



Political and
Geostrategic
OBSERVATORY
of the United States

UKRAINE, EUROPE AND TRUMP

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PRESENTATION OF THE POLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC OBSERVATORY OF THE UNITED STATES

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During the presidential campaign when asked about Ukraine, Donald Trump would respond, somewhat vaguely, that he knew how to end the war quickly¹. Most people understood that to mean that he would simply withdraw American support for Ukraine, therefore allowing Russia to overrun that country. There is no way to know for certain what Trump will do once he becomes president, and he certainly has an unpredictable streak, but it seems likely that is precisely what will happen beginning in late January of 2025.

The concerns that many have over simply letting Putin get what he wants in Ukraine, therefore empowering him to further intervene in other countries are obvious. However, there may be a ray of political opportunity here for Europe.

Before turning to that it is important to understand something about recent American elections and the American electorate. There have been seven presidential elections this century. With the exception of 2004, the first election after the 9/11, and 2020 during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, in every presidential election this century the candidate who has campaigned on a less robust American involvement in the rest of the world has won. That is just one piece of evidence, and there are many more², that the American people are not aligned with the American foreign policy establishment's view that the answer to any crisis anywhere in the world is for the US to do something. Nobody understands that distinction, and has gotten more political mileage out of it, than the president-elect.

This raises an enormous question for Europe. If the US walks away from Ukraine, will European powers from Paris to London and Berlin allow that to happen, or will they collectively use their wealth and military might to continue to support Ukraine without the assistance from the Americans? We cannot know the answer to that question yet; and it would require an enormous contribution from European countries and European economies. However, if Europe were able to do this it would send a very clear message, not only to Moscow but to Washington as well, that Europe is not always going to be aligned with the United States, and is a political and military force with which the world must reckon. It would also demonstrate that the hub from which democracy can defend reassert itself is Europe, not Washington.

Those of us here in the US who support the Ukrainian people in their struggle against Russian aggression would be happy to see Europe help Ukraine if our own government turns away from that cause. However, this would also send an unequivocal message to Europe that they

¹ Andrew Roth, "Trump refuses to say whether he wants Ukraine to win war against Russia", *The Guardian*, September 11, 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/sep/11/us-presidential-debate-donald-trump-ukraine-war>

² Bruce Stokes, "Public Opinion: US Engagement with the World and the US Election", *GMF US*, September 19, 2024: <https://www.gmfus.org/news/public-opinion-us-engagement-world-and-us-election>

can no longer depend upon the US, regardless of who wins the 2026 midterms or the 2028 presidential election.

One of the bigger picture problems this raises for the US is that stability and dependability cannot be sometime things. Here, as is frequently the case, I am reminded of something the great Canadian Jewish poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen sang. “Everybody knows that you’ve been faithful, give or take a night or two”³. This is not a relationship advice column, but if you’ve been faithful give or take a night or two, then you have not been faithful. Similarly, if the US has been stable and dependable, give or take an administration or two, then it is no longer stable or dependable.

When the American people decided, albeit by a narrower margin than the initial coverage suggested, to return Donald Trump to the White House, they sent a message to Ukraine, Europe and, indeed the world. The US may continue to be a major power and even have the world’s biggest economy and most powerful military, but it is nonetheless withdrawing, in a very meaningful way, from the rest of the world. Observers outside of the US should also recognize that, for better or for worse, most Americans are fine with that arrangement.

The question facing Europe now is how to respond to this new world disorder, where the US will soon be entering its second decade of democratic rollback, regime crisis and having one of its major political parties substantially aligned with Moscow. Ukraine could become the first test this raises for Europe, but it will not be the last. For example, Georgia is currently in a deep political crisis as its increasingly pro-Russia governing party, the Georgian Dream, has engaged in election fraud to ensure a parliamentary majority. For decades, democratic forces in Georgia have been able to rely on support for the US, at this absolutely key moment for that country, it seems very likely those democratic forces will be abandoned by the US once Trump returns to power.

European countries find themselves facing what might be understood as a three-headed crisis in their relationship with the US. Russia remains a direct threat to much of eastern Europe and may be further emboldened if the Trump administration abandons Ukraine. Meanwhile, many European countries are facing domestic political crises of their own that are, in more than a few cases exacerbated by Moscow. Lastly, the US is no longer a dependable or stable ally for Europe and liberalism, and is increasingly likely, at least while the Trump administration is in power, to align itself with Russia. Navigating through those crises will be extremely difficult, but it is more evident than ever that the US is in no position to assist.

³ Leonard Cohen, “Everybody knows (Live in London)”, *YouTube*, March 29, 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/clip/UgkxLgB2wwi9Or2EzNKh5Jlg3YPnhczH3ilj>

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