Trump and the EU's Security: Are we Prepared for Uncertainty?

9 FEBRUARY 2025

Karla Kohlhaas



A lot has changed after Trump's first ruling (2017-2021). Not only have geopolitics heavily shifted, and new wars emerged, but it seems like the world is in a constant crisis, and issues to tackle are only growing exponentially. After his second inauguration, no one knows what to expect. But one thing is clear: a lot will change for the international community, and probably not for the better.

The 20th of February 2025 and Trump's second inauguration marked a turning point for transatlantic relations, especially for EU-NATO relations and the future of defence and security cooperation. When cooperation and

trust are needed, Trump is striving for the golden age of America, protectionism, and reckless policies. Although we should have been prepared for his second presidency, and the EU is advocating for a defence and security policy towards strategic autonomy, the central question is if there is a chance that we are protected well enough even with no American support and a US that is ruled by someone who wants to end the Russian aggression war and solve everything with tariffs.

Trump's Vision for NATO and its Implications for Europe

It is well known that Trump criticised the common NATO framework and demanded a commitment to 5% of GDP defence spending in anticipation of shrinking American support. He claimed burden sharing and a more substantial financial European commitment. This wake-up call deteriorated trust in transatlantic cooperation.

Moreover, the EU received multiple warning signals, and the central debate has shifted to strategic autonomy. Initiatives like the European Defence Fund (EDF) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) have shown the EU's increased focus on independence in Common Security and Defence Policy. However, the debate about a European army is still not likely to be implemented soon. We must be prepared if the worst-case scenario occurs and Trump drastically limits its financial and diplomatic support.

Strategic autonomy: the security the EU needs

Now more than ever, the EU should focus on its promise to become strategically autonomous. Overcoming internal divisions and fostering unity are essential. With increasing cybersecurity investments, defence infrastructure, and security tools, the EU is on the right track, but considerable challenges remain. This needs to push the EU towards self-defence, with a special focus on regional threats, such as Russia.

Nevertheless, full strategic autonomy would require significant investment and institutional change. The EU must consider increasing GDP defence spending and prioritise technological and asset investment. Therefore, PESCO and the EDF must be further supported to limit dependency.

EU Military Answers

The EU's bureaucratic work ethics and response mechanisms need to be reformed. In a world of geopolitical uncertainty, rapid response needs to be the priority. EU battle groups need to be deployed more effectively and faster. The EU's comprehensive approach should guarantee even quicker decision-making by placing more defence agencies and centres in different regions that bolster regional defence alliances.

While autonomy is needed, multilateralism and cooperation with committed partners are essential. Rapid response requires action and cooperation with other NATO allies and neighbouring states, as the fight against

hybrid threats demands collaboration. Investment and research in cybersecurity and energy security need to be guaranteed. This can only be achieved through reduced dependency on external actors, as the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy encompasses more than just military concerns. It also addresses issues such as economics, health, energy, and social security, which are interconnected with military security.

A Call for Action

With the anticipated reduction in US-NATO involvement, the EU must recognise that strategic autonomy is becoming central. It is urgent to reassess Common Security and Defence Policy and be prepared for the unpredictability of Trump's policies through better strategic autonomy. However, multilateral cooperation is required to ensure European security. Rapid responses and preparation for hybrid warfare remain indispensable to maintain regional stability amidst rising global threats and uncertainties.

Preparing for the worst-case scenario is not an option – it is a European duty to ensure security for its citizens. Even in the absence of US support, the EU's ability to prove itself as a credible global security actor will determine geopolitical landscapes and shifting borders.

EPIS