



# Commentary

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## Commentary #17

David Dondua

### The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy: Europe - Wake up!

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## The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy: Europe - Wake up!

*By David Dondua*

The United States' [2025 National Security Strategy](#) (NSS) came out at a critical moment for Europe. Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, its overt military threat to NATO's eastern flank, intensified hybrid attacks, and global competition for technological and industrial dominance have created a security environment unprecedented since the Cold War. The Trump 2.0 NSS differs from previous strategies. It emphasises American dominance, national sovereignty, and recalibrates Washington's approach to alliances. Crucially, it also reflects an increasingly ideological worldview that undermines long-standing assumptions about shared democratic values.

### **What We Already Knew.**

The new Strategy formally reaffirms U.S. commitments to NATO and cooperation with European allies, underscores NATO's Article 5 commitment, but reframes the relationship. Automatic security guarantees are replaced by conditional engagement and shared responsibility, meaning Europe's central place is not for granted. From now on, continued U.S. support will depend on demonstrating strategic, i.e., monetary, value. Allies are expected to increase defence spending, strengthen military and industrial capabilities, and align with U.S. priorities, particularly regarding Russia and China.

The message is clear: "We are here, but you must meet us halfway."

Strategic autonomy is no longer optional: modernised forces, robust industrial capacity, and technological independence are essential for Europe to be a credible partner, capable of addressing threats from Russia, regional instability, irregular migration, and terrorism.

### **What We knew, But Pretended Not to Know.**

While burden-sharing debates are not new, the NSS marks a geopolitical reordering in which Europe is no longer Washington's principal theatre of attention, shifting focus towards Indo-Pacific and the Americas.

But the most controversial departure lies in its political tone. Europe is singled out as the only region on our planet in which democracy is in real danger. Moreover, for the first time, a U.S. National Security Strategy directly attacks democratically elected allied governments for "resisting" Washington's approach, suggesting that the problem is not Russia's aggression but Europe's "civilisational decline," allegedly caused by immigration. Even more strikingly, the NSS states that "the growing influence of patriotic European parties gives cause for great optimism". It marks an unprecedented level of U.S. intervention in EU domestic politics, seeking to project elements of the MAGA agenda into Europe's political space. This dynamic creates new vulnerabilities—ones Russia is poised to exploit through hybrid and cognitive warfare.

Paradoxically, by emboldening nationalist and populist parties, the NSS strengthens forces advocating a reduction in defence spending, thus contradicting the Trump administration's stated objective of pushing Europe to assume greater defence responsibilities.

A major implication of the NSS is that NATO enlargement is effectively frozen. The document's silence on Ukraine's future membership is a strategic verdict: enlargement is no longer a U.S. priority. For countries like Georgia, which rely on eventual NATO entry as their ultimate security guarantee, this represents a big shift in their security perspective. This also weakens Washington's own leverage: without a credible path to membership, aspiring countries will have far less incentive to raise defence spending to meet the 5% of GDP criteria that President Trump himself pushed at the [NATO 2025 Summit](#) in The Hague.

These two departures reveal a clear contradiction: Washington calls on Europe to increase defence investment while simultaneously dismantling the political and strategic incentives that would drive such investment.

Equally significant is the NSS's ambiguity toward Russia. The strategy avoids criticising Moscow directly, treats the war in Ukraine as a regional crisis to be "managed," and speaks of re-establishing "strategic stability" without defining its terms. This ambiguity introduces risks of unintended signalling to both allies and adversaries, potentially weakening deterrence and opening space for transactional arrangements with the Kremlin.

#### **Possible European Responses: Four Pathways**

The first is a full transatlantic alignment, in which Europe increases defence spending and closely synchronises its policies with U.S. priorities. Given Europe's growing desire for autonomy and rising political resistance to close alignment with Washington, this scenario appears less likely.

A second, most pragmatic option is selective cooperation within the framework of strategic autonomy. Europe coordinates closely with the U.S. on defence and Russia while pursuing independent industrial, technological, and diplomatic policies. This path offers a balanced, sustainable partnership that strengthens Europe's capabilities without sacrificing transatlantic unity. However, internal divisions, rising nationalism, and conflicting threat perceptions significantly limit the viability of this balanced approach.

The third path envisages a strategically independent Europe, capable of robust defence industries, advanced technologies, and resilient supply chains without reliance on U.S. systems. But it demands unprecedented unity and political will. Given current political fragmentation and institutional constraints, this scenario seems unachievable in the near or medium term.

The final scenario is fragmentation, where EU members adopt conflicting approaches toward the U.S., Russia, and China. This would weaken both the EU and NATO and empower adversaries who exploit European discord. Regrettably, considering today's geopolitical disparities, ideological polarisation, and contradicting national priorities, this scenario appears the most realistic unless decisive corrective action is taken.

Europe must choose - ambiguity is no longer an option.

#### **Risks Europe Must Prepare For**

The 2025 U.S. NSS presents opportunities for deeper cooperation but also significant risks that Europe must address proactively. A primary concern is growing dependence on U.S. defence systems.

While American support is crucial in the short term, excessive reliance could limit Europe's ability to make autonomous strategic decisions, particularly if U.S. political priorities shift.

Economic competition is another challenge. Key sectors—artificial intelligence, defence technology, and critical materials—are increasingly framed as matters of U.S. national security. Without a coordinated EU industrial strategy, European industries risk falling behind as Washington invests to maintain technological dominance.

Internal EU divisions multiply these risks. Member states differ on the balance between Atlanticist alignment and strategic autonomy, and such divergences could weaken Europe's common foreign and security policy at a critical moment. Public resistance to rising defence spending, especially in countries geographically far from Russia, is also a concern; governments will need to communicate transparently, demonstrating that investments in security safeguard democratic values and social stability.

Finally, hybrid and cognitive threats are intensifying. The NSS highlights the growing importance of countering malign influence, yet U.S.–EU political divergence may inadvertently strengthen Russia's ability to exploit societal tensions. As the EU Awareness Centre has long warned, [Russia's hybrid warfare in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine](#) is a testing ground. The 2025 NSS confirms that if Russia consolidates its gains in the east, these methods will be applied more broadly across Europe—especially where political fragmentation and institutional distrust are already rising.

### **Conclusion: A New Strategic Era for Europe**

The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy offers both reassurance and challenge. It reaffirms Washington's commitment to European security while making clear that Europe must now assume far greater strategic responsibility. The era of automatic guarantees is over; the future of the transatlantic partnership hinges on Europe's ability to act with cohesion and purpose.

If Europe invests in defence, modernises its industrial base, strengthens technological capabilities, and shields societies from hybrid and cognitive threats, the partnership can enter its most mature phase—one in which Europe is a sovereign, capable actor shaping global security alongside the United States.

Unity across the EU is essential. Divergent threat perceptions weaken collective action and create openings for adversaries. Structured dialogue is necessary to align member states on Russia, China, and broader global challenges, ensuring Europe speaks and acts with one voice.

Support for [Ukraine, Moldova, and potentially Georgia and Armenia](#) must be integrated into Europe's core security strategy. Enlargement has become a geopolitical necessity, not a bureaucratic process, especially as Washington signals a pause in NATO expansion.

In essence, the NSS signals that Trump's America no longer sees Europe as a true partner. It's high time to accept this dire reality and act finally. Europe - wake up!

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Ambassador David Dondua is a diplomat and expert in international security, conflict resolution, and European integration. During his diplomatic career in the Georgian foreign service (1993–2022), he held key positions, including Ambassador to Austria, Greece, and NATO. Beyond diplomacy, he has been an associate professor and lecturer at various universities. He currently represents the European Public Law Organisation (EPLO) at the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) in Vienna. He serves as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the EU Awareness Centre.

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