, was “preposterous”.

As the talks drag on, Russia seeks to convince Mr Trump to ignore Ukrainian and European concerns and look to a grand bargain. Ukraine, in turn, wants to prove that Russia is negotiating in bad faith, in the hope that Mr Trump might turn against the Kremlin. In an interview with Newsmax tv on March 25th, Mr Trump conceded that Mr Putin may be stalling but seemed unperturbed. “It could be they’re dragging their feet. I’ve done it over the years, you know.” He was confident, though, that both Russia and Ukraine “would like to see it end”.

American officials hope to clinch a ceasefire within Mr Trump’s first 100 days in office. The danger is that a rushed agreement will mean forsaking Ukraine and caving in to Russia. As America’s spies put it, Mr Putin has good reasons to play for time, because “positive battlefield trends allow for some strategic patience.” Mr Zelensky fears a bad deal would “prompt domestic backlash and future insecurity”. ■

### ***New U.S. mineral deal imposes onerous conditions, Ukrainian officials say***

Ukraine says the minerals deal presented by the United States differs substantially from an earlier framework that had been agreed upon.

By [Siobhán O'Grady](#), [Lizzie Johnson](#) and [Serhiy Morgunov](#), March 28, 2025, Washington Post

DNIPRO, Ukraine — A new U.S. proposal for a minerals deal with Ukraine dramatically changes the last terms Kyiv proposed to Washington and does not provide security guarantees, according to Ukrainian officials and a draft of the document, setting the stage for potential [further](#)

[tension](#) between the countries as the White House pushes for access to Ukraine's natural resources.

President Volodymyr Zelensky told reporters that his office had received a new proposal from Washington on Friday. That proposal followed an earlier document Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko had received from U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Zelensky said. Svyrydenko told him it was "entirely different" from an earlier framework agreement and "includes things that were not previously discussed and contains elements that had already been rejected by both sides," he said.

"I will only consider the version that was officially submitted to our side. The format has changed, so let's study that format first, and then we can talk," Zelensky said. Any further changes must be thoroughly reviewed, he said, adding that he will only review it personally and speak publicly on it once lawyers "confirm that everything complies with Ukrainian law and our constitution." Ukraine will not agree to any proposal that could disrupt its plan to join the European Union, he said.

National Security Council spokesman James Hewitt [said this week](#) that "the mineral deal offers Ukraine the opportunity to form an enduring economic relationship with the United States that is the basis for long-term security and peace."

A quick approval is unlikely, however, judging by the reaction of Ukrainian lawmakers and officials. The new draft deal, one senior official said, looks like "Ukraine was in the war with U.S., lost, [was] captured and now has to pay lifetime reparations." The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Ukrainian and U.S. officials were set to sign a [framework](#) agreement in Washington last month, which would have laid the groundwork for cooperation and mutual benefit from future extraction of [Ukraine's mineral deposits](#). But after an explosive [Oval Office meeting](#) between Zelensky and President Donald Trump last month, plans were abruptly canceled for the rest of the visit, and the proposal was never signed. Zelensky has addressed the issue carefully in public, aware that disagreements over the deal could displease the White House.

On Thursday, he said, "I want to make it clear that we do not want the United States to think that Ukraine is opposed to this process overall."

Now Washington has stunned Kyiv by preparing a new, much more extensive draft of a deal, first [published](#) by the Financial Times on Thursday. The senior Ukrainian official verified to The Washington Post that the 55-page document published by the newspaper is legitimate.

The new document does not include any security guarantees and considers all U.S. support to Ukraine during the war thus far as debt to be paid back with interest from the proceeds of the deal. It also gives the U.S. the "right of first offer" on all investments related to energy and minerals, effectively allowing U.S. control.

The senior official said the draft raises major concerns for Ukraine, since it reclassifies past U.S. grants as loans to be repaid. Washington is also requesting "50 percent from all new and existing revenue sources without U.S. contribution at all."

Svyrydenko confirmed during a meeting with the Ukrainian parliament on Friday that Ukraine has received a working version of the deal and is reviewing it. She urged caution against public discourse.

“Any public discussions about the text of this agreement at this stage are only harmful to the negotiation process and hinder our ability to conduct a constructive dialogue with our American partners,” she said.

A former Ukrainian official familiar with negotiations said the new proposal may just be an initial negotiating stance from the U.S., but it “is terrible for Ukraine.” The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

“There is not any chance it would be signed in this version,” the former official said.

The proposed board of the fund managing all investments would consist of three U.S. and two Ukrainian representatives, giving the United States a constant majority and effective control of decision-making. The two Ukrainian members of the board would need to be vetted by Washington and could be subject to dismissal at any time.

“What’s the point? They could accept anyone given that they won’t be able to do anything meaningful,” the former official said. “Either they are very impudent or trying to start with too aggressive position just to be able to make some small concessions.”

Ukrainian lawmaker Yaroslav Zheleznyak told The Post that the parliament wants fair cooperation with the U.S. but “absolutely will not support” the current version of the deal.

“The issue is that this agreement, as it stands, isn’t just ‘not beneficial enough’ — it’s outright not neutral,” he said. In a public Telegram post, he described the deal as “frankly, horrifying,” pointing to how it would provide American access to all of Ukraine’s mineral, oil and gas reserves in perpetuity.

Profits would immediately be converted into foreign currency and transferred abroad, he said, and the U.S. would get the “first refusal on all new infrastructure projects and a veto on selling resources to third countries” with “no mention whatsoever of security guarantees. Not even a hint.”

“It can and must be changed,” Zheleznyak said.

Some Americans tracking the negotiations said that they felt the issues could be resolved through more talks.

“The agreement is confusing as drafted,” said an American lawyer who invests in Ukraine, who reviewed the draft. “I can see the Ukrainian government being concerned because this fundamental ambiguity in the structure is not resolved. Where is the capital to do this?”

“So the Ukrainian government should be negotiating. Now is not the time to talk in public to express concern. It’s time to negotiate,” said the lawyer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of their business in Ukraine.

Drew Horn, a former U.S. official who now leads GreenMet, a Washington-based advisory company that advised the Trump administration on critical minerals and mining, said that there was a “real business case” for the critical mineral deal but that negotiations would be complex.

“I think there’s a solution there that meets both the U.S. and Ukrainian needs,” he said.

On Thursday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Heorhii Tykhyi said Ukraine remains committed to reaching a “win-win” deal that would lead to the advantageous “presence of American business here, strategic and long-term, for many years.”



The proposed deal for Washington to profit from Ukraine’s mineral wealth became a priority for the Trump administration, which first presented a draft agreement to Zelensky in early February. The initial proposal — much like the current one — did not include security guarantees for Ukraine and was framed as a way for Ukraine to reimburse the U.S. for past assistance, which was not provided at the time with the expectation it would have to be repaid.

Bessent presented the deal to Zelensky in a visit to Kyiv in early February, expecting him to sign on immediately. Zelensky declined to do so.

Ukrainian officials then worked to rewrite the deal with more favorable terms, including broad language about security guarantees and joint control over the future fund controlling the profits from Ukrainian resources.

Ukraine has long hoped that any such mineral deal would include a written offer of serious security guarantees for the country. Kyiv has said U.S. investment in its natural resources and the presence of U.S. companies in Ukraine alone will not serve as a deterrent against future Russian aggression.

Zelensky has also repeatedly said publicly that he would not agree to any deal that would leave future generations of Ukrainians in debt.

### ***Zelenskyy meets European military leaders to plan for a peacekeeping force***

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) , April 5, 2025— Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met the leaders of the British and French armed forces in Kyiv Saturday to discuss the [potential deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force](#) to Ukraine, despite the reluctance of U.S. President Donald Trump to provide security guarantees.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense said that officials addressed the structure, size and composition of any future “reassurance force,” while the chief of the defense staff, Adm. Antony Radakin, emphasized that the U.K. would look to “build on the formidable capabilities of the Ukrainian army and put them in the strongest possible position to deter Russian aggression.”

The weekend discussions are planned to set the ground for a further meeting between defense ministers in Brussels and the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Friday.

Britain has been promoting the idea of a European-led peacekeeping force for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire but it has said such a force needed a U.S. “backstop” to make it credible in the face of possible Russian reprisals.

Building a force big enough to act as a credible deterrent — U.K. officials have talked about possibly 10,000 to 30,000 troops — would be a considerable effort for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War but [are now rearming](#).

Trump, who has been pushing for a ceasefire in the war in Ukraine, temporarily paused military aid to Kyiv and has repeatedly said that the country will never join the NATO military alliance.

## **Death toll from Friday's strike rises to 18**

The death toll from a [Russian missile strike](#) in the central Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih has risen to 18, including nine children, regional Governor Serhii Lysak said Saturday.

A further 72 people were injured in Friday's attack, the youngest a 3-month-old. About half of them remained in the hospital, with 17 in serious condition.

"There can never be forgiveness for this," said Oleksandr Vilkul, head of the city's defense council. "Eternal memory to the victims."

Kryvyi Rih is Zelenskyy's hometown.

"The missile struck an area right next to residential buildings — hitting a playground and ordinary streets," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram.

Local authorities said the strike damaged about 20 apartment buildings, more than 30 vehicles, an educational building and a restaurant.

The Russian Defense Ministry claimed Friday that it had carried out a high-precision missile strike with a high explosive warhead on a restaurant where a meeting with unit commanders and Western instructors was taking place.

Russian military claimed that the strike killed 85 military personnel and foreign officers and destroyed 20 vehicles. The military's claims could not be independently verified. The Ukrainian General Staff rejected the claims.

A later drone strike on Kryvyi Rih killed one woman and wounded seven other people.

Russian forces launched 92 drones into Ukraine overnight, with 51 shot down by air defenses, the Ukrainian air force wrote on social media Saturday. A further 31 decoy drones also failed to reach their targets, it said.

Elsewhere, one person died Saturday in the Russian-occupied town of Horlivka in Ukraine's Donetsk region due to shelling, Moscow-installed Gov. Denis Pushilin said. Security officials told Russian state news channels that they had destroyed 28 Ukrainian drones over the Donetsk region overnight, marking the first time that the occupied territory had been targeted by such long-range strikes.

## **Zelenskyy criticizes US ambassador's response**

Zelenskyy blamed the daily strikes on [Russia's unwillingness to end the war](#): "Every missile, every drone strike proves Russia wants only war," he said, urging Ukraine's allies to increase pressure on Moscow and bolster Ukraine's air defenses.

He also criticized the response of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv to the strike. Ambassador Bridget A. Brink posted on social media Friday that she was "horrified" by the strike in Kryvyi Rih. "More than 50 people injured and 16 killed, including 6 children. This is why the war must end," the post said.

Zelenskyy, who has so far had a [strained relationship](#) with U.S. President Donald Trump, described the post as "unpleasantly surprising" for not directly naming Russia as the perpetrator of the attack.

“Such a strong country, such a strong people — and such a weak reaction. They are even afraid to say the word ‘Russian’ when talking about the missile that killed children,” he said in a post that also praised countries including Japan, Britain, Switzerland and Germany for their “principled statements.”

“Yes, the war must end. But in order to end it, we must not be afraid to call a spade a spade,” he said.

## ***‘Little suns in the classroom’: Ukrainian city mourns children killed by Russian missile***

BY YEHOR KONOVALOV AND ILLIA NOVIKOV, April 7, 2025

KRYVYI RIH, Ukraine (AP) — Anger and outrage gripped the hometown of Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) on Monday as it held funerals for some of the 20 people, including nine children, [killed by a Russian missile](#) that tore through apartment buildings and blasted a playground.

More than 70 were wounded in the attack last Friday evening on Kryvyi Rih. The children were playing on swings and in a sandbox in a tree-lined park at the time. Bodies were strewn across the grass.

“We are not asking for pity,” Oleksandr Vilkul, the head of the city administration, wrote on Telegram as Kryvyi Rih mourned. “We demand the world’s outrage.”

The U.N. Human Rights Office in Ukraine said it was the deadliest single verified strike harming children since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022. It was also one of the deadliest attacks so far this year.

“We’re talking to Russia. We’d like them to stop,” Trump told reporters Sunday. “I don’t like the bombing.”

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reaffirmed on Monday that Putin supports a ceasefire proposed by Trump but wants Russian conditions to be met.

“President Putin indeed backs the ceasefire idea, but it’s necessary to first answer quite a few questions,” Peskov said.

Radyslav, she said, was proud to be part of a school campaign collecting pet food for stray animals. “He held the bag like it was treasure. He wanted to help,” she told The Associated Press.

After Friday evening, “two desks in my classroom were empty forever,” Kholod said, adding that she still has unopened birthday gifts for them.

“How do I tell parents to return their textbooks? How do I teach without them?” she asked.

### **Only Patriot missiles can prevent such attacks**

Russian missile and drone tactics continue to evolve, making it harder to shoot them down, Yuriy Ilnat, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian air force command, said on national television.

Russia’s Iranian-designed Shahed drones have undergone significant upgrades, while Moscow is also modernizing its ballistic missiles, he said.

Only the U.S. Patriot missile defense system can help prevent attacks like the one in Kryvyi Rih, Zelenskyy said late Sunday.

He said he had instructed his defense and foreign affairs ministers to “work bilaterally on air defense, especially with the United States, which has sufficient potential to help stop any terror.”

[Ukraine will send a team to Washington](#) this week to begin negotiations on a new draft of a deal that would give the U.S. access to Ukraine’s valuable mineral resources, Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko told The Associated Press.

Failure to conclude a mineral deal has hamstrung Ukrainian efforts to secure pledges of continuing U.S. military support.

Britain’s Ministry of Defense and the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War, a think tank, say Russia’s battlefield progress on the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line has slowed since November. But on Saturday night, Russia launched its biggest aerial attack on Ukraine in nearly a month.

Both sides are thought to be preparing for a renewed spring-summer military campaign.

### **Air raid interrupts a student’s memorial**

In Kryvyi Rih on Monday, Nataliia Slobodeniuk recalled her 15-year-old student Danylo Nikitskyi as “a spark” who energized the classroom and helped organize school trips and other occasions.

Danylo died alongside his girlfriend, Alina Kutsenko, also 15. “They were holding hands,” said Roman Nikitskyi, Danylo’s father.

“If Danylo was going, half the class went too,” the 55-year-old teacher said. “That’s how loved he was.”

She choked up as she spoke of her feeling of powerlessness after the attack.

“You live through their joy, their sadness,” she told the AP. “And now, this pain, it tears you apart. And you realize there’s nothing you can do. Nothing to fix it. You just carry the pain forever.”

An air raid alert interrupted a planned memorial ceremony in the city — a reminder of the continuing threat for civilians.

The frustration hit home for Nataliia Freylikh, the teacher of 9-year-old Herman Tripolets, who was also killed in last Friday’s attack. A minute of silence was held in the children’s school, where teachers, classmates and families gathered. Nearly a hundred people stood grief-stricken together.

“Even mourning him properly is impossible,” Freylikh said.

From the school, the mourners walked to the church for the funeral liturgy for Tripolets — and bid a final farewell to the children who never made it home.