

## REFLECTIONS ON DONALD TRUMP'S FOREIGN POLICY AND EUROPE'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

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With Donald Trump's return to the White House, American foreign policy is being reshaped, placing Europe in front of critical decisions. During his first term, Trump drew a clear line, privileging America's internal interests under the "America First" slogan and undermining traditional multilateral commitments. If this approach is strengthened in a second term, Europe may be forced to choose between two crucial options: consolidating its own strategic autonomy to ensure its security and economic interests or attempting to maintain an increasingly uncertain alliance with the United States.

In recent years, the idea of strategic autonomy has gained traction among European leaders. The pressures exerted by Trump on NATO members during his first term to increase their defense spending highlighted that old commitments can no longer be taken for granted [1]. Some measures, such as the partial withdrawal of American troops from Germany, emphasized a new geopolitical context in which Europe must prepare for the possibility of increasingly diminished American military support. In such a scenario, strategic autonomy would no longer be just an ambitious concept but an urgent necessity [2].

However, the challenges in achieving this autonomy are multiple and complex. Although leaders like Emmanuel Macron have proposed the idea of a united European army, opinions remain divided within the Union. Some countries, such as Poland and the Baltic states, base their security almost exclusively on their partnership with the United States and are wary of an alternative that would reduce the American role in the region [3]. At the same time, developing an effective defense capacity requires substantial financial resources and a shared vision that many member states are not ready to adopt, especially given internal budgetary constraints [4,5]. Yet, without such cohesion, the idea of strategic autonomy risks remaining an aspiration, without a solid foundation in practical reality [6].

Moreover, the protectionist trade policies promoted by Trump could exacerbate transatlantic economic tensions. During his first term, the effects of measures such as tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Europe already impacted certain European industries [7]. A new Trump term could intensify this approach, and Europe, which relies on exports to the U.S. in essential sectors such as the automotive and technology industries, could feel the economic impact of such policies. In the absence of a stable trade agreement, Europe may find itself forced to reconsider its economic policies to protect its interests, without further deteriorating the already fragile relationship with its American partner [8].

Economic and security pressures, however, are not the only challenges on the horizon. Europe is in a difficult situation regarding relations with other global powers, such as China and Russia. In the absence of a strong American presence, Chinese influence through the Belt and Road initiative is becoming increasingly visible in Europe, with numerous countries attracted by investments and infrastructure projects offered by Beijing [9]. As these economic

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ties strengthen, there is a risk that Europe's political independence may be undermined. In parallel, an ambiguous relationship between the U.S. and Russia, similar to Trump's first term, could jeopardize the stability of the Union's eastern flank. For countries like Poland and the Baltic states, a rapprochement between the U.S. and Moscow could mean increased vulnerability, as they largely rely on American military support to protect themselves from potential Russian threats [10].

Therefore, Europe faces a critical decision. Trump's return to the White House should accelerate the continent's efforts to define and consolidate its own strategic identity, capable of protecting its fundamental interests and providing a solid alternative to a declining transatlantic partnership [11]. This requires not only increased financial commitments but also a shared vision that transcends differing priorities and materializes in real cooperation between member states. In an increasingly polarized global climate, the future of European strategic autonomy can no longer be postponed. Europe must become capable of acting independently, defending its interests, and strengthening its economic stability and security. The success of this transition will be a crucial test of maturity and unity for the entire continent, and the choices made now will define Europe's future in an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable global context [12, 13].

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