



**POLICY COMPASS**  
**EU Mobilises:**  
**New Realities of TransAtlantic**  
**Security**

**By**  
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**8 January 2026**

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**EU Mobilises: New Realities of TransAtlantic Security**

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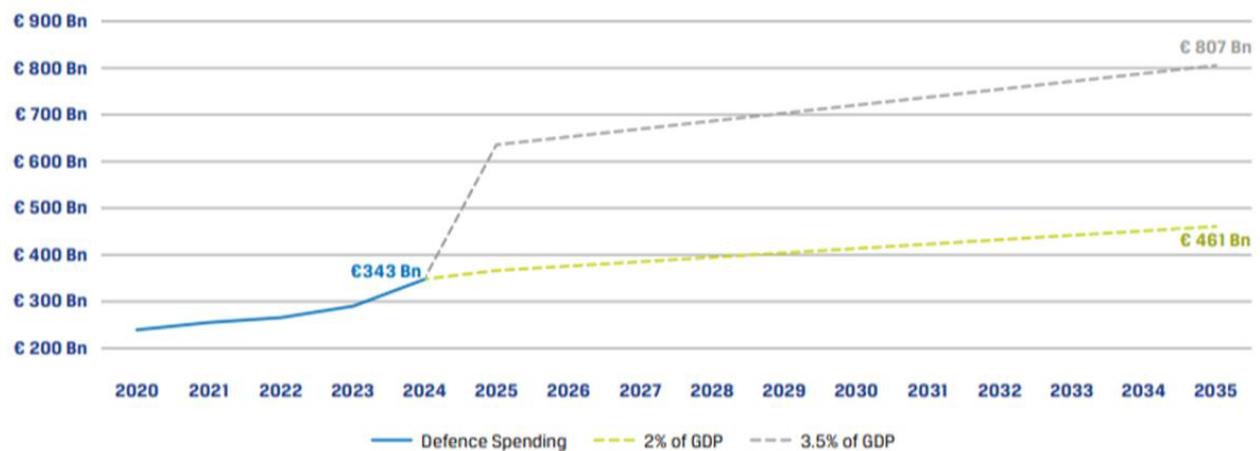
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**Executive Summary**

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- ✖ The EU's confidence in the US has lagged for some years. Neglect of long-standing agreements and shared understanding under the current US administration evokes uncertainty and a lack of trust.
- ✖ The US backpedals on guaranteeing regional and transatlantic security while addressing Europe as a geoeconomic competitor.
- ✖ European leaders are planning for joint military, respective voluntary service, and conscription. However, Germany is expected to lead EU mobilisation efforts.
- ✖ Future investment must be directed to defence and advanced tech and serve both civilian and military purposes.
- ✖ Europe's future is in peril, anxiously waiting on which adversary will strike first - Russia, China, or the US?
- ✖ US isolationist and national-realignment stances during a time of heightened aggression on the Eurasian continent are eerily similar to pre-World War sentiments.

**Key Picture: Total Defense Expenditure for the Previous and Revised NATO GDP Guideline.**



Source: EDA

**1. Background**

Exactly four years ago, France 24 reported on the growing concern across the European Union (EU) regarding the unreliability of its most important and strongest strategic partner, the United States (US). These sentiments have not changed, though US presidential administrations have. At that time, Ukraine expressed concerns of Russian encroachment, and, just a few months later, Russia invaded Ukraine.

Russia's advancements continue, and Ukraine's military forces are dwindling in number. Since the start of the most recent Russian aggression, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky has (1) extended martial law multiple times, calling for men up to 60 years of age to register,<sup>1</sup> (2) intensified the use of drones on Russian infrastructure,<sup>2</sup> and (3) diversified strategy to include economic and political tactics such as bidding for Ukraine to join the EU and agreeing to a transactional minerals deal for future investment and nation rebuilding post-conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Since the last US presidential administration, aid packages to Ukraine have ceased.<sup>4</sup> A contentious relationship between the two allies has since dawned after Zelensky's first and only face-to-face meeting with US President Trump. Emanating from fatigue stemming from EU conflicts and an internal need to exert influence, the current administration has expressed an almost inexorable ultimatum for the conflict to end. This yearning even calls for Ukraine to concede territory seized by Russia.

The US has been the primary guarantor of security for the EU. From sanctioning long-standing allies to diminishing support for Europe, the Trump administration has rattled the confidence of EU leadership, jeopardising regional security and questioning the future of the transatlantic partnership.

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## 2. European Sovereignty: A Rock Stuck in a Hard Place

The EU has long relied on the US to ensure regional security. Its reliance expands to several arenas - aid, trade & investment, defense, tech and intelligence, energy, pharmaceuticals, critical supplies, and more. But the two are heavily interdependent. The long-standing strategic partnership was founded on shared philosophies, such as market economics and democratic liberalism, establishing a joint template for international systems since the end of World War II.

However, for nearly a decade, Europe has questioned the US's commitment to this shared understanding. Trump's first presidency ushered in a new reality for America and its allies. During his term, the US pulled out of the Paris Agreement, demanded that European counterparts pay their fair and agreed-upon share for NATO, proclaimed Europe was an economic competitor, and challenged the existence of a European bloc.<sup>5</sup>

The EU and Europe alike have expressed deep confusion about the recent shift in US policy positions. In 2025 alone, the US imposed 10-20% tariffs on EU goods, threatened sanctions against European companies like Spotify and SAP for imposing fines against US tech giants, and ceased aid and verbal support for Ukraine.

Europe must now reconcile with the possible reality that the EU-US partnership will once again be constrained for the next years, and that rebuilding a strong coalition may take at least a decade. So, what will Europe do?

European dependency on the US will take time. Complex processes and cumbersome bureaucracy will not allow swift change nor hastened decision-making. But the EU, specifically, must act fast to reinforce security and sovereignty, as the recent 2026 US National Security Strategy (NSS) alludes to potential interference in regional dynamics. This shift only amplifies European concerns as it reiterates previously expressed dissent from the first Trump term.

### 2.1. US Pushback

The 2026 US National Security Strategy (NSS) reasserts the "America first" approach, pivoting previous stances to support allies now to professing a renewed, heightened interest in Western Hemisphere kinetics. The document was adversarial tone. Its sentiments reiterate those expressed under the first Trump administration: Europe must be more resilient and responsible for its own defence.

The document is layered in ambivalence, emphasised by a desire to disengage while being included in decision-making.

NSS policy positions also reduced the ranking, and subsequent strategic importance, of Europe from first to fourth. The shift earmarks a change in Eurocentric-US global alignment and strategic partnership. And, instead of expressing continued interdependence, the 2026 NSS communicates a need for rebalancing and deems Europe as a geoeconomic competitor. It also depicts a paradoxical internal perspective; Though a competitor, the US remains disquieted by its potentially declining influence in the region and globally.

Other foreign policy objectives for Europe mention reducing US presence in non-priority regions while "[cultivating] resistance".

The document reiterates a prior Trump insistence for Europe to increase its defense spending for NATO while simultaneously redefining Russia-US threat assessments. However, the US also begrudgingly expresses unwavering support for NATO expansion and support for Ukraine.

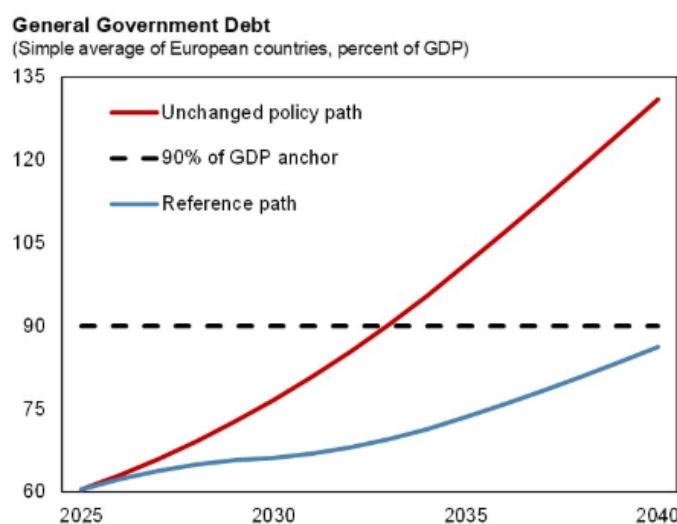
Furthermore, there's a growing concern that EU defence structures may replicate that of NATO. If replicated, the US is perturbed by a realised, fully-capable EU defence structure undermining the effectiveness of NATO. Other concerns are economic: A fully-capable EU defence system could (1) compete for resources, (2) exclude the US from defence projects, and (3) enhance protectionism. To bring this full circle, these concerns underpin why the NSS depicts Europe as a geoeconomic competitor.<sup>6</sup>

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## 2.2. EU Capabilities

Europe is capable of defending its security and sovereignty. It will need to drastically scale up its defence sector to meet current needs. However, the region is currently facing economic stagnation, and now has to navigate the complexities of needing to autonomise the economic bloc and potentially renege on previous policies to decouple from China.

**Figure 1: Public Debt Could Become Explosive Without Policy Action**



*Source: Kammer, Alfred. "How can Europe pay for things it can't afford?" IMF. 04 Nov 2025.*

Regulatory barriers limit the mobility of cross-border capital, coupled with rising and unsustainable public debt, require fast action. Europe must stimulate growth via increased private investment, a deepened single market, and increased EU public investment. Given the geopolitical constraints, inviting reform and pivoting investment to the defence and tech industries<sup>7</sup> will drive significant growth.

Growth in the tech industry will also need to spillover to the public. Civilian use of tech advances will engender cross-region resource pooling, scale economic growth and efficiency, and reconcile "national champion" to regional leadership<sup>8</sup>. This strategy will join together economic viability with political tact, ensuring that at least the EU's economy prospers while capital flows to defence fortifies security.

## 3. EU and State-to-State Efforts

Security doesn't stop with joint mobilisation. Most EU member states have given more consideration to the idea of mobilisation. The EU has officially agreed to leverage over \$800 Billion USD in funds for rearmament<sup>9</sup> while member nations are reimplementing mandatory conscription and exploring youth engagement and voluntary military service. In addition, the EU Rapid Deployment Force would enlist upwards of 5,000 troops in joint efforts

for regional security.<sup>10</sup> Efforts to revitalise mobilisation began early in 2025, but the ever-present threat of a continental war with Russia and the 2026 US NSS have catapulted the need to enhance mobilisation strategies.

### 3.1. Germany

The Bundestag, or German Parliament, agreed in favor to boost military recruitment. The plan commits billions towards improving defence infrastructure and equipment. In 2026, young men who turn 18 will be sent a questionnaire inquiring about their interest in joining the military and will be required to undergo a medical examination. Young women will also be sent this questionnaire, though their correspondence will not be mandatory, nor will they be required to endure an examination.

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Chancellor Mertz has also announced a pledge to increase defence spending to over \$765B USD over the next five years. This figure averages out to \$153B USD per year and far outpaces French fiscal commitments. Mertz's pledge also seeks to double the military capacity by 2030.<sup>11</sup>

However, Mertz and his conservative party are hinting towards a need to reinstate conscription to raise recruitment numbers to 260,000 over the decade if voluntary measures do not achieve desired enrollment figures.<sup>12</sup> This would double the current figure of military personnel. The draft from the most powerful European nation sends a clear signal that the continent is preparing for full-scale military mobilisation, especially if it cannot rely on its strategic partner.

### 3.2. France

In late November 2025, President Emmanuel Macron announced a new program designed to encourage youth (aged 18 to 19 years old) to volunteer for military service. Starting in Summer 2026, President Macron hopes 3,000 selected youth will enlist in voluntary military service, receiving equal pay and rights as current servicemen. France has outlined an ambitious figure of 50,000 hopeful volunteers by 20235. Prospects will then start their professional careers in the military if they choose to continue after their initial 10-month term.

Macron has also announced a \$7.6 Billion USD increase in defence spending, increasing the budget to almost \$70 Billion USD. The 2026-2030 strategy will designate \$2B USD to national services and aims to double servists from 40,000 to 80,000.<sup>13</sup> As the third economic powerhouse in the region, this significant increase in spending, however, is insufficient to enable French leadership in the fight for regional security. Moreover, Elie Tenenbaum of the French Institution of International Relations acknowledged that, though France holds the correct assessment regarding EU-US-Russia relations, Germany is in a better position to lead Europe.<sup>14</sup>

## 4. Evolving Transatlantic Relationships

Solidarity and security were once core underpinnings for a strong partnership between the US and Europe. Under a second Trump term, that relationship is once again being questioned. Visions for a more autonomous and capable EU while remaining within the US sphere of influence were made poignant in the recently published US 2026 NSS.

As Europe intensifies mobilisation efforts, its relationship with its most important partner, the once-revered transatlantic partnership, enters a new paradigm - one of new foundations, friction, and disillusionment. Europe must reconcile and adapt to US seemingly-intentional inconsistency and weaponised ambiguity. To have a fighting chance at regional security, internal politics and liberalisation must strengthen, bureaucratic processes expedited, defence spending increased, and inter-bloc relations realigned.

Concurrently, Europe must remain wary of the US and its internal developments. New policy approaches (domestic and foreign) determine that current US trajectory is enigmatic. Its recent NSS suggests a paradoxical, ambivalent, and audacious foreign policy position to consider US interests in continental policy and economic endeavors, while allowing the US to disengage from the uncertain fate of its most strategic partner as it withdraws from regional security operations and preparations in an ongoing, critical era in which Europe is the

closest its been to full-scale war since World War II. Moreover, this “America first” and mistrust of foreign entanglements discourse are reminiscent of pre-World War isolationist sentiments. And, its refocus on internal strength and economic isolationism may be the precursor to the world at war yet again.

The allies are heavily intertwined. Under a different administration, the world could expect US intervention if violence with Russia were to escalate. The certainty is now all but lost. European sovereignty is now multiple-pronged, depending on who strikes first - Russia territorially, China economically, or the US politically. Regardless, Europe is working against the clock and cannot depend on its former strongest partner to come to its rescue.

## NOTES

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