



Trump vs. Harris:

The Future of U.S. Foreign Policy and Transatlantic Relations

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The 2024 U.S. presidential election will be held on Tuesday, November 5, 2024, with the elected candidate serving a four-year term starting in January 2025. Both major political parties nominate their candidates through state primaries and caucuses, where voters choose their preferred leaders for the general election. On the Republican side, former President Donald Trump secured his party's nomination with a substantial lead over his rivals and was officially confirmed at the party's convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Trump selected Ohio Senator JD Vance as his vice-presidential running mate. For the Democrats, Vice President Kamala Harris entered the race after President Joe Biden withdrew, and with no challengers, she became the party's nominee. Harris chose Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as her vice-presidential candidate.

In the latest national polling averages, according to 538, Kamala Harris holds 48% of the vote, while Donald Trump trails slightly with 46%.¹ Harris experienced a bounce in her numbers after entering the race in late July, and she has maintained a small lead since then. Although her advantage has remained stable, particularly since the September debate, the race is still very competitive. While these national numbers are important, the real focus remains on the key battleground states where the election will be decided. The polls are very close in these swing states, with neither candidate having a decisive lead. In Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina, Trump has a small advantage, while Harris is slightly ahead in Nevada. Meanwhile, in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, Harris has been leading since early August, but the margins have tightened in recent days.

The 2024 U.S. presidential election presents a critical juncture not only for the United States but also for the international community, particularly its transatlantic partners. The potential election of either Donald Trump or Kamala Harris as the next president will have far-reaching consequences for U.S. foreign policy and its relationship with Europe. Analyzing the foreign policy orientations of both candidates provides valuable insight into the future of transatlantic relations and global stability. As Europe continues to face challenges such as the Ukraine war, energy security, and trade uncertainties, the foreign policy direction of the next U.S. administration will significantly influence these issues.

In this context, Donald Trump and Kamala Harris appear to represent two markedly different visions for America's role in the world. Trump, whose first term was characterized by a focus on "America First," reshaped U.S. alliances, particularly with NATO and the EU. Harris, currently serving as Vice President, seems to be offering a contrasting approach, with an emphasis on multilateralism, diplomacy, and climate action. This paper examines the foreign policy legacies of both figures, their campaign promises, and the potential impact their leadership could have on transatlantic relations from 2024 to 2028.

¹FiveThirtyEight, "2024 Presidential General Election Polls," October 28, 2024, https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-general/2024/national/?ex_cid=abcpromo.

Foreign Policy Strategies Under the Trump Administration

The "America First" doctrine, prominently championed by former U.S. President Donald Trump, embodies a nationalist and more isolationist approach to foreign policy, prioritizing American interests over global cooperation. While this stance appealed to certain domestic constituencies, it has had profound implications for international relations, particularly in terms of collective security frameworks. Collective security relies on cooperation between nations to address global threats, and the "America First" doctrine challenges this by emphasizing national sovereignty and reducing multilateral commitments. The United States demanded more from its allies during Trump's term, emphasizing the need for a fairer distribution of defense costs to support allies in Europe and Asia.

Within this context, Trump's presidency strained ties with transatlantic nations by being vocal about a number of things. Trump took a controversial stance on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), repeatedly questioning the alliance's value and threatening to reduce U.S. involvement. At the core of Trump's focus lies a 2014 agreement among NATO member states to strive towards allocating 2% of their GDP to defense—a target set as a "guideline" in response to Russia's invasion and unlawful annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.² While Trump is known for insisting on the 2% allocation, the matter is a strategic element that stands at the U.S. foreign policy core, considering it has been first introduced by the Democrat President Joe Biden, in 2015, during his participation at the Munich Security Conference as U.S. Vice President to then President Obama.³ However, it was Trump who took over the U.S. presidency in 2016 and criticized NATO members for not meeting the defense spending threshold, arguing that they were financially benefiting from U.S. protection while under-investing in their own defense. In 2017, the United States represented 51.1% of NATO's total combined GDP and was responsible for 71.7% of the alliance's total defense spending.⁴ In other words, the U.S. contributed more to NATO's budget than Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Canada combined. That year, U.S. defense expenditures amounted to \$685.9 billion.⁵

Trump reportedly told European officials that "NATO is dead" and suggested reconsidering Washington's commitment to the bloc's collective defense obligations, which had been a cornerstone of transatlantic security since the Cold War.⁶ His administration was vocal in demanding that NATO members increase their defense spending, asserting that the U.S. was

²Soo Rin Kim and Lalee Ibssa, "A closer look at Trump's years of criticizing NATO, particularly on defense spending," ABC News, published February 21, 2024, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/closer-trumps-years-criticizing-nato-defense-spending/story?id=107201586>

³Joe Biden, "Remarks by the Vice President at the Munich Security Conference," *The White House*, February 7, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/07/remarks-vice-president-munich-security-conference>.

⁴Martin Banks, "Results Are in: Here's How Much NATO Allies Spent on Defense in 2017," *Defense News*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2018/03/15/results-are-in-heres-how-much-nato-allies-spent-on-defense-in-2017>.

⁵Amanda Macias, "The US spent \$686 billion on defense last year — here's how the other NATO countries stack up," *CNBC*, published July 3, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/03/nato-spending-2017.html>.

⁶Julian Borger, "Trump told European leaders that US 'will never come to help you'," *The Guardian*, published January 10, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/10/donald-trump-says-never-help-europe-attack>.

unfairly shouldering the financial burden of the alliance. While previous administrations had also raised this issue, Trump's rhetoric was notably direct, accusing countries like Germany of benefiting from U.S. military protection while neglecting their own contributions.

In efforts to emphasize spendings into national prioritizations, Donald Trump diverted spending towards bolstering defense capabilities, his administration placing considerable focus on U.S. defense and national security strategies. He oversaw substantial budget increases for the military, starting with a \$700 billion allocation in 2018 and reaching over \$740 billion by fiscal year 2021, citing the need to "rebuild" what he called a depleted U.S. military.⁷ His administration emphasized modernizing U.S. defense capabilities, including the launch of the U.S. Space Force in 2019 as a separate branch of the armed forces, designed to address growing strategic competition in space, particularly from China and Russia. Trump also issued the first missile defense review since 2010, which focused on using space-based technologies and new defense systems to protect both the U.S. and its allies.⁸

In parallel with this military expansion, Trump reoriented U.S. national security policy to center on great-power competition, particularly with China and Russia. His administration's 2018 National Defense Strategy underscored the strategic importance of the Asia-Pacific and European regions, identifying China and Russia as aggressive powers that required enhanced U.S. military focus.

Trump's relationship with Russia was complex and controversial. While his administration imposed over 40 sanctions on Russia in response to its annexation of Crimea and interference in the 2016 U.S.⁹ elections, Trump himself often adopted a conciliatory tone toward Russian President Vladimir Putin. His reluctance to criticize Putin led to accusations that he was too lenient on Moscow, even as U.S. intelligence agencies and Congress maintained a hardline stance. The administration's mixed signals on Russia left allies uncertain about the U.S.'s commitment to countering Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, contributing to a perception of a weakened transatlantic front against Russian influence.

Regarding China, Trump's presidency marked a significant departure from past administrations' policies. The administration imposed nearly \$80 billion worth of new taxes on Americans by levying tariffs on thousands of products valued at approximately \$380 billion in 2018 and 2019, amounting to one of the largest tax increases in decades.¹⁰ In addition, Trump accused China of unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, and currency manipulation. This aggressive trade policy, while intended to protect American industries, also disrupted global supply chains and led to retaliatory tariffs from China, affecting global markets. In the

⁷Amanda Macias, "Trump Signs \$738 Billion Defense Bill. Here's What It Means for Space Force, Pay Raises and F-35s," CNBC, published December 20, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/21/trump-signs-738-billion-defense-bill.html>.

⁸Frank A. Rose, "The Trump Administration's New Missile Defense Review Is a Mixed Bag," Brookings, January 25, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-trump-administrations-new-missile-defense-review-is-a-mixed-bag/>.

⁹Fyodor Lukyanov, "Trump May Be Leaving, but Russia Sanctions Will Stay," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 20, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2020/11/trump-may-be-leaving-but-russia-sanctions-will-stay?lang=en>.

¹⁰ Erica York, "Tracking the Economic Impact of U.S. Tariffs and Retaliatory Actions," *Tax Foundation*, published June 26, 2024, <https://taxfoundation.org/research/all/federal/trump-tariffs-biden-tariffs/>.

year 2020, China was the main partner for the EU. This result was due to an increase of imports (+5.6%) and exports (+2.2%)," according to Eurostat, the EU's statistical office. The figures were similar to China's official data published in January, which showed trade with the EU grew by 5.3% to \$696.4bn in 2020. The same year, the US had a trade volume of \$671 billion with the EU, down from \$746bn the previous year.¹¹



Source: "President Trump spoke after visiting a tool manufacturing company in Kenosha", photo by Doug Mills, The New York Times, April 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/us/politics/executive-order-hire-buy-american-h1b-visa-trump.html>

Unilaterally, during his presidency, Donald Trump led the United States in withdrawing from several major international agreements, marking a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy. In June 2017, Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, citing economic concerns and the deal's perceived unfairness "that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries."¹² This decision formally took effect on November 4, 2020. Trump also rejected the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a comprehensive trade deal, by withdrawing the U.S. from negotiations in January 2017, just days after taking office, arguing that it would harm U.S. manufacturing.¹³ In May 2018, Trump withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which had

¹¹"China Overtakes US as EU's biggest trading partner" BBC News, published February 17, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56093378>.

¹²Timmons Roberts, "One Year Since Trump's Withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement," Brookings, June 1, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/one-year-since-trumps-withdrawal-from-the-paris-climate-agreement/>.

¹³Ylan Mui, "President Trump Signs Order to Withdraw from Trans-Pacific Partnership," The Washington Post, January 23, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/01/23/president-trump-signs-order-to-withdraw-from-transpacific-partnership/>.

been brokered in 2015 to curb Iran's nuclear capabilities in exchange for sanctions relief; Trump deemed the agreement flawed and inadequate for preventing Iran's nuclear ambitions.¹⁴ Additionally, during his presidency, the United States withdrew from UNESCO as well as the UN Human rights council. These withdrawals highlighted Trump's broader "America First" strategy, emphasizing national sovereignty over multilateral commitments.

Delving into the withdrawal of the Paris Climate Agreement, Donald Trump decided to remove the US from this pact because he believed it was economically disadvantageous and unfair to American interests. He argued that the agreement imposed restrictive regulations that would harm U.S. businesses, reduce economic growth, and lead to job losses, particularly in traditional energy sectors like coal and oil. Trump viewed the accord as overly burdensome, placing the U.S. at a competitive disadvantage while allowing countries like China and India to continue increasing emissions. His decision reflected his broader energy policy favoring U.S. energy independence, prioritizing the revival of the fossil fuel industry over renewable energy commitments, and seeking to roll back what he saw as excessive environmental regulations that hindered economic productivity.¹⁵

Kamala Harris' Role in the Biden Administration

During her tenure as Vice President, Kamala Harris has been less visible than his predecessors, but played a pivotal role in shaping U.S. foreign policy, focusing on strengthening international alliances and addressing global security challenges. As a key advocate for multilateralism, Harris has worked to reinforce U.S. commitments to longstanding partnerships, particularly through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). She has been deeply involved in the administration's response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, coordinating sanctions, rallying Western allies, and pushing for NATO enlargement with the inclusion of Finland and Sweden. Additionally, Harris has led U.S. efforts in addressing the root causes of migration in Latin America and promoted cooperation on global issues such as climate change and space policy.

Kamala Harris has positioned herself as a strong advocate for multilateral cooperation and has emphasized the importance of NATO as a central pillar of global security, reinforcing the U.S. commitment to Ukraine following Russia's 2022 invasion.¹⁶ At the Munich Security Conference in 2024, Harris called NATO "the greatest military alliance the world has ever known" and highlighted its critical role in deterring aggression.¹⁷ Under her leadership, the Biden-Harris administration supported the enlargement of NATO by successfully backing

¹⁴Mark Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned," The New York Times, May 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.

¹⁵Nicolas Loris, "4 Reasons Trump Was Right to Pull Out of the Paris Agreement," The Heritage Foundation, June 1, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/environment/commentary/4-reasons-trump-was-right-pull-out-the-paris-agreement>.

¹⁶ Kamala Harris, "Remarks by Vice President Harris at the Munich Security Conference," The White House, February 18, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/02/18/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-at-the-munich-security-conference-2/>.

¹⁷ Kamala Harris, "Remarks by Vice President Harris at a Campaign Event," The White House, July 11, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/07/11/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-at-a-campaign-event-9/>.

Finland's accession in 2023 and Sweden's in 2024, further strengthening the alliance's collective defense.¹⁸

Additionally, Harris has played a leading role in coordinating with Western allies to impose comprehensive sanctions, export controls, and penalties on Russian entities and individuals.¹⁹ Harris has argued that failing to respond decisively to Russian aggression in Ukraine would embolden other nations considering similar actions. Key sanctions under the Biden administration, supported by Kamala Harris, include more than 500 new measures introduced in February 2024 in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.²⁰ These sanctions targeted Russia's financial and military institutions, its card payment system, and officials tied to Navalny's imprisonment. In August 2024, an additional 400 sanctions were imposed on entities supporting Russia's defense and evasion of existing sanctions, including some Chinese actors.²¹ These efforts aimed to weaken Russia's war capabilities while continuing U.S. aid to Ukraine.

In this regard, Harris has pledged that the United States will stand by Ukraine for "as long as it takes" to help counter Russia's aggression.²² She has represented the U.S. at several high-level peace talks, including the 2024 peace summit in Switzerland, where she secured an additional \$2 billion in aid for Ukraine. Harris has been vocal in condemning Russia's invasion, labeling it a violation of international norms and crimes against humanity.

Beyond supportive statements for Ukraine, a lack of a cohesive strategy on the Ukrainian war is evident. The Biden-Harris administration has often delayed decisions on surpassing "red lines" in military aid, such as approving Abrams tanks, ATACMS missiles, and F-16 jets, which came later and in fewer quantities than Ukraine requested, reducing impact on the frontlines. There's an impression that the U.S. seeks to avoid sparking an internal crisis in Russia that could lead to uncontrollable outcomes, therefore, providing Ukraine only enough support to prevent defeat but not to ensure a decisive victory over Russia. This cautious approach includes National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's visit to Kyiv in March 2024, where he reportedly asked Ukrainian leaders to stop drone attacks on Russian refineries, fearing negative effects on global markets and inflation in the U.S., which could impact elections.²³

¹⁸ Zeke Miller, "Biden formalizes US support for Finland, Sweden joining NATO," AP News, August 10, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-biden-finland-6a04422190bdd7e75440f7e176a88109>

¹⁹ Kamala Harris, "Remarks by Vice President Harris in Press Gaggle," The White House, February 20, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/20/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-in-press-gaggle-2/>.

²⁰ George Wright and Will Vernon, "US targets Russia with more than 500 new sanctions," BBC News, February 23, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68380251>.

²¹ Simon Lewis and David Lawder, "US sanctions 400 entities aiding Russia's war including Chinese firms," Reuters, August 24, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-imposes-sanctions-400-more-targets-aiding-russias-war-effort-2024-08-23/>.

²² Kamala Harris and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Remarks by Vice President Harris and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine in Joint Press Conference," The White House, February 17, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/02/17/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-and-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine-in-joint-press-conference-munich-germany/>.

²³ Christopher Miller et. al, "US urged Ukraine to halt strikes on Russian oil refineries," Financial Times, March 22, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/98f15b60-bc4d-4d3c-9e57-cbdde122ac0c>.

At that time, drone strikes had affected 15% of Russian refining capacity, forcing Moscow to halt gasoline exports and even ration fuel in some Russian regions.²⁴

In terms of energy, Kamala Harris has been a strong advocate for addressing the climate crisis, which she describes as an “existential threat.”²⁵ She has supported many of President Biden’s climate policies, including the decision to rejoin the Paris Agreement, an international accord under which nearly 200 countries committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit global temperature rise. Harris also played a critical role in passing the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), casting the tie breaking vote in the Senate.²⁶ The IRA represents the largest investment in clean energy and climate-related policies in U.S. history, allocating approximately \$370 billion for emissions-reduction efforts, including tax credits and subsidies for clean energy projects. This historic legislation builds on the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), a \$1.2 trillion law aimed at modernizing U.S. infrastructure and accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles, furthering the administration's commitment to combating climate change.

Security Priorities: America First vs. Global Cooperation

During the 2024 campaign, both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris have made bold claims about the future direction of U.S. foreign policy, with significant implications for transatlantic relations. Trump has reiterated his stance on reassessing U.S. commitments to NATO, shifting the approach to the Ukraine War, and focusing on trade imbalances, potentially reshaping the U.S.-Europe relations. In contrast, Harris has emphasized reinforcing NATO alliances, pledging continued support for Ukraine, and advocating multilateral cooperation to address global security challenges, presenting a stark difference in their approaches.

Trump’s recent comments on NATO reflect a fundamental challenge to the longstanding principles underpinning the alliance, particularly regarding financial commitments and the concept of mutual defense. His statements are characterized by a pointed critique of the uneven burden-sharing among NATO member nations, emphasizing that the United States has disproportionately shouldered the financial responsibilities of the alliance. "NATO countries have to pay up," Trump has repeatedly insisted, adding, "I've been saying, 'Look, if they're not going to pay, we're not going to protect, OK?'"²⁷ This argument is reinforced by Trump’s repeated declarations that countries failing to meet their financial obligations would no longer enjoy guaranteed U.S. military protection. This line of reasoning was further emphasized during a rally in South Carolina, where Trump recounted an interaction with a NATO leader who questioned whether non-payment would indeed lead to the cessation of

²⁴ John Irish, "Ukraine Strikes May Have Hit 15% of Russian Refinery Capacity: NATO Official," Reuters, April 4, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-strikes-may-have-hit-15-russian-refinery-capacity-nato-official-2024-04-04/>.

²⁵ Brady Dennis and Joshua Partlow, "What a Harris campaign could mean for the fight against climate change," The Washington Post, July 24, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2024/07/23/kamala-harris-climate-change-environment/>.

²⁶ "Kamala Harris Positions," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/election2024/candidate-tracker/kamala-harris>.

²⁷ Andrew McDonald, "Donald Trump Says He Won't Quit NATO if Europe Pays Its Way," Politico Europe, March 19, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-says-he-wont-quit-nato-if-europe-pays-its-way/>.

U.S. protection. Trump's response was unequivocal: "That's exactly what it means. I'm not going to protect you."²⁸ Such rhetoric is a stark departure from NATO's collective security ethos, wherein Article 5 guarantees mutual defense irrespective of financial contributions. In February 2024, during a speech, Trump stated he would encourage Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to any NATO member that doesn't meet defense spending guidelines.²⁹ Trump's stance suggests a transactional view of alliances, where financial parity is equated with security guarantees.

However, a record 23 NATO countries have met the 2% GDP defense spending target this year, up from just half of that number four years ago. This increase, which NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg described as the largest in decades, highlights a significant shift toward fairer burden-sharing among allies, addressing criticism about European contributions. Non-U.S. allies also, for the first time, met the target on average, demonstrating their growing commitment to collective defense responsibilities. With an 18 percent increase in defense spending among allies in Europe and Canada, collectively, this has reached 2.71 percent of their GDP,³⁰ investing a combined total of more than USD 430 billion in defense.³¹ Among the top spenders are Poland with 4.12% of their GDP, Estonia with 3.43%, and the United States with 3.38% and other major European countries include Germany with 2.12%, France 2.12% and UK 2.33%.³²

²⁸James M. Lindsay, "Election 2024: Donald Trump Says He Will Not Protect 'Delinquent' NATO Members," Council on Foreign Relations, published February 16, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/election-2024-donald-trump-says-he-will-not-protect-delinquent-nato-members>.

²⁹Kate Sullivan, "Trump says he would encourage Russia to 'do whatever the hell they want' to any NATO country that doesn't pay enough," CNN, February 11, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-russia-nato/index.html>

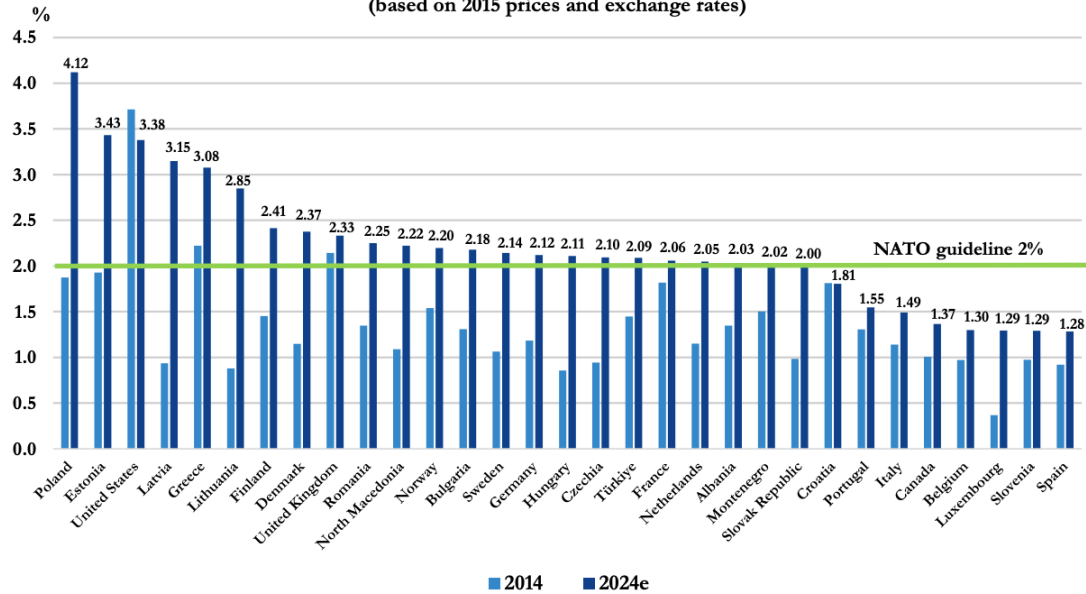
³⁰ Clara Falkenek, "Who's at 2 Percent? Look How NATO Allies Have Increased Their Defense Spending Since Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," Atlantic Council, July 8, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/whos-at-2-percent-look-how-nato-allies-have-increased-their-defense-spending-since-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

³¹"Defence expenditures and NATO's 2% guideline," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, accessed June 18, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm.

³²NATO Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024), NATO Public Diplomacy Division, June 12, 2024, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf.

Graph 4 : Defence expenditure as a share of GDP (%)

(based on 2015 prices and exchange rates)



Note: Figures for 2024 are estimates.

Source: Defense Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024), NATO Press Release, June 2024, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf

In addition, to indirect defense spendings, direct contributions to NATO are comparable to the dues paid by members of a condominium association, used to support NATO's civil and military budgets, as well as the NATO Security Investment Program, which finances infrastructure, command-and-control systems, and other essential projects. In 2023, these common funding areas amounted to a total of 3.3 billion euros. The United States contributed approximately 16% of this total, matching Germany's contribution, which equates to roughly \$566 million.³³

Furthermore, Trump and his allies have discussed a "two-tiered NATO" system in which Article 5 would apply only to those nations that meet their defense spending targets.³⁴ Such a proposal would effectively create a divide within the alliance, undermining the principle of collective defense and potentially weakening NATO's cohesion. Analysts have pointed out that while Article 5 mandates mutual assistance, the actual wording—"such action it deems necessary"—leaves room for interpretation, allowing Trump to argue that military support is not mandatory if financial commitments are unmet.³⁵ His allies have even floated the idea of enacting tariffs on countries that fail to meet defense spending goals, adding an economic dimension to his pressure tactics. This two-pronged approach—threatening military

³³Sean Carberry, "NATO Members Dial Up Defense Spending," National Defense Magazine, June 20, 2024, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2024/6/20/nato-members-dial-up-defense-spending>.

³⁴Michael Hirsh, "Trump's Plan for NATO is Emerging," Politico Magazine, July 7, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/07/02/nato-second-trump-term-00164517>.

³⁵ibidem

withdrawal while leveraging economic tools—shows Trump’s strategy of using both sticks to demand greater European accountability.

If Donald Trump were to secure a second term, his current rhetoric and policy suggestions regarding NATO could significantly reshape the alliance, potentially undermining its cohesion and collective defense principles. However, the campaign tone may change when in office, however marginal that may be. At the same time, these investments indicate that member countries are increasingly aware of their obligations and are taking significant steps to fulfill them, thus reducing the need for the kind of drastic measures that Trump has proposed, such as a two-tiered system or the threat of withdrawing protection from nations failing to meet financial commitments.

Under a Republican administration, the U.S. relationship with NATO allies would focus on European members taking on more conventional military responsibilities, while the U.S. continues to provide the "nuclear umbrella"³⁶ and maintain missile defense in Romania and Poland.³⁷ Conservative policy documents, including the latest "A Conservative Defense Budget for Fiscal Year 2025" from April 2, 2024, emphasize increasing defense spending, with all NATO allies required to contribute a minimum of 2% of GDP for defense, aiming for a future target of 3% of GDP. In parallel, Trump also plans to increase U.S. defense spending alongside his call for NATO allies to raise their budgets to 3 percent of GDP. Meeting this goal domestically would mean a considerable expansion of the U.S. defense budget, potentially reaching \$1.03 trillion by 2029.³⁸ Although this may pose difficulties to achieve, Trump’s approach, similar to Reagan’s “peace through strength” strategy, focuses on bolstering American military capabilities to deter threats and affirm the nation’s leadership role in global security.³⁹

On the contrary to Trump, Kamala Harris has made clear her unwavering support for NATO and commitment to continuing the Biden administration’s policies regarding transatlantic security. In her speech at the Democratic National Convention, Harris reinforced her dedication to standing by Ukraine in its fight against Russia, vowing to maintain military assistance and strengthen NATO’s collective defense. She emphasized that, as president, she would ensure that the U.S. continues to play a leading role in safeguarding democracy and confronting global threats. “I will never waver in defense of America's security and ideals," Harris declared, underscoring her belief that NATO remains crucial in the global struggle between democracy and authoritarianism.⁴⁰ Her campaign echoes the Biden administration’s approach to foreign policy, particularly the importance of multilateral cooperation through NATO, and signals a continuation of strong U.S. support for the alliance and its mission.

³⁶ Ibidem pag. 94

³⁷ Robert Greenway et al., „A Conservative Defense Budget for Fiscal Year 2025”, The Heritage Foundation, 02.04.2024, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/conservative-defense-budget-fiscal-year-2025>

³⁸ Dustin Walker and Mackenzie Eaglen, "Trump Wants NATO to Hit 3 Percent GDP on Defense. The US Could Fall Short," Breaking Defense, October 9, 2024, <https://breakingdefense.com/2024/10/trump-wants-nato-to-hit-3-percent-gdp-on-defense-the-us-could-fall-short/>

³⁹ New Strategy Center, roundtable discussion with former high-level members of the Trump administration, October 29, 2024.

⁴⁰ Todd Prince, "Harris Accepts Democratic Presidential Nomination Vowing To 'Stand By Ukraine'," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 23, 2024 <https://www.rferl.org/a/harris-dnc-speech-ukraine-nato/33089454.html>

Both the candidates' positions on NATO also tie closely to their views on the conflict in Ukraine. Trump has signaled his willingness to "undo the very methods that the Biden administration has employed to reassure Europe after Russia invaded Ukraine," which includes pulling back the additional U.S. troops stationed in Europe and ending the support that has enabled military aid to Ukraine.⁴¹ In Trump's narrative, his own leadership and relationship with Vladimir Putin would have prevented the war, suggesting a preference for diplomatic engagement over military aid.⁴²

Kamala Harris has consistently reinforced her commitment to supporting Ukraine, emphasizing the broader implications of Russia's aggression for European security. In her seventh meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on September 27, Harris reiterated that continued aid to Ukraine is vital to preventing Russian President Vladimir Putin from advancing further into Europe. During the meeting, President Biden and Harris reviewed Zelensky's "victory" plan and announced nearly \$8 billion in additional military aid to bolster Ukraine's defense.⁴³ Harris has also represented the U.S. multiple times at the Munich Security Conference, where she praised NATO and affirmed the "ironclad" U.S. commitment to defending democratic principles.⁴⁴ Harris believes that continued support for Ukraine is essential not only for the country's survival but also for maintaining the security and stability of Europe as a whole, a contrast to Trump's negotiatory stance.

Since the onset of the war, the U.S. Congress has passed five legislative bills to ensure continuous support for Ukraine. The total budget authority allocated through these bills stands at \$175 billion, with the largest commitment coming in April 2024 when the US pledged \$60 billion.⁴⁵ The majority of the aid has been military-focused, aimed at strengthening Ukraine's defense capabilities in the ongoing conflict.⁴⁶ Of the \$175 billion total allocated by the U.S. Congress for aid related to the war in Ukraine, only \$106 billion is directed specifically to supporting the Ukrainian government. The majority of the remaining funds are allocated to various U.S. initiatives connected to the conflict, such as bolstering American military readiness and regional security operations. Additionally, a smaller portion of this funding is dedicated to assisting other countries in the region that have been impacted by the war.

Donald Trump has criticized this level of U.S. financial support, calling Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky "the biggest salesman in history," implying that Zelensky has effectively

⁴¹ Liana Fix and Michael Kimmage, "Trump's Threat to Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, March 22, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/trumps-threat-europe>.

⁴² Musk Interview on X: Trump Blames U.S. President Biden for Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Euronews*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/08/13/musk-interview-trump-blames-us-president-biden-for-russias-invasion-of-ukraine>.

⁴³ Katie Rogers and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, "Harris Meets With Zelensky, Anticipating a Handover of Global Crises," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/26/us/politics/harris-zelensky.html>.

⁴⁴ Emilio Perez Ibarquen, "Kamala Harris Shores Up Union Support in Lansing Visit," *State News*, October 18, 2024, <https://statenews.com/article/2024/10/kamala-harris-shores-up-union-support-in-lansing-visit>.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Masters, "How Much U.S. Aid Is Going to Ukraine?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 27, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-us-aid-going-ukraine>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine, *Congressional Research Service*, updated May 22, 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12040>.

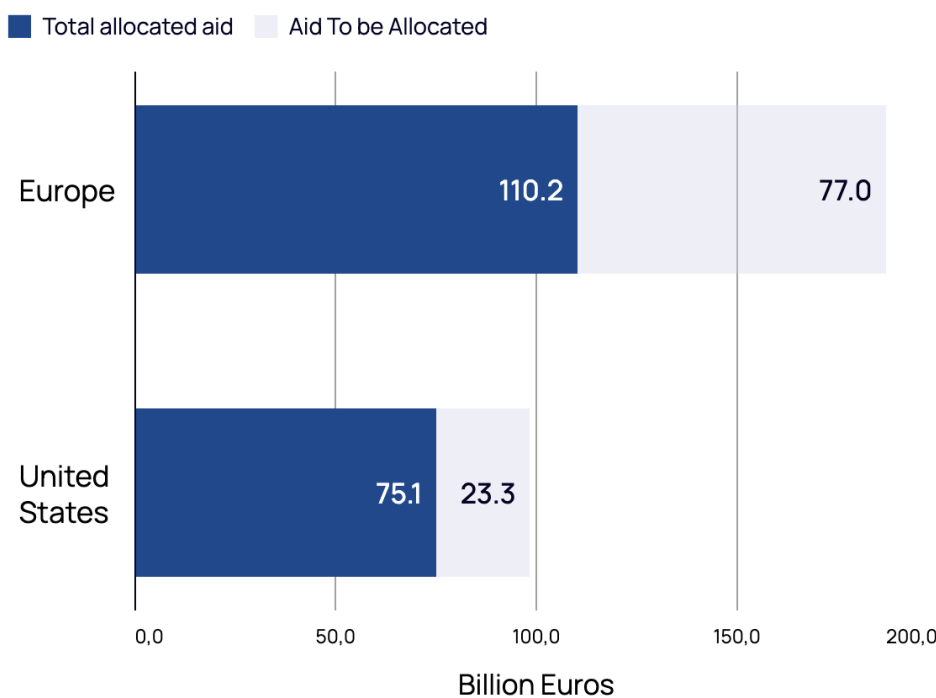
persuaded the U.S. into providing extensive aid.⁴⁷ This comment underscores Trump's broader skepticism towards continued American financial assistance to Ukraine, which he views as excessive and burdensome for the U.S., particularly given his desire to prioritize American interests and his view on a more time effective solution.

Altogether, Europe—including EU institutions, member states, the U.K., Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland—has committed a total of 110.2 billion euros in aid related to the Ukraine conflict. Of this amount, approximately half, or 51.5 billion euros, has been allocated specifically for military assistance.⁴⁸

Government support to Ukraine: By country group, € billion



Allocations and Commitments Jan. 24, 2022 to June 30, 2024



Source: Trebesch et al., "The Ukraine Support Tracker," Kiel WP, 2023, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

In terms of the proposal for a negotiated peace, Trump has warned that he would "immediately cut all U.S. aid to Kyiv" and push for a rapid end to the war in "24 hours".⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ According to Trump, Biden's foreign policy, specifically the suggestion of Ukrainian NATO membership,

⁴⁷"Trump Called Zelensky "the Greatest Salesman in History," Fact News, June 16, 2024, <https://fact-news.com.ua/en/trump-called-zelensky-the-greatest-salesman-in-history/>.

⁴⁸"Ukraine Support Tracker," Kiel Institute for the World Economy, accessed October 29, 2024, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>.

⁴⁹ Gram Slattery and Simon Lewis, "Exclusive: Trump handed plan to halt US military aid to Kyiv unless it talks peace with Moscow," Reuters, June 25, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-reviews-plan-halt-us-military-aid-ukraine-unless-it-negotiates-peace-with-2024-06-25/>.

⁵⁰Angela Stent, "How Would Trump and Harris Handle the Russia-Ukraine War?" Brookings, accessed October 1, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-would-trump-and-harris-handle-the-russia-ukraine-war/>.

was a provocation that helped trigger Russia's invasion. During the presidential debate, Trump argued that the Ukraine war could be swiftly ended through negotiation, portraying himself as uniquely capable of brokering peace, claiming respect from both Zelensky and Putin, and blamed Biden for failing to prevent the conflict, highlighting the threat of nuclear escalation as a key concern.⁵¹ This was a reference to a recent escalation of Moscow's rhetoric, where Putin indicated the potential mobilization of Russia's nuclear arsenal if another nuclear power were to support a non-nuclear state in an attack on Russia. Senior Republican representatives considered that a possible strategy of "nuclear blackmail" by Putin against Trump would not function and would not prevent him from taking any measures against Russia if necessary.⁵²

In an interview with Elon Musk, Trump emphasized his close relationship with Putin, stating, "I know Putin very well. I got along with him very well... and he would. We would talk a lot about Ukraine".⁵³ Trump's remarks highlight his belief that his personal rapport with Putin, positions him uniquely to negotiate directly with the Russian leader and potentially influence the outcome of the conflict. During his meeting with President Zelensky on September 27, Trump confidently remarked that if reelected, he will "sit down just to discuss it, and if we have a win, I think long before... we can work out something that's good for both sides."⁵⁴ Trump's approach would bring both Zelensky and Putin to the negotiating table, applying firm pressure on each side with carefully chosen incentives.⁵⁵ Apparently, the possibility of convincing Zelensky seems more feasible given Ukraine's military reliance on Western aid, especially from the United States. Making Putin more flexible in his stance and bringing him to the negotiation table could be achieved by suggesting economic measures that impact Russia's revenue from oil exports. Additionally, the possibility of the U.S. providing Ukraine with unlimited and unrestricted military assistance could serve as leverage. A significant increase in U.S. oil production could lead to a global drop in oil prices, severely impacting Russia's war revenues. This strategy would mirror the approach taken by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, when lowering oil prices to very low levels pushed the Soviet Union to the brink of economic collapse.

Among Republican leaders who could play a significant role in a future Trump administration, opinions on the Ukraine war and potential solutions for ending the conflict are diverse and, at times, opposing. Vice-presidential candidate JD Vance, during an interview with "The Shawn Ryan Show" on September 12, indicated that Trump's foreign policy is focused on prioritizing

⁵¹ Tuhi Das Mahapatra, "Donald Trump touts 'good ties' with Vladimir Putin, '...let's hope for good relations,' Zelensky asks back," Hindustan Times, September 27, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/us-news/donald-trump-meets-ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelensky-at-trump-tower-and-touts-if-we-win-101727453748738.html>.

⁵² New Strategy Center, roundtable discussion with former high-level members of the Trump administration, October 29, 2024.

⁵³ Eddy Wax, "Trump hearts Zelenskyy, Musk hates Breton", Politico, August 13, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/trump-hearts-zelenskyy-musk-hates-breton/>

⁵⁴ "Ukraine War Latest: Zelensky Meets Trump, Presents Victory Plan in New York City," Kyiv Independent, September 27, 2024, <https://kyivindependent.com/ukraine-war-latest-zelensky-meets-trump-presents-him-victory-plan-in-new-york-city/>.

⁵⁵ New Strategy Center, roundtable discussion with former high-level members of the Trump administration, October 29, 2024.

American interests and reducing overseas military involvement.⁵⁶ Vance outlined what such a peace might entail: allowing Russia to retain the territory it has already taken and establishing a heavily fortified demilitarized zone along the current front lines. This proposal, however, is controversial as it appears to reward Russian aggression, potentially setting a precedent for territorial changes through force—a plan that is highly controversial and runs counter to the territorial integrity principle upheld by Ukraine and much of the international community.

On the other hand, Mike Pompeo, former U.S. Secretary of State under President Trump, strongly advocates the "peace through strength"⁵⁷ concept, involving substantial aid to Ukraine and a tougher stance on Russia than the current Democratic administration. This strategy would be a complex one, involving not only massive military aid and the lifting of any bans on Ukraine's use of the weaponry it has received, but also tough sanctions that would predominantly target Russian oil and oil product exports. Additionally, the U.S. would need to boost its own oil production to lower global prices, an action that would deprive Russia of the resources needed to continue the war. Such a strategy, while it aligns with Donald Trump's incentives of boosting domestic energy production, also requires time to yield results, conflicting with Donald Trump's calls for a quick end to the conflict. Most likely, Trump could adopt measures signaling to Putin that negotiations and a more flexible stance could spare Russia from economic and social instability, impacting the stability of Putin's regime.

Concurrently, Kamala Harris, has taken a clear stance on Ukraine's involvement in peace negotiations, insisting that Ukraine must be included in any talks aimed at ending the conflict with Russia. In a recent interview on October 7, Harris firmly stated she would not meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin without Ukraine's representation, declaring, "Ukraine must have a say in the future of Ukraine."⁵⁸

On the issue of Ukraine's potential NATO membership, Harris took a cautious approach, stating that Washington would address the matter "if and when it arrives at that point," indicating that while she supports Ukraine, she is mindful of the complexities surrounding its accession to NATO.⁵⁹ However, it remains uncertain what Washington's stance will be if that decision point arises, as geopolitical dynamics continue to shift and may impact the U.S. approach. The question of Ukraine's membership will most likely depend on evolving circumstances and future administration priorities.

If Kamala Harris were to become president, her administration would likely maintain the current U.S. policy towards Ukraine, including a similar level of support, both in terms of military aid and diplomatic backing. Harris has made it clear that she would continue providing significant financial and military assistance to Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression.

⁵⁶ Julian E. Barnes, "Vance Describes Plan to End Ukraine War That Sounds a Lot Like Putin's," The New York Times, September 13, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/13/us/politics/vance-trump-ukraine-russia-war.html>

⁵⁷ David J. Urban, Mike Pompeo, A Trump Peace Plan for Ukraine, Wall Street Journal, July, 25, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-trump-peace-plan-for-ukraine-russia-foreign-policy-926348cf>

⁵⁸ "Harris Says She Would Not Meet Putin for Peace Talks if Ukraine Wasn't Represented," Le Monde, October 8, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/united-states/article/2024/10/08/harris-says-she-would-not-meet-putin-for-peace-talks-if-ukraine-wasn-t-represented_6728568_133.html.

⁵⁹ "Kamala Harris makes the case in 60 Minutes interview for why she should be president," CBS News, October 7, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/kamala-harris-2024-election-interview-60-minutes-transcript/>.

Consequently, it remains to be seen to what extent the Harris administration will commit to a clear strategy for Ukraine, providing consistent and timely military and financial aid to enable Ukraine to halt the Russian offensive in Donbas and regain ground, positioning it better for future negotiations. Negotiating with a potentially hostile Congress will be a major challenge for Kamala Harris, as any delay or reduction in U.S. support could have disastrous effects on the front lines and dramatically weaken Ukraine's position in a prolonged war of attrition with Russia.



Source: Vice President Kamala Harris alongside President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine at the White House, photo by Erin Schaff, The New York Times, September 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/26/us/politics/harris-zelensky.html>

Reduction or untimely U.S. military and financial support would leave Ukraine significantly weakened against Russia, drastically altering the balance of power on the battlefield. Ukrainian forces, currently bolstered by extensive Western military aid, would struggle to sustain operations without American weapons, financial support, and logistics. In 2025, Ukraine will need substantial Western financial support to meet its economic and defense needs. While it plans to cover its defense budget of Hr.2.2 trillion (\$53.66 billion) independently, additional funds are required for social wages and business support, which heavily depend on foreign aid. So far, only \$15 billion out of the \$38.4 billion needed has been secured from Western allies, highlighting the ongoing necessity for continued external financial assistance to sustain Ukraine's war efforts and broader economic development.⁶⁰

Cutting off this support, while simultaneously pushing for a settlement that acknowledges Russian control of occupied territories, would severely compromise Ukraine's ability to negotiate from a position of strength. It would effectively force Ukraine to accept unfavorable

⁶⁰Olena Hrazdhan, "Budget of War': Ukraine's 2025 Draft Plan – Here Are the Numbers," Kyiv Post, Spetmber 21, 2024, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/39342>.

terms that could involve losing significant portions of its eastern regions, thereby sacrificing sovereignty and territorial integrity in favor of a "quick peace," further impacting regional security. Moreover, Trump's insistence that European nations should "play fair" and carry more of the burden would mean shifting the responsibility for Ukrainian support away from the United States. However, the capacity of European countries to fill the void left by the U.S. is highly questionable. European nations, even those that have increased defense spending, do not possess the same level of military resources or financial capacity as the U.S. This shift in policy would not only embolden Russia but also signal to other authoritarian regimes that Western support for democratic allies is conditional and potentially temporary.

Regulation Rollback vs. Green Investment

Another aspect that would affect transatlantic relationships includes energy security. Donald Trump's proposed energy policy for his potential upcoming presidency is focused on dramatically scaling back renewable energy initiatives in favor of increasing fossil fuel production. He has vehemently criticized President Biden's efforts to transition to renewable energy, calling it a "plan to make China rich" due to the reliance on Chinese-made components for electric-vehicle batteries and other green technologies.⁶¹ Trump plans to undo regulations promoting clean energy, roll back restrictions on oil and gas drilling, and withdraw from international agreements like the Paris Agreement, arguing that such measures are crucial to achieving "energy dominance" and reducing inflation.⁶² He has vowed to repeal the Inflation Reduction Act, which he claims contributes to rising costs, and replace energy regulatory bodies' leadership to pivot them away from green energy goals, emphasizing the maximization of fossil fuel output.⁶³

In his vision, Trump aims to open U.S. waters and protected lands to extensive oil and gas drilling and remove permitting delays for new fossil fuel projects. This strategy also involves ramping up investments in nuclear energy, particularly focusing on small modular reactors, an energy source Trump sees as an important supplement to achieve American energy independence. His administration would prioritize domestic drilling and new oil pipeline construction, while rescinding Biden's policies that restrict liquefied natural gas exports. Overall, Trump's energy agenda represents a clear shift towards fossil fuels, aimed at supporting traditional energy sectors while significantly cutting back on the Biden administration's clean energy initiatives.

Analyzing Trump's proposed energy policies reveals several potential impacts on transatlantic relations. First, his commitment to fossil fuels and intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement will likely strain relationships with European allies, many of whom are deeply invested in

⁶¹Lisa Friedman, "Trump Says Clean Energy Is a Scam. That Could Benefit China, Experts Say," The New York Times, June 26, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/26/climate/trump-clean-energy-china.html>.

⁶²Samantha Gross, "Trump Has Big Plans for Climate and Energy Policy, but Can He Implement Them?" Brookings, July 30, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/trump-has-big-plans-for-climate-and-energy-policy-but-can-he-implement-them/>.

⁶³Kelsey Tamborrino, "Trump vows to pull back climate law's unspent dollars," Politico, September 5, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/09/05/trump-inflation-reduction-act-00177493>.

reducing emissions and accelerating their green transitions. The European Union, which views climate change mitigation as a top priority, would find itself at odds with a U.S. government actively reversing its renewable energy commitments. Moreover, Trump's framing of renewable energy as a pathway to making "China rich" could feed into broader geopolitical disputes with China, further complicating the U.S.-EU relationship. Europe has taken a more balanced approach toward engaging with China, especially in terms of green technologies and supply chain development, and Trump's confrontational rhetoric could put additional pressure on allies to choose between the U.S. and China. Such a stance may lead to a fragmentation of efforts in advancing renewable energy and technology cooperation between the U.S. and Europe, weakening their ability to collectively counter China's dominance in these sectors. Furthermore, Trump's prioritization of American energy "dominance" and moves to maximize fossil fuel production may drive down global energy prices, potentially affecting European energy markets, which have been pivoting toward renewables. These policies may lead to decreased demand for green technologies, lowering incentives for European industries to invest in renewable infrastructure if global energy prices drop significantly. The U.S. push for oil and gas exports could lead to a short-term boost in energy availability for Europe, but at the cost of aligning with longer-term European climate ambitions.

On the contrary, Kamala Harris has made her energy agenda a central aspect of her 2024 presidential campaign, emphasizing the importance of expanding renewable energy while also maintaining support for fossil fuel production. Harris has consistently highlighted her role in passing the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), casting the tie-breaking vote in the U.S.⁶⁴ Senate for what she describes as the largest investment in clean energy in U.S. history. The IRA allocates hundreds of millions of dollars in tax credits for green technologies such as wind, solar, and home heat pumps, and Harris has noted that these investments have already saved over 3.4 million American families \$8.4 billion in energy costs in 2023 alone.⁶⁵ She has also stressed that the law balances renewable energy incentives with continued support for fossil fuels, as it opened new leases for oil and gas production, leading to U.S. fossil fuel output reaching record highs in 2023.

While Harris has promoted the clean energy transition as beneficial for both the environment and the economy, she has also pushed back against Trump's accusations that renewable energy is responsible for rising energy costs. She has defended the IRA as a balanced policy that addresses climate change without abandoning fossil fuel production, noting that the U.S. has simultaneously increased oil and gas output. During the Biden administration, oil and gas output, especially crude oil production increased. The Biden-Harris administration followed this trend by approving the massive Willow oil drilling project in Alaska, while also advancing climate goals through the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. This law included provisions for

⁶⁴Jarrett Renshaw, "Harris' Energy Policy Is Strategically Ambiguous, Her Aides Say," Reuters, August 14, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/harris-energy-policy-is-strategically-ambiguous-her-aides-say-2024-08-14/>.

⁶⁵"U.S. Department of the Treasury Releases New Data on American Consumer Energy Savings Under Inflation Reduction Act," U.S. Department of the Treasury, published August 7, 2024, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2521>.

additional oil and gas leasing, alongside incentives for carbon capture, aiming to balance energy production with environmental priorities.⁶⁶

How US crude oil production increased over 3 presidencies

Each recent president has ended his term with higher US crude oil production levels than his predecessor. Today, the U.S. is the world's largest oil producer.

■ Obama-Biden ■ Trump-Pence ■ Biden-Harris

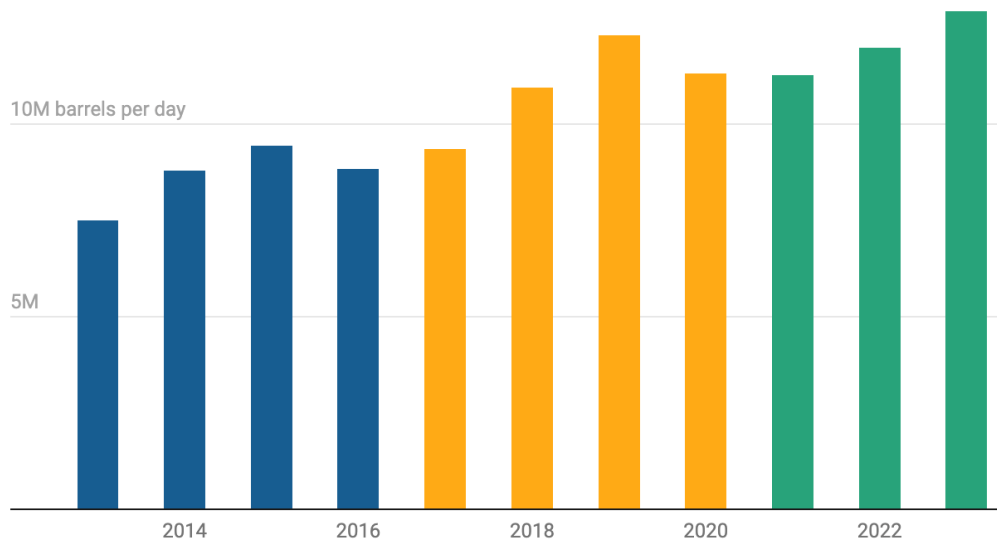


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Source: The Conversation, data from EIA, September 2024, <https://theconversation.com/under-both-trump-and-biden-harris-us-oil-and-gas-production-surged-to-record-highs-despite-very-different-energy-goals-236859>

In contrast, Trump has vowed to repeal the IRA, describing it as a "Green New Scam" and blaming it for inflation.⁶⁷ Donald Trump criticized the Biden-Harris administration for canceling the Keystone XL pipeline, which would have transported 830,000 barrels of oil per day from Canada, arguing that this contradicts Harris' energy independence goals.⁶⁸ He also pointed out that, while Biden blocked Keystone, his administration initially waived sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, intended to transport gas from Russia to Germany. However, those sanctions were reinstated several months later, reflecting conflicting energy policies under the Biden administration.

Under a Trump administration, transatlantic energy security could experience shifts, as his emphasis on fossil fuel production, skepticism toward international climate agreements, and concerns about renewable energy's ties to China may create tension with European allies

⁶⁶ Valerie Thomas, "Under Both Trump and Biden-Harris, U.S. Oil and Gas Production Surged to Record Highs Despite Very Different Energy Goals," The Conversation, September 9, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/under-both-trump-and-biden-harris-us-oil-and-gas-production-surged-to-record-highs-despite-very-different-energy-goals-236859>.

⁶⁷ Jennifer A. Dlouhy, "Trump 2.0 Climate Tipping Points," Bloomberg, September 30, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2024-climate-action-trump-wins-election/>.

⁶⁸ Ariel Cohen, "Trump and Harris Duel Over Energy," Forbes, September 11, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2024/09/11/trump-and-harris-duel-over-energy/>.

focused on green transitions. This approach might impact global energy markets, potentially challenging European investments in renewables and influencing their relations with the U.S. and China. In contrast, a Harris administration would likely pursue a balanced energy strategy, supporting renewables, fostering U.S.-European alignment on clean energy and climate initiatives, however, with a more limiting focus on conventional energy sources.

Economic Nationalism vs. Techno-Nationalism

Trump and Harris' economic tariff plans both have the potential to strain transatlantic relationships, with Trump's more aggressive trade measures risking retaliatory actions from Europe, while Harris' focus on protecting U.S. industries could also introduce friction in U.S.-EU trade dynamics.

Donald Trump's proposed tariff policies for his potential second term mark a significant pivot toward a more aggressive stance on international trade, which could have profound consequences for the transatlantic relationship and Europe at large. Trump has portrayed himself as a staunch ally of American business, famously cutting the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21% during his first term through the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.⁶⁹ This legislative effort was a cornerstone of his economic agenda, aimed at boosting corporate growth and revitalizing American manufacturing. In his speeches, Trump has promised more of the same if he is reelected—pledging even deeper tax cuts, particularly for companies that manufacture domestically.⁷⁰

Central to Trump's vision is a plan to reduce the corporate tax rate to 15% for businesses that produce their goods in the United States.⁷¹ This proposed tax reduction is coupled with promises of lower energy costs, fewer regulations, and advantageous access to the American market. Trump believes these measures will create a substantial incentive for companies, both American and foreign, to invest in domestic manufacturing. He highlighted this in a speech in Savannah, Georgia, where he described his vision of turning Savannah's port into a major export hub, underscoring the emphasis on boosting U.S. economic self-sufficiency. "American workers will no longer be worried about losing their jobs to foreign nations. Instead, foreign nations will be worried about losing their jobs to America," he confidently asserted.⁷²

However, these policies come with a distinctly protectionist edge—one that threatens to significantly alter U.S.-European trade dynamics. Trump's proposed tariffs, which include a blanket 20% on all foreign imports and a much steeper rate of up to 60% on Chinese goods, signal a return to the economic nationalism that defined much of his first term. For Europe, these tariff proposals could be particularly problematic. European economies are closely

⁶⁹"How Did the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act Change Business Taxes?" Tax Policy Center, updated January, 2024, <https://taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/how-did-tax-cuts-and-jobs-act-change-business-taxes>.

⁷⁰Tamy Luhby and Katie Lobosco, "Here's how Trump says he'll help US businesses through tariffs and taxes," CNN, September 24, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/24/politics/trump-us-business-tariffs-taxes/index.html>.

⁷¹"Donald Trump's Proposal to Lower the Corporate Tax Rate to 15%," Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, September 6, 2024, <https://www.crfb.org/blogs/donald-trumps-proposal-lower-corporate-tax-rate-15>.

⁷²Kayla Epstein, "Trump vows to 'take other countries' jobs' in economic speech," BBC News, September 25, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clj3qnrpvg9o>.

integrated with the U.S. through extensive trade relationships, and a blanket tariff on imports would make European goods significantly more expensive in the American market. This could lead to a decline in exports from key industries across Europe, such as automotive, pharmaceuticals, and machinery—all sectors that rely heavily on U.S. consumers.

Further complicating the transatlantic relationship is Trump's proposed "100% tariff" on countries that move away from using the U.S. dollar.⁷³ Such a policy would primarily target nations attempting to de-dollarize their economies—a trend that has gained some traction, particularly in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent shifts in global financial alignments. Should major European economies make moves toward reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar, they would face punitive trade measures, further straining diplomatic ties. This would add another layer of economic tension, as many European nations have been exploring ways to diversify their financial systems to reduce vulnerabilities associated with over-dependence on the dollar.

The impact of these potential tariffs would not only be felt in Europe's economic metrics but would also resonate politically. Trump's emphasis on penalizing foreign goods through tariffs could lead to retaliatory actions from European countries, who might impose their own tariffs on American products. This could potentially trigger a trade war, reminiscent of the tensions seen during Trump's first term when he targeted the European Union with tariffs on steel and aluminum. The resulting tit-for-tat measures could destabilize the transatlantic trade relationship, affecting industries on both sides and leading to higher prices for consumers.

Trump's proposed tariff policies suggest a future in which the U.S. prioritizes domestic production above all else, utilizing the power of the American market to pressure companies into reshoring jobs and operations. For Europe, this shift poses multiple challenges: a potential reduction in export competitiveness, increased trade barriers, and a reconfiguration of longstanding trade relationships. These potential measures indicate that a second Trump presidency would likely adopt a confrontational stance not only with rivals like China but also with key allies in Europe, prioritizing economic nationalism over international economic cooperation.

Kamala Harris' trajectory on trade suggests a continuation of the Biden administration's approach, characterized by a strategic use of tariffs and trade policies to address economic competition, particularly with China, while promoting U.S. manufacturing and energy transition goals. Although she has not outlined specific international trade plans, Harris supports maintaining tariffs, especially on Chinese goods, as a tool to counter what the U.S. views as unfair trade practices and to ensure that America leads in key sectors such as renewable energy.⁷⁴ Her stance reflects a commitment to "techno-nationalism," favoring the U.S.-subsidized projects and stringent export restrictions on high-tech products to protect national

⁷³"Trump Says He Will Put 100% Tariffs on Every Car Coming Across the Mexico Border," Reuters, September 24, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-says-he-will-put-100-tariffs-every-car-coming-across-mexico-border-2024-09-24/>.

⁷⁴"Kamala Harris: Candidate Tracker – Trade," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed October 25, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/election2024/candidate-tracker/kamala-harris#trade>.

security and American jobs.⁷⁵ Harris' emphasis on “de-risking”⁷⁶ rather than fully decoupling from China signals a measured approach, where she seeks to manage the competitive relationship without severing economic ties completely, while continuing to press allies, including the European Union, to adopt similar trade restrictions on Chinese technology. This strategy, in return, may strengthen transatlantic cooperation on technology but could complicate relations if EU leaders seek a more balanced trade approach with China.

Conclusion

In conclusion, considering the discourse analysis on both candidates' campaign speeches as well as the documents available for describing their particular policy choices, it is likely that the transatlantic relationships under Trump and Harris respectively would take different paths, especially with regards to defense, trade, and energy security. As things show now, while the two candidates are still campaigning, under a Trump administration, Europe is likely to face a renewed push for increased defense spending as part of NATO's burden-sharing, with Trump's rhetoric suggesting that U.S. military protection might be contingent on financial contributions. European nations, already increasing their defense budgets in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, may be forced to further accelerate arms manufacturing and self-reliance. This shift could weaken collective security efforts in Europe, and the ripple effects would be felt globally as countries reconsider their defense strategies. In terms of trade, Trump's tariff policies could lead to significant economic tension with Europe. The potential for a trade war similar to the one seen in his first term could disrupt the transatlantic economic landscape, with key European industries facing higher costs and potential retaliatory tariffs from the EU.

Without adopting Donald Trump's assertive rhetoric, a Harris administration would continue prioritizing the Indo-Pacific region, focusing on strategic competition with China. This shift would compel Europe to increase its defense investments to bolster its strategic autonomy. While a Harris-led U.S. might progress these efforts at a moderate pace, a Trump administration would likely accelerate them across the EU. NATO cooperation under a Democratic administration would be more predictable, yet Europe would need to assume greater military responsibilities, allowing the U.S. to concentrate on the Indo-Pacific. The outcome of the Ukraine war and U.S. policies toward it will significantly impact not only the transatlantic relationship but also the broader European security structure established post-World War II.

Harris' commitment to both renewable energy and fossil fuels through a balanced approach, alongside strategic tariffs targeting unfair trade practices, would likely align more closely with European goals for climate action and energy independence. Europe is already preparing for a future less reliant on external energy sources, with investments in renewable infrastructure and diversification of energy imports to reduce dependence on Russian gas. Under Harris,

⁷⁵ Jenny Gordon, "Kamala Harris on Trade: A Better Alternative, but Not by Much," Lowy Institute, September 30, 2024, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/kamala-harris-trade-better-alternative-not-much>.

⁷⁶Nouriel Roubini, "Kamala Harris's Economic Priorities," Project Syndicate, October 14, 2024, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/kamala-harris-economic-policy-agenda-compared-to-donald-trumps-by-nouriel-roubini-2024-10>.

this alignment on energy goals would foster stronger U.S.-EU collaboration in clean energy technologies and innovation, providing a foundation for more unified climate and trade policies.

The differences between the two platforms are likely to take a more nuanced implementation, once the new administration takes power. While campaigning programs and speeches tend to be ambitious, considering they need to convince the voters to decide upon one or the other candidate, the US strategy is long term and it is only nuanced policy features that get to shape the American view of the world. However, given all the global challenges, the next presidency will have the urgency of dealing with Europe – and Eurasian security. Therefore, in preparation for either administration, European nations must continue to strengthen their defense capabilities, invest in energy independence, and prepare for potential shifts in transatlantic trade dynamics. Should Trump win, a greater focus on national defense and self-reliance within Europe may be necessary, while Harris' approach would likely encourage deeper cooperation on security and climate issues.


The relationship between Europe and the US will be shaped by the solution found to end the war in Ukraine. It remains to be seen whether it will be a negotiated solution together with EU or a solution negotiated by the US with Russia and Ukraine and more or less imposed to the EU. Ukraine is in the middle of a war of attrition that will be impossible to win unless the flow of military support increases. If Washington continues to impose restrictions on Ukraine's use of certain types of weaponry, this will weaken Ukraine's defense capability and diminish its chances in a future negotiation.


Obtaining or imposing a ceasefire will not solve the problem of war in Ukraine. The Russian the full scale invasion of Ukraine launched on February 24, 2022 is in fact the second episode of the war started by Russia against Ukraine in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea. If there will be no solid security guarantees for Ukraine, it is very likely that Russia will restart this war in 2-3 years, towards the end of President Harris' term or President Trump's term. An inconsistent peace solution will not solve the problem of the war in Ukraine and will only lead to a frozen conflict in Europe that could flare up again at any time.

At the same time, an uncertain security situation for Ukraine and a process of rebuilding Ukraine in which the responsibility for economic and financial support will be passed between the EU and the US, will turn Ukraine into a country with a high degree of social and political instability. Even if the kinetic war will cease, Russia will continue to maintain its hybrid attacks and increase its intensity. Disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks will be just as present and in the Black Sea Russia will have an aggressive behavior in naval domain, especially if it maintains Crimea, jeopardizing freedom of navigation and energy and connectivity projects in the Black Sea region.

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