



By: *Radosław Sikorski*

# Europeans must be able to help the US defend its allies



For years, I have taken every opportunity to urge the European Union and its member states to invest more in defense.

When Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I repeatedly asked (as a member of the European Parliament) what further proof we would need to recognize the threats facing all of Europe.

What would we – as Europeans – do if our security was threatened while our closest ally, the United States, was otherwise engaged?

Today, we confront that very situation. US officials are openly stating that they do not intend to devote most of their time or resources to dealing with what they deem European issues. **According** to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the US has “other priorities to focus on.”

I agree. The global superpower has global responsibilities, and the number of flash points that might demand the US government's attention seems only to be growing.

In addition to challenges in the Western hemisphere, instability in the Middle East, and severe tensions between two nuclear powers – India and Pakistan – there is also the paramount goal of redefining relations with China.

Moreover, **according** to the official US Defense Department planning doctrine, the US can no longer fight more than one major war at a time.

## Strategic realities

The new US administration has been communicating its position plainly. “We’re here today to directly and unambiguously express that stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe,” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth **announced** in Brussels this February.

And US Vice President J.D. Vance was even more direct, **stating** that “Europe’s entire security infrastructure ... has been subsidized by the United States of America,” even though it is neither in Europe’s nor America’s interest “for Europe to be a permanent security vassal of the United States.”

President Donald Trump himself has repeatedly accused Europe of “freeloading” and “taking advantage” of the US.

**Europeans may not like what we hear, but we cannot pretend not to hear it**

Europeans may not like what we hear, but we cannot pretend not to hear it. We must be prepared for the US to wash its hands not only of Ukraine, but even of Europe.

Le Monde’s Sylvie Kauffmann recently **argued**, “Preparing for the worst is a safer bet than hoping for the best.” We can and should do both – hope and prepare. Trust but verify.

## Europe faces an existential choice

Ever since Trump announced his presidential candidacy back in 2015, there have been two schools of thought on interpreting his words.

Some argue that we should take him seriously but not literally, whereas others urge us to do the opposite: treat him literally but not always seriously. I believe that the most reasonable and respectable approach is to treat whatever the US president says both literally and seriously.

Given the current state of the world, this implies that Europe faces an existential choice. We can enter the global game united, as a heavyweight competitor, or we can condemn ourselves to marginalization.

Much has been done already to become a heavyweight contender. Since 2016 – just

before Trump's first term – NATO members, excluding the US, have **increased** their annual defense spending by 98%, from \$255 billion to \$506 billion.

## Deterring Russia is not beyond our means

Moreover, after three years of Putin waging war on Ukraine, the EU and its member states have proven willing to spend even more and to embrace a more cooperative, rational, and effective approach to defense planning and procurement.

The new joint defense **agreement** between the EU and the United Kingdom is another step demonstrating this new strategic solidarity.

Deterring Russia is not beyond our means. We don't need to match US military capabilities; rather, we just need enough to force Putin to reconsider his chances of winning in a confrontation with a united European community of democratic nation-states.

The people of Europe are clearly demanding that we develop a revitalized European defense posture. According to the European Commission, 71% of EU citizens **believe** that the bloc must strengthen its ability to produce military equipment, while 77% support a common defense and security policy. This gives European leaders a mandate to think and act boldly.

But how long will it take to restore peace to Ukraine and stability to Europe?

## We can do more

I believe we must act on the basis of three assumptions. First, we should view this as a war of a former imperial metropole against what it regards as a mutinous colony.

History suggests that colonial wars usually take about a decade to end. Anything less than that should be considered a bonus.



*We are acting for our own safety, not to undermine transatlantic relations but to improve them – Radosław Sikorski*

Second, we should accept that for the invading country to start negotiating in good faith, it must conclude that the invasion was a mistake.

It must acknowledge that the costs of war, and of keeping the former colony subjugated, are greater than whatever benefits the colony can possibly yield.

Third, given the above, we should remember that colonial wars are usually finished by a different group of leaders than those who started the fighting.

Yes, boosting European defense capabilities while supporting Ukraine will cost money. Since the start of Russia's war of aggression, the EU and its member states have **provided** more than \$165 billion in support for Ukraine and its people.

That is a significant amount, but it is still less than 1% of the combined GDP of the EU's member countries (some \$19 trillion). We can certainly do more.

And as we reinvigorate Europe's defenses, we must not lose sight of why we are doing it: we are acting for our own safety, not to undermine transatlantic relations but to improve them. To avoid a strategic dilemma, we Europeans must be able to help the US defend its allies by taking on our fair share of the security burden.

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