

After Trump's dispute with Zelenskyy

Three divides, three scenarios for Europe, US

ANALYSIS The tension at the recent meeting between the presidents of the United States and Ukraine in the White House has raised questions about the future of US relations with its European partners, particularly regarding the war in Ukraine. In light of these questions, analysts have developed transatlantic scenarios.

The war in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, remains one of the most complex geopolitical crises of the current century. This conflict has not only turned Ukraine into a bloody battleground but has also put the unity of the Western world to a severe test.

From the outset of the war, the US and European countries, especially through NATO and the European Union, have supported Kyiv with substantial aid categorized as military, financial, and humanitarian. By the end of 2024, the US had allocated over \$56 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, while the European Union and its member states had provided approximately €90 billion.

However, US President Donald Trump claimed during his recent meeting with his French counterpart at the White House that "The United States has put up far more aid for Ukraine than any other nation, hundreds of billions of dollars." "We've spent more than \$300 billion, and Europe has spent about \$100 billion. That's a big difference," Trump said.

This transatlantic cooperation has not remained unified. Differences in priorities and strategic viewpoints between the US and Europe have repeatedly led to tensions, which have manifested at various times. With Trump's rise to the presidency in January 2025, these disagreements entered a new phase. The peak of these tensions became evident on February 28, 2025, in the White House, when a meeting between Trump, Marco Rubio, and J.D. Vance with Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine, which was supposed to result in an agreement on Ukrainian mineral resources, turned into an unprecedented public dispute. This incident not only strained US-Ukraine relations but also revealed deeper differences with Europe.

Main disagreements between US, Europe

With Trump's return to power in January 2025, the US approach to the war in Ukraine has changed significantly, exacerbating differences with Europe. These discrepancies can be examined along three main axes:

Strategic objectives: The Joe Biden administration viewed the war in Ukraine as part of a global rivalry with Russia, aiming for the long-term weakening of Moscow. In contrast, Trump has adopted a more pragmatic approach, seeking a quick end to the war through negotiations with Russia, even if it means conceding to Putin. This position was clearly articulated during the February 28 meeting, when Trump told Zelenskyy, "You're either going to make a deal or we're out, and if we're out, you'll fight it out, and I don't think it's going to be pretty." He also accused Zelenskyy of leading the world towards World War III by continuing the war. Meanwhile, Europe, particularly countries like France and Estonia, emphasizes the importance of preserving Ukraine's territorial integrity and preventing a strategic victo-



A worker adjusts the US and EU flags before the arrival of European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and then-US secretary of state Antony Blinken during the EU-US Energy Council Ministerial meeting at the European Council building in Brussels on April 4, 2023. ● VIRGINIA MAYO/AP

ry for Russia. Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, stated after this meeting that any leniency towards Russia jeopardizes European security. This difference in perspective highlights a profound divide between US and European priorities.

Military support and its nature: Under Biden, the US took the lead in sending advanced weapons, such as ATACMS missiles and HIMARS systems, while encouraging Europe to increase military support. However, as evidenced in the February 28 meeting, the Trump administration has shown less inclination to continue this trend. J.D. Vance told Zelenskyy during the meeting that Ukraine lacks the manpower to utilize additional weaponry and should turn to diplomacy instead. This statement drew a sharp response from Zelenskyy, who urged Vance to visit Ukraine and witness the reality. In contrast, following this incident, Europe reinforced its commitment to escalating military aid. Kaja Kallas, the EU's foreign policy chief, announced that additional funding would be allocated for sending weapons to Kyiv. This contrast indicates that Europe is taking a more aggressive approach compared to the more conservative stance of the new US administration.

Sanction policies and diplomacy: The Biden administration imposed extensive sanctions on Russia and urged Europe to act in concert. However, in recent weeks, Trump has proposed reducing sanctions as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Putin, an idea that has faced strong opposition from Europe. The French president and other European leaders have emphasized that maintaining sanctions is vital for exerting pressure on Russia, especially following reports in February 2025 of North Korean forces entering the war alongside Russia. The difference in diplomatic approaches, particularly after the February 28 meeting where Vance called diplomacy the only solution, has deepened the rift between the US and Europe.

When US was pulling Europe along

Last Friday's meeting in the White House marked a turning point in showcasing the differences between Europe and Trump's America regarding the war in Ukraine. What was intended to lead to the signing of a mineral agreement between the US and Ukraine quickly devolved into a public dispute. Vance told Zelenskyy that Ukraine no longer has the capacity to continue the war and should be grateful for US

assistance, to which Zelenskyy responded angrily, saying, "Come to Ukraine and see for yourself." Trump, interrupting Zelenskyy, accused him of "disrespect," stating that he needs to be more grateful; "You don't have the cards right now." The tension escalated to the point where the press conference was canceled, and Zelenskyy was forced to leave the White House. This incident triggered an immediate response from Europe, with Macron and Kallas expressing their strong support for Zelenskyy and emphasizing the need to increase aid.

Even during Joe Biden's presidency, there were disagreements between the US and Europe regarding the management of the war and support for the Ukrainian military. For instance, in January 2023, Germany reluctantly sent Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine after US pressure. Additionally, in June 2024, Macron's proposal to send NATO troops to Ukraine faced opposition from both the US and Germany, highlighting Europe's greater caution in response to the more aggressive US approach under Biden. However, with the shift in US policy under Trump's leadership, this dynamic has reversed.



US President Donald Trump (R) meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C., on February 28, 2025. ● MYSTVSLAV CHERNOV/AP

Where are transatlantic relations headed?

The recent disputes in the White House, the cancellation of the mineral agreement, and the open tensions with the Trump administration have weakened Kyiv's trust in unconditional US support. After leaving the White House, Zelenskyy wrote on X, "Thank you, America," a remark that seems to carry a hint of sarcasm. This incident has increasingly pushed Ukraine towards Europe, where leaders like Kallas have asserted that Ukraine is part of Europe and that they will increase their support.

At the level of transatlantic relations, these tensions will deepen the existing divides between Europe and the United States. Concerned about the deal-oriented approach of the Trump administration, Europe is seeking greater strategic autonomy. Macron has repeatedly spoken about the necessity of self-sufficient European defense. Meanwhile, the US under Trump expects Europe to act within NATO and under Washington's guidance. This dynamic could weaken the transatlantic alliance.

Future analysis, possible scenarios

In light of recent developments, three scenarios can be envisioned regarding the future of U.S.-European disagreements related to the war in Ukraine:

Scenario One; Continuation of the current state with intensified tensions: The Trump administration's more aggressive approach may push Europe to adopt more independent policies, while Ukraine remains caught in the middle. This scenario could work to Russia's advantage, benefiting from the Western divide.

Scenario Two; Reduction of US support for Ukraine: Trump and Vance's harsh comments during the February 28 meeting suggest that Washington may condition or halt its support for Ukraine, especially if Zelenskyy does not comply with Trump's demands regarding negotiations with Russia. This would increase pressure on Europe to fill the gap left by a US withdrawal.

Scenario Three; Renewed Western convergence: This scenario would only occur if the threat from Russia against other NATO members escalates. However, currently, there are few signs supporting this scenario.

Final thoughts

The disagreements between the US and Europe regarding the war in Ukraine, which peaked during the February 28 meeting, stem from the strategic differences and priorities of both sides. While both parties support Ukraine, their methods and objectives remain contentious. These tensions have not only placed Ukraine in a difficult position but have also challenged the future of transatlantic relations. The success of the West in this crisis depends on its ability to find a balance between these viewpoints. However, recent events indicate that such coordination remains out of reach.

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