

ReArmed Europe: A Trump-Induced Strategic Awakening

“**T**here are decades when nothing happens and there are weeks when decades happen,” a phrase attributed to Vladimir Lenin, has come to the minds of many since Donald Trump retook possession of the Oval Office.

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Transatlantic relations have often been punctuated by moments of disagreement and internal tensions between Europeans and Americans such as the Iraq war (2003), the unilateral U.S. decision to withdraw from Afghanistan (2020), or the incessant debates on burden sharing within NATO. But these decisions had no direct impact on Europe's security.

But today, just several weeks into the Trump 2.0 presidency, and for the first time since World War II, the Western camp is fractured at the heart of its *raison d'être* - the transatlantic defense alliance. This divide seems all the more serious as it is accompanied by the Trump administration's attacks on the Old Continent, both on the economic (a declared war on customs barriers) and the ideological (the crux of JD Vance's speech in Munich) fronts.

Unintended Architect of European Defense

Some Ukrainians, with a touch of irony and malice, argue that Vladimir Putin—through his aggression, invasion, and outright denial of Ukraine's sovereignty—has unintentionally done more than anyone to forge and solidify the Ukrainian nation. While any comparison between Donald Trump and



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Putin would be entirely misplaced when it comes to European defense, Trump's abrasive and disruptive stance on the transatlantic alliance may well become a turning point. Whether he intends it or not, Trump could end up being remembered as an unwitting architect of Europe's defense awakening.

Trump's behavior leaves Europeans with no excuse not to make a swift and brutal readjustment. Europe needs to find a rapid but lasting solution to two existential challenges. The immediate objective is to help Ukraine more and better in order to compensate for the loss of the American ally. A more fundamental objective is to organize an integrated defense of European countries, including defense industries.

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Preventing Ukraine's capitulation is the key to ensuring that Putin does not extend his war to another European country in the near future. The foundation of a common European defense must be laid—not necessarily within the EU framework, as waiting for the approval of Budapest and Bratislava at this stage would be futile and counterproductive—but through a coalition that actively includes the British, Norwegians, and ideally the Turks who command NATO's second-largest army in terms of personnel and armored vehicles. Crucially, this new alliance must not be formed without Ukraine, which deserves a central role given the strength and battle-hardened experience of its military, as well as Kyiv's growing defense industry.

To this day, it is difficult to know what will become of the transatlantic alliance. What form will NATO take? Relative optimists, including the British and Italian governments, want to believe that one could be moving towards a NATO 3.0 with an increased role for Europeans and the progressive

disappearance of the Americans, who will nevertheless remain in the background to ensure a certain number of functions, given their supremacy in intelligence, air surveillance control or even nuclear power.

The more pessimistic outlook, championed by Macron and Merz in particular, suggests "facing reality" and accepting the end of 80 years of American security guarantees. This implies that Europe must prepare to defend itself independently while any continued or future U.S. support would be an unexpected bonus rather than a false hope that wastes precious time. Regardless of the scenario, Europe must reinvent and rebuild its defense, securing financial, human, and technological resources on a scale far beyond what currently exists.

Europe, Still Alive and Kicking

After an initial state of paralysis, European leaders launched an unprecedented diplomatic offensive: multiple mini-summits in Paris and London, high-profile visits to Washington, a Kyiv summit gathering leaders from 13 European nations, and a European Council meeting in Brussels—all within just ten days. While uncertainties remain, the broad contours of a European response to the two major strategic challenges are beginning to take shape. Discussions in Paris and London have centered on the potential deployment of a European force to help stabilize Ukraine. Some countries, such as Italy and Spain, remain hesitant, particularly in the absence of American logistical and intelligence support. However, a core coalition is already forming with France, the UK, and the Scandinavian nations at the forefront, likely joined by others. Türkiye's participation could significantly bolster this effort as Ankara views the evolving European security landscape as a strategic opportunity. In total, up to 20 countries are reportedly willing to contribute to a "coalition of the willing" aimed at securing a ceasefire in Ukraine.

The March 6 European Council in Brussels may go down in history as the moment Europe decisively rallied around Ukraine and embraced a bold vision for its own defense. In a landmark move, European leaders [endorsed](#) the “Re-Arm Europe” initiative, aimed at forging a stronger and more sovereign European defense posture. All EU member states backed European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s plan to mobilize EUR 800 billion for defense spending. The plan includes relaxed fiscal rules to accommodate higher budget deficits and a EUR 150 billion package of EU-backed market loans for member states.

Adding to the significance of the summit, French President Emmanuel Macron [proposed](#) discussions on extending France’s nuclear deterrent to European partners—an idea once considered unthinkable but now gaining traction amid growing security concerns. The urgency of these measures has been amplified by Donald Trump’s decision to [suspend](#) all military assistance to Ukraine and his repeated remarks casting doubt on U.S. commitments to defend NATO allies in the event of an attack.

London and Rome are working to minimize the damage and salvage what remains of transatlantic relations, at least holding back Washington until Europe can stand on its own. However, there is consensus that the U.S. is no longer a reliable ally.

This article focuses on how each of the G4 European states is responding to Trump’s challenge. Poland, whose commitment to Ukraine is unquestionable and which had already raised its defense spending to 4.7% of its GDP even before the Oval Office confrontation between Trump and Zelenskyy, is not included due to the paper’s limited scope. The same applies to the unwavering support for Ukraine and European defense efforts by Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, and Lithuania, whose contributions must not be overlooked or undervalued.

France’s “Told You!” Moment

France reacted with less panic than others to America’s declarations, having long anticipated the possibility of Europe standing alone without its transatlantic ally. Strategic autonomy has always been a cornerstone of French defense thinking, rooted in a deep-seated mistrust of U.S. hegemony (the De Gaulle-Mitterrand doctrine) and a fierce commitment to national sovereignty, exemplified by its independent nuclear deterrent.

While recent French presidents (Hollande and Macron) leaned more Atlanticist, they never abandoned the vision of a strategically autonomous Europe. The real obstacle was European reluctance—Germany and Central and Eastern European states preferred NATO’s umbrella and U.S. military backing over what they saw as redundant French ambitions. Macron’s 2017 Sorbonne [speech](#) and his 2019 [warning](#) about NATO’s “brain death” were largely ignored.

Now, as Trump’s policies shake Europe’s security architecture, Macron is doubling down on his vision. The UK partnership, [formalized](#) in the Lancaster House accords (2010), remains solid, and echoes of the 1998 Saint-Malo Declaration, which aimed at a European military force, are resurfacing. With Germany under Merz showing newfound openness to Gaullist ideas, France seizes the moment—offering to extend its nuclear deterrent, and, perhaps, lead Europe’s defense on its own terms.

Macron appears to have moved past his earlier attempts to “tame” Putin—a strategy that defined the first years of his presidency. Determined to succeed where others (Bush, Merkel, Hollande, Obama) had struggled, he sought a grand compromise with Moscow. His final disillusionment came in February 2022 when his diplomatic overtures failed to prevent Russia’s full-scale invasion

of Ukraine. Putin's blatant lies, coupled with relentless hybrid attacks on French interests, ultimately convinced Macron that Russia was not just an unreliable partner, but an imperialist threat to France and Europe.

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In his impassioned March 5 [address](#) to the French nation, Macron left no room for ambiguity: Russia has turned its war on Ukraine into a global conflict. Calling for national resilience, he framed Moscow as a direct threat and urged France to step up, both militarily and strategically. He floated the idea of the French nuclear deterrent to protect Europe and vowed to revitalize France's defense industry—signaling a decisive shift from diplomacy to deterrence.

Global Britain Back to Port Europe

When Boris Johnson championed Brexit, he promised Britain a geopolitical reset—unshackled from Brussels and free to expand its global influence. Yet, even as Brexiteers sought new horizons, they placed unwavering faith in the “special relationship” with the United States. This partnership, reinforced by the Mutual Defence Agreement (MDA), remains critical to the UK's nuclear deterrent, ensuring access to nuclear materials, technology, and intelligence—despite London's independent operational control over Trident.

But the “special relationship” had already dimmed from its Churchill-Roosevelt, Macmillan-Kennedy, and Thatcher-Reagan heyday. With Trump 2.0, it now hangs by a thread. Nowhere is the rift more visible than in Ukraine: a “beautiful ocean” separates Washington and London on the Russian

threat. For the first time in recent history, nearly all of Britain's political establishment—except Nigel Farage's Reform Party—stands firmly against the White House's stance on Ukraine, alongside a British public still committed to Kyiv's defense.

Kier Starmer, the UK's Labour Prime Minister, has grasped the gravity of this “once-in-a-generation moment for European security.” His response has been twofold: doubling down on military aid to Ukraine while forging closer ties with European allies. The London mini-summit, convened swiftly after the Trump-Zelenskyy clash, underscored this realignment. However, unlike Macron and Merz, Starmer refuses to concede that America is lost. He recognizes that, in the short term, Europe alone may struggle to sustain Ukraine's defense. That is why he is deploying all his diplomatic skills to prevent an abrupt American retreat, particularly in critical areas such as Air Surveillance Control and intelligence sharing.

Should his efforts fail, Starmer might emerge not as the bridge to Washington, but as one of Europe's most determined leaders, embracing the continent's defense as a British priority.

Today, under vastly different circumstances and with a shifting transatlantic landscape, history's currents seem once again to be steering Britannia back toward its natural European harbor.

Decades ago, in his famous West Point [speech](#), U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson remarked, “Great Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role.” At the time, he urged London to join the European Economic Community (EEC), arguing it offered greater strategic advantages than the Commonwealth or even the “special relationship” with the U.S.. The remark offended Prime Minister Macmillan and much of the British press, yet by 1973, the UK joined the EEC. Today, under vastly

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Can Germany's Budgetary "Grand Bazooka" Save Europe?

"Money doesn't matter anymore!" [declared](#) *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on 4 March - a striking headline from a country where fiscal orthodoxy has long been a near-religious doctrine. For almost a century, Germany's economic policy has been shaped by the trauma of post-World War I hyperinflation, instilling a nearly sacred commitment to balanced budgets. This ethos extended across Europe, setting the tone for the entire eurozone—though not all member states adhered to it as devoutly.

Now, faced with the urgency of rearmament, Germany is breaking with its sacrosanct constitutional rule of budgetary discipline. Even before finalizing the coalition agreement—a meticulous process that could take weeks—Friedrich Merz reached a landmark deal with the Social Democrats to nearly double the military budget, raising it to EUR 100 billion annually, pushing defense spending toward 3% of the GDP. Commentators have already [dubbed](#) this unprecedented shift a "budgetary grand bazooka."

With Russia looming and the U.S. wavering, Germany is embracing extraordinary measures, echoing Mario Draghi's famous "whatever it takes" approach from the 2008 financial crisis. Merz himself made the parallel explicit: "In light of the threats to freedom and peace, we must apply the same principle to defense—'whatever it takes,'" he [declared](#) on 4 March 2025.

Germany now faces a triple intellectual revolution. First, it must overcome its deep-seated aversion to militarism, a postwar cultural taboo. Second, it must confront its long-standing opposition to both

civil and military nuclear power—public opinion may resist, but with German industry struggling to replace cheap Russian gas while ramping up production of Leopards, Taurus missiles, and other advanced weaponry, nuclear energy is becoming an unavoidable debate. In the military sphere, Merz suggests that Germany should rely on an extended French and British nuclear umbrella rather than pursuing its own nuclear capability.

Finally, Germany must remove the constitutional and psychological barriers that prevent it from taking on debt. This would require a two-thirds majority in both the Bundestag and Bundesrat—an extraordinary political feat, but one that could be achieved by the end of March 2025. If so, it would mark the most dramatic economic policy shift in modern German history, proving that in times of existential threat, even Germany's deepest dogmas can be rewritten.

Merz, a staunch Atlanticist, has already undergone this triple transformation in his thinking. Coming from the historically transatlantic CDU, having spent his entire career in a Germany that once hosted the largest contingent of American troops—around 200,000 during the Cold War and 35,000 today—he has long been steeped in the belief that security was NATO's responsibility. Yet, on the very night of his election victory, before the final results were even confirmed, Merz [made](#) a striking declaration: "It is clear that this (American) government doesn't care much about Europe's fate... My absolute priority will be to strengthen Europe as quickly as possible so that we can achieve independence from the USA."

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to defense spending alone. Berlin is [also launching](#) an ambitious EUR 500 billion plan over the next decade to modernize its aging infrastructure. The link to defense may seem indirect, but in reality, it is designed to stimulate economic growth and, in time, generate the resources necessary to sustain a stronger security posture. Crucially, Merz's vision aligns perfectly with Emmanuel Macron's ambitions for a robust Franco-German axis—one that never quite materialized under Merkel and deteriorated further under Scholz.

Italy and Meloni's Delicate Balancing Act

Italy has long been one of Europe's most steadfast Atlanticist nations, maintaining a close security relationship with the United States since 1945. Even when Matteo Salvini's *Lega Nord* and the populist *Five Star Movement*—both sympathetic to Moscow—briefly shared power, the country's transatlantic orientation remained unchanged. Since taking office in October 2022, Giorgia Meloni has worked to solidify her standing on the European stage, offering rare government stability while France and Germany struggled with internal upheavals. By strongly backing Ukraine, toning down her EU skepticism, and positioning herself as a hardliner on illegal immigration, Meloni earned credibility among European leaders. With Trump's return to power, the stars seemed perfectly aligned—she was the only sitting European head of government invited to his inauguration and boasted strong ties with his inner circle, including Elon Musk. But the recent course of American politics has thrown Meloni off balance.

Since JD Vance's provocative speech in Munich and Trump's increasingly aggressive rhetoric—threatening to withdraw from European defense, normalize ties with Moscow, and pressure Ukraine into a minerals deal—Meloni's carefully crafted political calculus has unraveled. Unlike Merz and

Macron, who are openly moving toward European strategic autonomy, she has been working to keep bridges intact, positioning herself as a stabilizing force between Washington and European allies. To this end, she has proposed a transatlantic summit in Rome to defuse tensions. Keen to maintain ties with the U.S. while avoiding alienation from Kyiv and her European partners, Meloni has reportedly advised Ukraine to adopt a more conciliatory stance and has allegedly been discreetly deleting past pro-Zelenskyy tweets. Despite this, her Defense Minister, Guido Crosetto, publicly [backed](#) Ursula von der Leyen's initiative to boost European rearmament.

Meloni is acutely aware of the emerging geopolitical realignment: France, Germany, Poland, the Nordic and Baltic states, and soon the UK are coalescing around a new European defense axis, preparing for a future without American guarantees. Meanwhile, Hungary and Slovakia—historically pro-Moscow—are now fully aligned with Trump's Washington. Ideologically closer to the latter camp, Italy is nonetheless more deeply integrated into the former, leaving Meloni caught in a delicate balancing act.

No matter how Meloni maneuvers, Italy is bracing for a Europe that may soon have to stand on its own.

Despite these dilemmas, Italy is forging ahead with plans to increase its defense spending from the current 1.5% to 2.5% of its GDP by 2027. And behind the scenes, Rome is preparing for even more drastic measures. On 28 February, *Corriere della Sera* [revealed](#) the existence of a secret contingency plan to rapidly convert Italy's automotive industry into a military production powerhouse should the need arise—further proof that, no matter how Meloni maneuvers, Italy is bracing for a Europe that may soon have to stand on its own.

European Defense for Ukraine, by Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has become both the crucible and the betrayal of European defense—a baptism in blood without a godfather to fulfill his duty. As outlined earlier, Ukraine's survival is Europe's immediate imperative. Its 900,000 soldiers are the ones holding back Russia's military, led by a Kremlin bent on avenging its Cold War defeat. This thirst for revenge is all the more dangerous given that the United States appears increasingly tempted by the idea of striking a deal with Russia at any cost—even if it means abandoning Ukraine and dismantling the transatlantic alliance into a patchwork of transactional arrangements.

Europe's security, sovereignty, and prosperity now rest on Ukraine's ability to withstand the onslaught, and on the collective resolve of European nations to support it—militarily, financially, and diplomatically. Beyond the battlefield, Ukraine's success must translate into a lasting peace that ensures its sovereignty, deters future Russian aggression, and prevents another war, whether against Ukraine or any European state. That imperative is already shaping European policy, with aid commitments doubling—not only at the EU level but also through national efforts from the UK, Norway, and other key allies.

The ultimate ambition for Europe has always been to build a robust and independent defense system—one with fully integrated armies, command structures, and even a unified arms industry, free from reliance on the United States. Today, Ukraine stands as one of the most formidable military forces on the continent. For more than three years, its army has held off a numerically and logistically superior Russian force, carrying out successful counteroffensives and even striking within Russian territory and seizing parts of the Kursk Oblast.

European defense without Ukraine is now unthinkable.

Through the crucible of war, Ukraine has not only strengthened its military but also cultivated a defense industry capable of large-scale production, technological innovation, and battlefield-tested advancements. Such a nation cannot be sidelined in Europe's future security framework. Ukraine must be at its core. Europeans should push for its NATO accession, and if political roadblocks—whether from Hungary, Slovakia, or even the United States—make that impossible, then alternative integration mechanisms must be devised. European defense without Ukraine is now unthinkable.

And Georgia?

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When Georgia eventually has a government free from Russian influence, it should seize the opportunity to integrate into Europe's defense architecture. The country holds strategic assets that make it a valuable security partner: its geographic proximity to adversaries like Russia and Iran, its vital role as a transit corridor for energy (gas, oil, electricity), goods, and digital infrastructure, and its small but battle-hardened military, which has proven its commitment in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, Georgia ranked second only to the United States in troop contributions relative to its population. If Türkiye becomes part of the emerging European defense structure, Georgia's chances of inclusion will increase significantly.

Trump's foreign policy is rooted in a starkly different understanding of power. While past administrations—whether neoconservative or liberal—

saw force as an instrument tied to broader values and legal principles, Trump's approach seems to champion raw power for its own sake. In this worldview, order itself becomes the highest value, unburdened by moral constraints, law, or traditional alliances. NATO, the longest-standing defensive alliance in history, is dismissed as a costly inconvenience. Trump prefers fleeting transactional arrangements, where relationships shift based on immediate self-interest rather than long-term commitments.

This explains his treatment of allies—disregarding them much as he disregards inconvenient truths. JD Vance, for example, falsely claimed that NATO allies have not fought for decades, ignoring the sacrifices of British, French, and other European troops in allied operations. Worse still, on 6 March, 2025, Trump [suggested](#) that NATO's Article 5 obligations were conditional on payments, adding: "Do you think France would come to help us if we were attacked? I'm not sure." In response, the French President [reminded](#) the world that NATO's only invocation of Article 5 followed the 9/11 attacks, leading European forces into Afghanistan in solidarity with the United States.

Where does Georgia fit into this worldview? Despite its steadfast military support for Washing-

ton in Iraq and Afghanistan, the reality is that it likely means little to Trump. Seeking *connivance* with his administration might be possible, but such relationships are fleeting and unreliable. For a small country like Georgia, the only viable path is to build lasting alliances.

This brings to mind an anecdote from the Obama years. In November 2011, Georgia hosted a North Atlantic Council (NAC) visit, bringing NATO's 28 permanent representatives and its Secretary-General to Tbilisi and Batumi. On a government-chartered plane flying from Tbilisi to Batumi, I found myself seated next to a senior European diplomat. In casual conversation, I lamented that Georgia was not a priority for the Obama administration. His reply, half-joking but striking in hindsight, has stayed with me: "*Consider it good news—he's not interested in Europe either. That means he already sees you as a European state. Use that as an argument to get Europeans to support your EU and NATO aspirations.*"

Today, as Europe embarks on its own defense awakening, Georgia must once again make its case—this time, not just as a future NATO and EU member, but as an essential player in European security ■