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in the White House and the emerging end of the Transatlantic alliance

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From Europe and America to America (with Russia) against Europe? A Fascist in the White House and the emerging end of the Transatlantic alliance

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Ulf Brunnbauer presents a hot take on the second Trump presidency, which is turning away from NATO and the EU. He argues that the reason for this is not so much a geopolitically motivated realignment of US alliance policy but a fundamental ideological shift: away from democratic values and towards fascism combined with a Putin-style understanding of the world. This is an extremely dangerous development for the EU.

German abstract:

Die Regierung Trump 2.0 wendet sich von NATO und EU ab. Dahinter steckt weniger eine geopolitisch begründete Neuausrichtung der US-Bündnispolitik als vielmehr ein grundlegender ideologischer Wandel: weg von demokratischen Werten, hin zu Faschismus und einem Weltverständnis à la Putin. Für die EU eine äußerst gefährliche Entwicklung.

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White House/ Public Domain

President Donald J. Trump participates in a bilateral meeting with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin during the G20 Japan Summit Friday, June 28, 2019, in Osaka, Japan. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead) / Public Domain. [Source](#).

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In 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a widely discussed speech at the Munich Security Conference.[1] In it, he railed against the US-dominated unipolar world order and NATO's eastward expansion. He called for a multipolar world order and made it clear that he saw Russia as one of its centers of power. Many attendees at the time recognized Putin's speech as a break with Russia's previous policy toward the West, as there was no longer any mention of partnership. Still, some high-ranking German politicians even expressed understanding for Putin's position.[2] However, only a few figures in NATO and the EU understood the speech as a real wake-up call—otherwise, they would not have been so unprepared for Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, and even more so in 2022, or for Russia's hybrid war against the West. Today, we know that we should have taken Putin at his word as early as 2007.[3]

The beginning of the end of NATO?

It is hard to believe, but it is true: a United States government is openly supporting pro-Russian (and indeed anti-American) right-wing extremists in Germany.

Future historians are quite likely to see the 2025 Munich Security Conference as another turning point in the development of Europe's security architecture, marking the beginning of the end of NATO. As widely reported, the second-highest US representative, Vice President J.D. Vance, declared at the conference that the EU—not Russia or China—was a threat to democracy and security. "The threat I worry the most about vis-à-vis Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor. What I worry about is the threat from within, the retreat of Europe from some its most fundamental values, values shared with the United States of America," Vance said. At the same time, he made it clear that Europeans could no longer count on US support in defending themselves against Russia. In his depiction of the supposedly undemocratic tendencies of the EU—for instance, its efforts to combat hate speech and Russian disinformation on US-owned social media—Vance sounded much like Russian state propaganda on *Russia Today*, which paints a similarly distorted picture of the EU. This narrative is eagerly picked up by pro-Russian parties like the "Alternative for Germany" (AfD) as "proof" of the existence of a dictatorship in Germany. After Elon Musk already declared his support for the AfD, the US administration is now making no secret of whom it hopes will succeed in the upcoming Bundestag elections.[4]

It is hard to believe, but it is true: a United States government is openly supporting pro-Russian (and indeed anti-American) right-wing extremists in Germany. Besides the ideological affinity between Trump, his MAGA movement, and groups like the AfD, there can only be one reason for this: the US wants to destroy the EU—or at least help it self-destruct. The representatives of the EU and Germany looked accordingly stunned after Vance's speech.

A shattered alliance

it is not just that something in the transatlantic alliance is broken [...]. Rather, it appears that the alliance itself has shattered

That Vance (and Trump) are serious is already evident in the circumstances surrounding the “peace negotiations” for Ukraine, which were initiated by Trump without consulting the (former?) allies or Ukraine itself. After his 90-minute phone call with Putin, Trump once again expressed admiration for him and immediately conceded several bargaining positions—positions that could have been used to extract concessions from Russia, such as NATO membership for Ukraine.[5] So much for *The Art of the Deal*. Instead, Trump wants Russia to rejoin the G7. The upcoming talks at the foreign ministers’ level do not even include Ukraine, nor the EU. A “peace” agreement is being negotiated over the heads of Ukraine and the Europeans. Trump’s special envoy for Russia and Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, made it clear that the USA has no interest in involving the EU—except when it comes to footing the bill. Thus, it is not just that something in the transatlantic alliance is broken, as *Süddeutsche Zeitung*’s Hubert Wetzel put it on February 15.[6] Rather, it appears that the alliance itself has shattered.

Eighteen years after his speech in Munich, Putin seems to be achieving what he has systematically worked toward for a long time: the US abandoning Europe to fend for itself, no longer underwriting its security. Does anyone seriously believe that the United States under Trump would militarily assist a Baltic country in the event of a Russian attack, as per Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty? If an aggressor no longer has to fear this automatic response—an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all—then NATO is finished, especially given the pitiful state of the defense capabilities of most European NATO members. Since the end of the Cold War, Europe’s security situation has never been as dire as it is today, given the territorial ambitions of an imperialist, revanchist Russia and the growing influence of anti-European, pro-Russian parties within the EU—now joined by a US administration with a similar agenda. Not surprisingly, reactions from Russia to Trump’s overtures have been jubilant and self-satisfied.

Big USA learns from little Hungary

perhaps the EU simply embodies everything Trump despises: rule of law, human rights, separation of powers, free trade, and supranational cooperation

These dramatic developments should not come as a surprise. Trump made no secret of his obsessive hatred of the EU during his first term. Perhaps it is too complex for someone with notoriously low attention span and little interest in details (as we know from numerous books by former Trump

administration officials). Or perhaps the EU simply embodies everything Trump despises: rule of law, human rights, separation of powers, free trade, and supranational cooperation. Trump and his MAGA allies in Congress—notably Vice President Vance—and right-wing media echo chambers like *Fox News* have openly criticized US support for Ukraine for years, with some even expressing sympathy for Russia's stance (something not even disqualifying from becoming coordinator of the US intelligence services).

Viktor Orbán, the EU's most vocal opponent of Ukraine aid and a self-proclaimed Putin sympathizer, is hugely popular among MAGA supporters and has long undermined EU policies with his appearances in the US. Orbán's systematic dismantling of the rule of law over the years, the dismantling of democratic standards and hate propaganda against internal and external enemies in the name of Christian (and White) ultra-nationalism are seen by MAGA proponents as a role model. The big USA is thus following the example of little Hungary – Orbán's mood is correspondingly euphoric; and this also includes rejecting further support for Ukraine, as it is fighting in the name of values that Orbán and the MAGA movement have renounced. The shift in US-American Ukraine policy was therefore rather predictable.

Europe, America, Russia and China in multipolar world

it remains an embarrassment that the EU, despite its economic power, cannot adequately defend itself or its allies. The EU's economy is more than nine times the size of Russia's, and its population more than three times larger, yet its military preparedness is woefully insufficient

What makes this historical moment so threatening, however, is not merely a recalibration of US alliance policy. The United States reducing its involvement in Europe and focusing on a potential threat from China is nothing new—the Biden administration announced a similar policy— though Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine temporarily put those plans on hold. It is also legitimate for the USA to demand that its NATO partners enhance their own defense capabilities. In fact, it remains an embarrassment that the EU, despite its economic power, cannot adequately defend itself or its allies. The EU's economy is more than nine times the size of Russia's, and its population more than three times larger, yet its military preparedness is woefully insufficient. This is partly due to the growing influence of right-wing populists in Europe—who tend to be pro-Russian and supported by Moscow—resulting in voters punishing, rather than rewarding, increased defense spending and long-term security policies.

The real issue, however, is a fundamental shift in the ideological orientation of the US. Trump and the MAGA movement share far more common ground with Putin (and his ideological allies like Orbán) than with the democratic mainstream of Europe. Trump, along with his wrecking ball Elon Musk, is rapidly reshaping the United States. Less than a month after his inauguration, the country can no longer be

called a democracy. Speaker of the House Johnson recently openly acknowledged as much when he handed control over government spending to Musk, even though, according to the Constitution, this is a prerogative of Congress; there is no sign of congressional oversight of Musk's activities anyway. The separation of powers is collapsing amid relentless attacks from Trump, Musk, Vance, and others on judges who dare to rule against the administration.

From draining the swamp to flooding with shit

Trump famously employs a political strategy that his advisor Steve Bannon described as "flooding the zone with shit." The idea is to overwhelm opponents with so much chaos that they become disoriented and lose sight of the bigger picture, making it difficult to determine which particular transgression or abuse of power is the most significant. In effect, opponents drown in the mess. Sometimes, however, it is seemingly minor acts that reveal the true nature of a political regime. A week ago, Trump appointed himself chairman of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and installed one of his most bizarre supporters, former US ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell, as president of the arts center. Beyond his broader goal of subjecting all institutions to his will, this move is also part of the culture war: Trump accused the Kennedy Center of giving a platform to "anti-American" artists. From there, it is only a short step to a campaign against so-called "degenerate art," especially given the Trump administration's equally aggressive actions against independent research and its imposition of official language bans on federal agencies.

Benito Mussolini took more than two years to completely dismantle Italian democracy. At the pace Trump and Musk are moving, they will reach that goal much sooner – another sign of US-American exceptionalism.

There has long been debate in the USA over whether Trump is a fascist. Historian Timothy Snyder, known for his research on Eastern Europe, was among those who labeled Trump as such, drawing parallels to Putin. General John Kelly, Trump's longest-serving chief of staff in his first term, stated in 2024 that Trump fits the definition of a fascist. He specified that fascist meant "a far-right authoritarian, ultranationalist political ideology and movement characterized by a dictatorial leader, centralized autocracy, militarism, forcible suppression of opposition, belief in a natural social hierarchy."^[7] This definition falls in line with standard definitions of fascism. Historian Benedetta Carnaghi agreed, warning that Trump would fully embrace fascism if given the opportunity: "I believe that Trump would act as fully-fledged fascist if he could. The question is: will the American people let him do so? He has, in fact, enacted fascist-lite policies to the extent that his power allowed."^[8] So far, there is little indication that the American people or institutions will stop him. In fact, new elements are emerging that place Trump firmly in the tradition of fascist rulers: territorial expansionist ambitions (Canada, Greenland, the Panama Canal) and plans for ethnic cleansing (Gaza).

Faster than Mussolini?

Benito Mussolini took more than two years to completely dismantle Italian democracy. At the pace Trump and Musk are moving, they will reach that goal much sooner – another sign of US-American exceptionalism. The United States has always prided itself on its exceptionalism—but Philip Roth never imagined that his dystopian novel *The Plot Against America* could become reality. Anyone who still believes that the 2026 congressional elections will be free and fair or that Trump—unless biology intervenes—will leave the White House on January 20, 2029, seems to be a hopeless optimist; and we are only a month into Trump's second presidency. Whether Europe can survive four (or more) years of a fascist in the White House remains highly doubtful.

Notes

All links accessed on 18.02.2025

[1] A transcript of the speech is available here: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

[2] See for example: Hans-Jürgen Leersch, Putins Paukenschlag, *Die Welt*, 12.02.2007 or Sebastian Fischer, Putin schockt die Europäer, *Der Spiegel*, 10.02.2007.

[3] Daniel Fried, Kurt Volker: The Speech In Which Putin Told Us Who He Was, *Politico*, 18.2.2022

[4] Andrew Rawnsley: Europeans are right to be angry with Donald Trump, but they should also be furious with themselves, *The Guardian*, 16.2.2025.

[5] Simon Tisdall: Donald Trump's betrayal of Ukraine has emboldened Vladimir Putin and pulled the rug from under Nato allies, *The Guardian*, 15.2.2025.

[6] Hubert Wetzel: Antwortsuche im Zappendustern, *sueddeutsche.de*, 15.2.2025.

[7] Michael S. Schmidt: As Election Nears, Kelly Warns Trump Would Rule Like a Dictator, *New York Times*, 22.10.2024.

[8] Benedetta Carnaghi: Is Donald Trump a fascist? Here's what an expert thinks, *The Conversation*, 25.10.2025.

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