

was already fighting in another theater (the current US National Defense Strategy is predicated on no more than one war at a time) or because an adversary had compromised the necessary infrastructure to deploy US forces. Knowing this in advance, Vladimir Putin or a future Russian leader would have fewer reasons to think they could pull off a quick win against NATO — thereby strengthening deterrence.

- A Europe that is truly committed to pulling its own weight militarily is also more likely to be seen as capable of contributing to

the alliance's eastern members, strengthening aggregate deterrence. A Europeanized NATO would present a united front in which major Western European countries themselves were actively demonstrating that they were truly committed to alliance security too.

- A Europeanized NATO would be pumping enough resources into military modernization and acquisition to develop true complementary areas of excellence that might even exceed America's in some ways, strengthening the

overall Western alliance vis-à-vis Russia and China. Right now, Germany may make a better tank than the United States, at least for some topographies, but I am otherwise hard-pressed to identify areas in which America's NATO allies are at the vanguard of alliance military modernization. (Ukraine may make better, more affordable drones, but it is unlikely to ever join the alliance.)

- A Europeanized NATO would develop defense industrial base capabilities at size and scale that increase the Western world's overall resilience and surge ca-

capacity. As we have all learned in recent years, it is incorrect and imprudent to assume one can quickly ramp up production of key military equipment once a crisis occurs, given the nature of modern defense industrial bases and their many bottlenecks and single points of failure. The US defense industrial base is presently inadequate to backstop the alliance's equipment needs; it needs to become deeper and more resilient, but so does Europe's. Last but not least, a Europeanized NATO can reduce the strength

of political forces in the United States that see an ungrateful set of allies with low defense spending across the Atlantic and choose to disengage from NATO as a result. As noted, I do not expect this outcome — but we should all be trying to make it even less likely. A tripling in projectable force by NATO's non-US members, to the point where they could collectively deploy and sustain 10 to 12 brigades of ground power and associated airpower and support, could go far toward achieving this objective.

Right now, Europeans are doing a lot — including not only with their own militaries. Yet the politics of sustaining support for NATO remain perilous, and future support for the alliance in America, while likely, is far from assured. As long as we collectively avoid giving the impression that Europeanizing NATO translates into American disengagement from Europe, the project makes enormous sense.

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Why NATO, transatlantic bond will outlast Trump

The illustration features US President Donald Trump and the NATO emblem.
● ZEHRA KURTULUS/TÜRKİYE TODAY

Europe needs to invest in its military capability regardless of the trajectory of US policy. In the best-case scenario, the transatlantic bond strengthens because the United States finds Europe a more capable partner. In the worst-case scenario, the United States quits Europe, but Europe is better prepared to assume responsibility for its own defense.

As Europeans contemplate their options, they also need to be realistic about their continuing dependence on US military power. The increases in defense spending to which Europeans have committed are impressive, but it will take a decade or more for new expenditures to fill significant gaps in military capability. In the meantime, Europe will continue to need US manpower, firepower, lift, and intelligence.

Britain and France do have nuclear weapons, and Paris has been floating the idea of forward deterrence — the extension of France's nuclear umbrella to its neighbors. But the British and French arsenals are small and limited in capability. They do not

pack the deterrent punch of the US nuclear umbrella. As Europe faces down the war in Ukraine and the threat Russia poses to countries on NATO's eastern flank, it simply cannot afford a strategic divorce from the United States.

Europe's strategic deficit is also political in nature. Europeans need not only more military power, but also the political will to aggregate the power they have. Pooling sovereignty as well as defense resources would endow the European Union with the authority to oversee procurement of weapons, the division of defense responsibilities among member states, and overall security policy.

Yet member states remain reluctant to give up national control over matters of war and peace. Indeed, the growing strength of populist parties and ethnonationalism is fueling anti-EU forces that are making it even more difficult to move authority over security policy from national capitals to EU institutions in Brussels. Absent greater political unity, which is for now unattainable, Europe will continue to punch below its weight.

Passionate calls for Europe's strategic autonomy sound good, but it's not happening. The bottom line is that the United States still needs Europe, and Europe still needs the United States. That reality will not change anytime soon.



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By Charles A. Kupchan
Special assistant to former US president Barack Obama

OPINION

Europeans are understandably worried that their strategic partnership with the United States is coming to an end. President Donald Trump's dismissive attitude toward NATO, his decision to turn off aid to Ukraine, his threats to seize Greenland from Denmark, his errant attack on Iran — these and other moves give Europeans good reason to wonder whether they can still count on their US ally.

Yet it is far too soon to pronounce the irreparable rupture and death of the transatlantic alliance. Yes, Europe needs a plan B: prudence necessitates that Europeans get ready for self-reliance just in case Trump, who is impulsive and unpredictable, decides to pull the plug and leave NATO. But that outcome is highly unlikely. The transatlantic alliance rests on common interests and values that endure. The United States' best partners are still its European allies, and Europe still needs US power and purpose to ensure its security. Accordingly, Europeans should continue to increase their defense budgets and seek to acquire more geopolitical heft. But they should play the long game with Trump, working with him when possible and standing up to him only as necessary. It is quite likely that NATO will emerge from the Trump era not only intact but fortified by a strengthened European pillar.

Transatlantic bond benefits the United States

Trump is right to insist on a re-balancing of the Atlantic alliance. For too long, Europeans underinvested in their militaries, lulled into complacency by the United States' protective shield and the seemingly stable peace that

emerged after the Cold War's end. Trump could certainly be more tactful as he pushes European allies to ramp up defense spending; his hectoring unnecessarily breeds resentment. But coupled with a resurgent Russian threat, Trump's pressure campaign is working. Nearly all NATO members have agreed to spend five percent of GDP on their armed forces and security infrastructure by 2035. It is particularly important that Germany, Europe's largest economy, has built a solid political consensus behind major investments in its military establishment.

To be sure, Trump has on occasion mused about withdrawing the United States from NATO and continues to call allies "delinquent" when it comes to defense spending. Meanwhile, the Pentagon is undertaking a force posture review that could lead to the downsizing of the US military presence in Europe.

Yet Trump is quite unlikely to walk away from the transatlantic alliance. Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and Moscow's threatening posture toward NATO's eastern flank would make it an act of strategic folly for the United States to quit Europe. US forces are still needed to deter and defend against potential Russian attack. Moreover, forward bases in Europe provide the United States with platforms for projecting military power into Africa, the Middle East, and beyond.

Europeans are working hard to fulfill Trump's demands that they shoulder their fair share of the burden of defense. And even amid its military shortcomings, Europe has repeatedly demonstrated that it is a loyal and capable ally. European and US soldiers teamed up to bring peace to the Balkans in the 1990s. After 9/11, European soldiers fought alongside their US counterparts in Afghanistan. NATO played a role in the US-led campaign against the self-proclaimed

Daesh (Islamic State). And thanks to transatlantic teamwork, Ukraine has survived the continuing Russian onslaught.

Given its track record, NATO enjoys the strong bipartisan support it deserves — both in Congress and among the US public. Vibrant transatlantic trade, investment, and tourism strengthen the bond. Transatlantic trade in goods and services tops \$2 trillion per year. During these busy summer months, more than one thousand flights crisscross the Atlantic every day. This network of strategic, political, economic, and societal linkages gives Trump every reason to keep NATO alive and well.

Europe's strategic autonomy isn't happening

Given that Europe has good reason to assume that the transatlantic bond will long outlast Trump, its best strategy is to manage and work with him — not confront and break with him. Moreover,

Troops from NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLF) multinational battlegroup in Hungary stand alongside one another during a large-scale military exercise in September 2025.
● NATO



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