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Topics:

- Ukraine – European Union
- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war

CONTENT

■ UKRAINE - EUROPEAN UNION

Theme Analysis: The EU is sponsoring Russia in its war against Ukraine_____3

■ FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY OF UKRAINE

Theme Analysis: Deal of the Century as a prototype of the future military and geopolitical alliance between Britain and Ukraine_____8

■ THE COURSE OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Changes at the front_____11
Military assistance_____12
Russia: External and internal challenges_____12

Ukraine – European Union

- *THEME ANALYSIS: The EU is sponsoring Russia in its war against Ukraine*



Source: Getty Images

At the European Council meeting held in early March in Brussels, it is planned to include a reference to the need for the development of the "***Eastern Shield***" project, which envisages strengthening the defence infrastructure on the Eastern border of the European Union. This was announced by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. The Polish Prime Minister noted that the "***Eastern Shield***", which was initially a Polish project and is now being joined by other EU member states, should be mentioned in the conclusions of the European Council as one of the main priorities.

"We have achieved what we wanted at this stage. The conclusions already contain a mention of the 'Eastern Shield' and the broader initiative. After all, this is not just a Polish project. Finland, the Baltic states, and, as I discussed with the President of Romania, other countries want to join this large project to protect Europe's eastern border," Tusk said. He also emphasized that he is "almost certain" that **the issue of protecting the Eastern border of the EU and the "Eastern Shield" have become priorities that no longer raise doubts.** "This also implies financial and infrastructure support from the EU," he added.

The Prime Minister of Poland also emphasized the need to increase the presence of European and NATO troops on the border with Russia and Belarus. "In order to guarantee the security of others, we must be secure ourselves. Therefore, the first thing we must do in Europe is to fully secure our own borders — especially with Russia and Belarus," Tusk stressed.

It is also worth noting that **the "Eastern Shield" project does not currently include Ukraine.** A diplomat from one of the key EU countries told the correspondent of "European Truth" that this project currently only concerns EU member states, and the issue of possible Ukrainian inclusion has not been discussed yet. However, this does not mean that Europe is abandoning Ukraine. Politician, deputy of several terms in the Polish Sejm, public figure, and

journalist Miroslav Czech expressed the opinion that Europe will be able to stand firm if the Armed Forces of Ukraine effectively defend themselves on the front line. He shared this in the program "People of Change with Lesya Vakulyuk" on the "Espresso" TV channel.¹

"If the Ukrainian Armed Forces move into a counteroffensive on the front and destroy the enemy, Europe will undoubtedly stand firm. Today, Europe's fate depends on Ukraine.", and this is recognized by everyone, including politicians such as Ursula von der Leyen, Macron, Starmer, and the leaders of the Scandinavian countries. Prime Minister Tusk has also repeatedly stated this. The President of the Czech Republic, General Petr Pavel, stated that the future of Europe is being decided in Ukraine. And this is the consensus. The issue is not whether Europe has awakened — it has already awakened. It has even fought back. I am confident that Ukraine will endure with the help of Europe," he said.

Czech emphasized that Europe has woken up in several aspects. *First*, significant funds will be allocated to defense, in particular, the 800 billion euros mentioned by the European Commission in its program. On March 19, the European Commission presented the so-called "White Paper" on European defense. The leaders of the European Council — the heads of EU states — gathered to approve it and make specific decisions. In this area, everything begins and ends with money. Ukraine will not be left without these funds — there will be enough of them," he noted.

Secondly, there is an understanding that without Ukraine, a modern European security system is impossible, said the politician. "On March 12, the European Parliament adopted a resolution emphasizing Ukraine's role as the cornerstone of the European security system."

The third and most important, according to him, was the absolute revolution in how Europeans perceive their own security: "We must think about European security without the United States of America."

Czech also noted that on March 5, 2025, President Macron, in his address to the nation, announced a new era. He emphasized that ***Europe can no longer rely solely on American power and leadership and must build Europe's strategic autonomy, creating an alternative.***

"The symbol that such an alternative really exists was France's readiness to share its nuclear forces with other European countries. This is a sign that when anyone—whether Russia or even the United States—tries to threaten with nuclear weapons, demanding silence, Europe will have the means to respond. This was one of the strongest statements. In Moscow, this was received with shock, as France was traditionally considered pro-Russian. But Macron told the French: "***It's over. We have to perceive Russia as an existential threat not only to Ukraine, but to the whole of Europe!***" — During the summit on March 6, 2025, the European Union member states adopted a communiqué, in which they stated that negotiations on European security cannot take place without Europe's participation. According to the document, the EU wants to express its position regarding potential peace talks that could end the Russian-Ukrainian war, highlighting the importance of Europe's involvement in these negotiations. The communiqué emphasizes that in light of the new momentum for negotiations, which should lead to a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace, the European Council stresses the importance of the following principles:

- Negotiations on Ukraine are impossible without the participation of Ukraine itself.
- Negotiations on European security are impossible without Europe's participation. The security of Ukraine and Europe are interconnected.

¹ В мисленні європейців відбулась абсолютна революція щодо власної безпеки без США, - польський політик Чех. 25.10.2025. <https://espresso.tv/svit-v-mislenni-evropeysiv-vidbulas-absolyutna-revolutsiya-shchodo-vlasnoi-bezpeki-bez-ssha-polskiy-politik-chekh>

- A ceasefire is only possible within the framework of a comprehensive peace agreement.
- Any such agreement must be accompanied by strong and reliable security guarantees for Ukraine.

"Achieving 'peace through strength' requires Ukraine to be in the strongest possible position. This applies both before, during, and after the negotiations for the cessation of the war. The European Union will remain committed to providing Ukraine with enhanced political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military, and diplomatic support in coordination with our partners," the communiqué states. Furthermore, it has been revealed that the EU is considering appointing a special representative to participate in potential peace negotiations to end the Russian-Ukrainian war. Thus, the European Union continues to provide Kyiv with support in various forms—financial, military, and diplomatic—to strengthen its position during future negotiations.

It is also worth mentioning the previous summit in London, where **four key agreements** were reached:

1. Continuing military support for Ukraine until the war is over, as well as increasing sanctions and economic pressure on Russia;
2. Guarantees for Ukraine's sovereignty – any peace agreement must ensure Ukraine's security, and Ukraine itself must participate in all peace negotiations;
3. Deterrence of Russia – in the event of a peace agreement, European leaders commit to implementing measures that will prevent further aggression from Russia;
4. Creation of an international *"coalition of the willing"* – allies will form a union of countries that will guarantee long-term security and peace in Ukraine.

The summit also presented the ReArm Europe program from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, with a volume of 800 billion euros. This plan not only strengthens Europe's defense capabilities but also supports Ukraine in its fight. The program consists of **five main elements**:

1. **Defense funding:** Member countries will increase security spending, with the European Commission supporting this. A 1.5% GDP increase in defense spending is expected, which will create 650 billion euros of fiscal space over four years.
2. **New support instrument:** Countries will receive up to 150 billion euros in loans for defense investments. Priority areas include air defense systems, artillery, ammunition, drones, cybersecurity, and military mobility, which will allow for immediate enhancement of aid to Ukraine.
3. **Use of the EU budget:** Countries will receive additional resources to finance defense needs.
4. **Mobilization of private capital** for financing the defense industry through the European Investment Bank and other mechanisms.

During the summit, a speech by French President Emmanuel Macron was also heard. He emphasized that Russia is a threat to Europe and called for strengthening defense, particularly by deploying European troops in Ukraine. Macron also proposed considering the expansion of France's nuclear deterrence to protect other European countries, stating that Europe can no longer rely on the United States as the main security guarantor. He stressed that **the future of Europe and Ukraine should not be determined in Washington or Moscow.**

The EU will provide Ukraine with enhanced political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military, and diplomatic support. In 2025, the EU plans to allocate 30.6 billion euros to Ukraine, with some funds to be obtained through the confiscation of Russian assets. Additionally, the European Union calls on national governments to increase their assistance to Ukraine. Countries will also intensify efforts to meet Ukraine's urgent military needs, such as air defense systems, ammunition, rockets, training of Ukrainian brigades, and more. In particular, Germany is preparing a 3 billion euro aid package, Norway will increase its aid to 7.7 billion dollars, and several countries from the "coalition of the willing" have committed to providing Ukraine with up to 15 billion euros.

Also **Italy has proposed expanding the application of Article 5 of NATO to Ukraine without granting full membership.** Additionally, several European politicians have proposed deploying a group of 120 aircraft from European countries in the skies over Ukraine to protect the western and central parts of the country from Russian attacks. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Keir Starmer, stated that London is ready to support a peace agreement, including through the deployment of troops.

Experts consider the summit to be significant, as it reaffirmed Europe's readiness to support Ukraine and adapt its defense policy to meet new challenges. At the same time, although there are some difficulties regarding unity among EU member states (as evidenced by Hungary blocking the final declaration), the summit demonstrated a readiness for active action. The European Council reaffirmed its continued support for Ukraine and called for the swift approval of a new multibillion-dollar military aid package that the EU will provide to Ukraine. This was recorded in the document adopted on March 6, which was supported by 26 EU countries, with the exception of Hungary.

"The European Union has supported Ukraine from the very beginning in its right to self-defense against Russian aggression and will continue to do so. The European Council reaffirms its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders," the document states. It also emphasized that all military support and security guarantees for Ukraine will be provided in accordance with the security and defense policies of each individual EU member state, as well as with regard to the security and defense interests of all Union countries.

At the same time, President of the European Council António Costa expressed his belief that Ukraine's accession to the European Union could serve as a reliable guarantee of its security. He noted that **security guarantees for Ukraine mean EU membership.** "І ми рухаємося в правильному напрямку". These words were spoken by him during his speech at the event "Europe: Strengthening Through Crisis," which took place on March 25, 2025, in Brussels. According to him, the European Commission "highly values what Ukraine is doing." "It is impressive to see how a country at war, in such difficult conditions, is able to implement reforms and achieve the goals for EU membership," Kosta added.²

However, he refrained from confirming 2030 as the target date for Ukraine's EU membership, which had previously been mentioned by some European high officials. "As we know, the process moves forward depending on achievements. Ukraine is already making serious steps forward. But whether the membership will happen earlier, or if it will be in 2030 — I cannot say," said the President of the European Council. According to him, "the main thing is not the date, but the process itself and the common desire to achieve this goal."

Although there have been discussions about deploying European troops to Ukraine, European countries are currently facing political and logistical challenges in sending

² Антоніу Кошта: Гарантії безпеки для України - це вступ в ЄС.25.03.2025.
<https://www.dw.com/uk/antoniou-kosta-garantii-bezpeki-dla-ukraini-ce-ii-vstup-v-es/a-72036123>

peacekeeping forces to Ukraine, as well as potential opposition from Russia and the U.S. to their plans. Despite the United Kingdom and France working on sending peacekeepers to Ukraine for the future ceasefire, diplomats remain skeptical about the appropriateness of this step. "They are abandoning the idea of deploying ground troops and are trying to reconsider their actions in favor of something more sensible," said an unnamed European diplomat. Another diplomat added that the idea of sending troops was appealing when Ukraine was in a more advantageous position, but because of the U.S. position, this idea no longer looks as attractive.

Despite doubts, the initiative for peacekeeping forces has not been cancelled. Some countries may decide to send their troops to Ukraine. On March 27, 2025, the "Coalition of Willing" summit took place in Paris, where military support for Ukraine to deter future attacks was discussed, as well as methods for monitoring the ceasefire at sea and protecting energy infrastructure. Some European allies express doubts about sending peacekeepers without clear guarantees from the U.S. and an international mandate. They are concerned about funding issues, a shortage of manpower and equipment, as well as the prospect of military confrontations with Russia.

European countries may still help Ukraine, even if they do not plan to send large contingents of troops. They may support the already present forces or reinforce troops in neighboring countries, such as Romania. In particular, an increase in NATO units in Eastern Europe is possible to deter potential aggression.

After the talks between the U.S. and Russia, which took place without the participation of Europe and Ukraine, an urgent meeting with EU leaders was held in France, where the main issue was the deployment of peacekeepers to monitor the ceasefire. French President Macron proposed placing European peacekeepers along the frontline in Ukraine; however, some countries, including Germany, Italy, Spain, and Poland, opposed this. The UK is ready to support peace agreements by sending its troops to Ukraine. Switzerland, Ireland, Denmark, Australia, Belgium, and Lithuania expressed their willingness to send peacekeeping contingents, but some countries, including Bulgaria and Romania, do not support this initiative. Bulgaria issued a declaration stating that its armed forces would not participate in combat operations in Ukraine. Turkey also expressed its willingness to deploy peacekeeping forces, but only on the condition that it is involved in all consultations and preparations for the peacekeeping mission.

Thus, ***The EU itself is in a phase of metamorphosis.*** The project of joint armed forces is more possible than ever. However, in these transformations, Brussels itself is uncertain about how to deal with Ukraine due to its non-member status. It is clear that Ukraine is ultimately seen as part of Europe's future, but its present is not yet defined. ***Although the forecasts are optimistic, it will depend on the further initiative and political will of both Kyiv and Brussels.***

Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- *THEME ANALYSIS: Deal of the Century as a prototype of the future military and geopolitical alliance between Britain and Ukraine*



Source: AP

Donald Trump recently stated that Volodymyr Zelenskyy's approval rating is only 4%, and that Ukraine needs to hold new elections. Such a statement caused outrage in the Ukrainian segment of social media, as it is an obvious lie. Even the opposition to Zelenskyy knows that the president's approval rating is actually much higher.

It is pointed out that such statements by Trump should be approached with a cool mind and not reacted to too emotionally. This is just one of many statements that have no real basis and often repeat Russian narratives. There will likely be many more similar remarks, as there are many pro-Russian figures in Trump's circle, and he often listens only to his closest advisers. The most famous among them are Elon Musk and the new head of the U.S. National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, who is known for her support of pro-Russian narratives.³

Such a development is not unexpected. As studies have shown, Russian propaganda and Trumpist rhetoric have often intertwined long before the war began, and now we are witnessing how these narratives are formalizing into a Trump-Putin alliance. A scenario in which Trump and Putin reach an agreement on "*Peace in Ukraine*" *implies forcing Ukraine into capitulation..* This means that Ukraine will endure even greater suffering than now and may turn into a country where torture, deportations, and mass executions will occur, and we will have no ability to resist. In such conditions **The Ukrainian government should ignore any agreements between the USA and Russia, as well as the demands from Washington.** So far, Ukraine has not faced sanctions from the United States, meaning there is no need to pay attention to what Senator Rubio or Minister Lavrov are negotiating. **Ukraine should once again rely on its internal strength and actively collaborate with European**

³ "Мир Трампа" — це примус до капітуляції. Що робити Україні в умовах альянсу США і РФ. 19.02.2025. <https://texty.org.ua/fragments/114496/myr-trampa-ce-prymus-do-kapitulyaciyi-sho-robyty-ukrayini-v-umovah-alyansu-ssha-i-rf/>

partners.

На початку війни, коли більшість світу, включаючи президента Байдена, сумнівалися в нашій здатності вистояти, Україна дала відсіч, і лише після цього почалася міжнародна підтримка. Зараз ми повинні бути готові до того, що частина підтримки може бути обмежена, але значна частина виборців Трампа все ж підтримує Україну. Якщо ми не підемо на капітуляцію, попри тиск з боку проросійських акторів, Трамп не зможе ігнорувати настрої всередині США.

It is expected that the United States will resort to informational attacks, which may be directed against Ukraine, emphasizing the importance of not falling for manipulations and not spreading false information. This will be done to whitewash Trump's reputation before the electorate in case of failure in negotiations. In particular, it is anticipated that, over the next few weeks, the US may launch a powerful information campaign that will accuse Ukraine of numerous crimes and provocations, attempting to create an image of a country that does not deserve aid or even the right to exist. **Trump is currently a proponent of a plan aimed at ending the war, although the conditions would amount to capitulation for Ukraine.**

In such conditions, the issue of unity and support for Ukraine's internal forces is crucial for Ukrainian society, as it directly impacts the country's ability to maintain its independence and defend its territorial integrity. It is also important to emphasize that any concessions will not lead to an increase in military aid. Therefore, **the main task is to hold the defense, despite all the pressures and manipulations.**

At the same time, the appointment of retired General Keith Kellogg as U.S. President Donald Trump's Special Representative for Ukraine Affairs signals a potential new approach to resolving the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. As noted by *The Wall Street Journal*, Trump has tasked Kellogg with the mission of ending the war in Ukraine within one hundred days. However, most experts doubt that this will be feasible, particularly given the complexity of negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Kellogg, as his former colleagues point out, has military experience but lacks diplomatic expertise for such critical negotiations. This raises questions about his ability to handle the role of envoy, although his experience may be useful for Trump when evaluating the consequences of providing or withholding aid to Ukraine. However, it is emphasized that Kellogg is unlikely to be directly involved in actual diplomatic negotiations with Russia. Nevertheless, the stated plan to end the war in 100 days seems overly ambitious, and most international observers are skeptical about its realism, as it requires significant political changes and complex negotiations between key actors, including Russia.

At the same time, on March 12, 2025, the European Parliament strongly condemned any attempts to pressure Ukraine into signing a peace agreement that could effectively lead to its capitulation to Russia. In the adopted resolution, lawmakers emphasized their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and expressed protest against any pressure on the Ukrainian leadership to force it into a peace agreement that would not align with the interests of Ukraine and its European partners.⁴ The European Parliament emphasized that attempts by the U.S. administration to negotiate with Russia without the involvement of Ukraine and European states are unacceptable. This jeopardizes international security and could set a precedent for unchecked aggression. European lawmakers also noted that peace in Ukraine is only possible if real security guarantees are provided for the country, particularly through effective security mechanisms.

In addition, the resolution expresses support for the initiative to create a "coalition of the willing" that would ensure the implementation of any peace agreement and guarantee

⁴ Європарламент виступив проти примусу України до капітуляції під виглядом мирної угоди. 12.03.2025.<https://slovoproslovo.info/evroparlament-proty-kapitulyaciyi-ukrayiny>

Ukraine's security. The European Parliament also called for an increase in military and financial aid to Ukraine, the acceleration of Ukraine's EU accession process, and the use of frozen Russian assets for Ukraine's reconstruction. This resolution was supported by 442 European MEPs, indicating strong support for Ukraine among EU countries. At the same time, 98 MEPs voted against it, and 126 abstained, reflecting differing views in the European Parliament on this issue. However, overall, the majority of EU countries are committed to unwavering support for Ukraine.

According to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, peace in Ukraine must be genuine, just, and lasting, with reliable security guarantees for both Ukraine and Europe. In this context, he thanked French President Emmanuel Macron for his clear vision and efforts toward achieving peace, highlighting the importance of this process for the security of the entire world. At the same time, additional complications have arisen due to the situation in the U.S., where it was recently reported that military aid to Ukraine had been suspended, which could signal the Trump administration's intent to shift towards more active negotiations with Russia. However, given the positions of Macron and other European countries, ***Peace cannot be achieved "at any cost," especially if it means Ukraine's capitulation to Russia.***

Trump's stance on this issue still needs to be clarified, but his support for "peace negotiations" could include a desire to end the conflict, which might be perceived as pressure on Ukraine to reach terms favorable to Russia. In this context, it is crucial for Europe to continue working actively with Ukraine, ensuring its security and supporting its sovereignty on the international stage.

Thus, peace negotiations could become a complex and painful process for Ukraine, as it will be necessary to find a balance between the demands of various international players, including the U.S. and the EU, while also protecting Ukraine's interests from potential pressure that may arise amid international shifts in political stances. ***At the same time, the chaotic and emotional nature of the new U.S. leader significantly complicates the advancement of not only relations with the U.S. but also the development of a common European strategy. Therefore, it is crucial for Kyiv to engage and mobilize the most professional and expert team to be prepared for any possible developments.***



Source: Army FM

■ Changes at the front

Trend: *A strategic balance has been established at the front lines in the face of a potential ceasefire.*

Unable to continue the offensive, the enemy is attempting to regain control over the territories of Ukraine that were liberated by Ukrainian forces.

The reason is simple – the insufficient number of operational reserves to carry out significant offensive operations against Sumy, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia without relocating forces already engaged on other sectors of the front.

On the Sumy direction, there remains a minor threat of Russian offensives. The Sumy region was once one of the key directions of the Russians' advance towards Kyiv.

On the Vovchansk direction, near Vovchansk and Lytsky, there is no sharp increase in Russian offensive forces, but while there was relative calm earlier, we are now seeing four to five engagements per day.

On the Kupiansk direction, the intensity of Russian offensive actions is moderate.

On the Lyman direction, the number of Russian offensives has increased.

On the Kramatorsk direction, especially in the Toretsk area, the Russians are attempting to break through the Ukrainian defense.

On the Pokrovsk direction, over the past month, the highest number of engagements has been recorded, with up to seventy clashes per day. The Russians are attempting to break through the Novopavlivsk direction but have been unable to accomplish the task set by the Russian command, which involves reaching Konstantinopil and taking control of the M-15 highway.

On the Orikhiv and Hulyaipole direction, there have been shifts in the intensity of military operations by the Russians.

Thus, the Kremlin is trying to influence the ceasefire and negotiations. According to an ISW forecast, Russia is unlikely to achieve significant successes. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky believes that currently, Russian dictator Vladimir Putin is trying to buy time. He needs time to prepare a new spring offensive on the Sumy and Kharkiv regions.

■ *Military assistance*

Germany continues to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression. On March 17, 2025, it delivered a new package of military aid to Ukraine. This package included air defense systems, artillery ammunition, armored vehicles, drones, and specialized equipment. Specifically, Ukraine received 22 MRAP armored vehicles with mine protection, three Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft systems with spare parts and 10,000 rounds of ammunition. Ukrainian military forces also received rockets for the IRIS-T SLM air defense systems, ammunition for LEOPARD 1 tanks and MARDER infantry fighting vehicles, 5,000 155mm artillery shells, 2,000 122mm shells, and 8,000 120-mm mortar rounds.

To enhance intelligence capabilities, 50 VECTOR drones, along with spare parts, and 30 systems for detecting enemy drones were delivered. Additionally, Ukraine received 30 remotely controlled tracked machines (Gereon RCS), two mine-clearing vehicles (WISENT 1), two mine plows, and 100 portable mine-clearing systems (H-PEMBS). Separately, German partners also provided two armored vehicles for border guards, MK 556 and HK 416 assault rifles, infrared binoculars, laser rangefinders, and first aid kits.

France may provide more Mirage - 2000 fighter jets to Ukraine. The first such planes were delivered by Paris in February 2025. The French government will allocate €195 million from frozen Russian assets to Ukraine, which will be used for supplying artillery ammunition and air bombs.

The United Kingdom and the European Union are negotiating to accelerate arms supplies to Ukraine amid discussions about a potential ceasefire in the war unleashed by Russia, with additional military supplies being discussed before a broad cessation of hostilities is achieved.

Sweden has announced a new military aid package to Ukraine worth 16 billion Swedish kronor (approximately \$1.6 billion). This is the largest package Sweden has ever provided. The largest part of the package—9.2 billion kronor—will be allocated to military equipment, which Sweden will procure under the guidance of the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration. Sweden had previously announced its intention to significantly increase its support for Ukraine. In 2025, it decided to allocate more money—40 billion kronor (nearly \$4 billion)—to support Ukraine, instead of the previously planned 25 billion kronor. These funds will go towards assisting Ukraine in its war against Russian aggression.

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

Trend: *Strategic Success of Russia on the Diplomatic Front: How It Drew the US into Its Allies*

A secret document from the U.S. Department of Defense, published by The Washington Post, reveals that the United States has identified China as the primary threat to national security, particularly due to a potential conflict over Taiwan. According to the directive from

U.S. Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, the priority for the U.S. Armed Forces is to deter China and prevent it from seizing Taiwan. This will become the core goal of U.S. defense strategy.

The document includes recommendations to significantly increase the presence of U.S. troops in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly through the use of submarines, bombers, drones, and specialized units. It also suggests improving the defense of U.S. military installations and creating reserves to support long-term military presence in the region. Additionally, the document highlights that the U.S. will pressure Taiwan to substantially increase its defense spending, which is part of a broader strategy supported by the Trump administration, which demanded that Taipei spend up to 10% of its GDP on defense.

At the same time, the document acknowledges the limitations of the Pentagon's resources and personnel, which could lead to risks in other regions, such as Europe, the Middle East, and in the context of deterring Russia, North Korea, and Iran. To address this, the U.S. plans to intensify pressure on its allies to increase defense spending and actively participate in deterring these threats.

According to this strategic document, the U.S. is focusing on strengthening its defense posture in Asia and supporting its European allies in combating Russian aggression. The U.S. hopes that European countries and other allies will take on a larger share of responsibility for deterring Russia, thus providing the U.S. with more resources to confront China. Additionally, recent actions in U.S. politics suggest that **The United States is actively seeking to engage Russia in an anti-China coalition, aiming to establish an alliance with it.**

Russia, on the other hand, is actively countering Trump's ambitions. Yes, according to recent media reports, the Kremlin is testing the limits of influence that U.S. President Donald Trump can exert on Europe to make it ease sanctions against Russia. Russia has developed a strategy in which an important element is the demand for the restoration of access to the international payment system SWIFT for "Rosselkhozbank," which was disconnected from the system following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The choice of "Rosselkhozbank" is not accidental: the Kremlin wants to test whether Trump can pressure Europe into agreeing to this restoration, considering that the European Union has jurisdiction over SWIFT, whose headquarters is located in Belgium. If this initiative succeeds, the Kremlin hopes it will lead to a gradual easing of sanctions overall.

At the same time, the EU has emphasized the inadmissibility of lifting sanctions until Russian troops are fully withdrawn from Ukraine. However, European leaders continue to discuss the possibility of tightening sanctions. Meanwhile, Finnish President Alexander Stubb stated that they are working on a new package of restrictions for Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted that Russia agreed to Trump's proposal to restore the Black Sea agreement, and the issue of SWIFT is an integral part of this agreement, which has been approved by both the U.S. and Europe. However, according to him, Europeans now seem less inclined to implement this agreement. After the Russia-U.S. negotiations in Saudi Arabia, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio emphasized that some Russian demands concern sanctions that are not within the control of the U.S. but are related to the EU. He highlighted that the U.S. is studying these proposals, and soon Trump will take the next step. Political analysts believe that this process is a test for Trump, and the Kremlin wants to check how willing the American leader is to fulfill his promises and influence European countries.

John Bolton, former U.S. National Security Advisor to President Donald Trump, shared in an interview with Politico that Trump has a unique approach to international relations, viewing them through the lens of personal relationships with other leaders. He emphasized that Trump believes his good relations with Vladimir Putin are key to improving U.S.-Russian

ties. At the same time, according to Bolton, **Putin does not view Trump as a friend but rather sees him as a political prize and actively manipulates him.**⁵

Trump, according to Bolton, believes that making concessions to Putin will help achieve peace, while Putin, in turn, tries to exploit this for his own purposes. He also recalled recent statements by the U.S. president, in which he suggested that Putin might be stalling negotiations, believing that the initiative on the battlefield is on his side. Regarding Trump's relationship with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Bolton pointed out that it soured after the controversial "perfect phone call" in 2019, which led to Trump's first impeachment.

Vladimir Putin is trying to leverage his relationship with Donald Trump to reduce Russia's international isolation and restore his image on the global stage. The Kremlin leader carefully flatters Trump to avoid provocations, as Russia's economy is on the brink of collapse, and new sanctions could ultimately undermine its stability. At the same time, internal shifts within the U.S. suggest that Trump is fond of Putin's domestic policies and sees them as a beneficial option for himself.

Putin has long sought to restore Russia's status as a global superpower. His ambitions to reclaim the former influence of the Soviet Union have become a central theme of his leadership. Back in 2005, Putin declared that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical disaster of the century. These imperial ambitions became the driving force behind his aggressive foreign policy, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and involvement in the Syrian conflict in 2015. However, after a decade of pursuing these ambitions, the situation has changed: the war in Ukraine, which Russia initially planned as a swift victory, has turned into a protracted conflict, seriously undermining its reputation and resources.

⁵ Путін вважає Трампа легкою здобиччю - експерт президента США. 30.03.2025.
<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3976364-putin-vvazae-trampa-legkou-zdobiccu-ekspert-prezidenta-ssa.html>