

THE GREENLAND CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR UKRAINE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Leo Litra,
Senior Research Fellow
at the New Europe Center, Visiting Fellow at ECFR





INTERNATIONAL
RENAISSANCE
FOUNDATION



New Europe Center
Kyiv, Ukraine

The material was prepared with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation. The material reflects the position of the authors and does not necessarily coincide with the position of the International Renaissance Foundation.



INTERNATIONAL
RENAISSANCE
FOUNDATION



THE GREENLAND CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR UKRAINE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Leo Litra,
Senior Research Fellow
at the New Europe Center,
Visiting Fellow at ECFR

January, 2026

The United States' attempt to get Greenland has sent shockwaves across the transatlantic alliance, creating an unprecedented rift that threatens to unravel decades of diplomatic cooperation. This move, regardless of its final form, immediately destabilises the geopolitical landscape, directly jeopardising Ukraine's defence against Russia and forcing Europe to fundamentally reassess its security architecture and its relationship with its primary ally.

SUMMARY

The US pursuit of Greenland represents a critical inflection point, profoundly weakening transatlantic unity, inadvertently legitimising aggressive territorial claims by adversaries, and diverting crucial support from Ukraine. This rupture necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of security paradigms, compelling Europe and Ukraine to consider building a more self-reliant defence architecture. While a diplomatic resolution to the Greenland issue is preferable, the long-term implications demand a strategic pivot towards European leadership in continental security, acknowledging that the traditional guarantor role of the United States may no longer be reliable.

THE COLLAPSE OF WESTERN UNITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ADVERSARIES

The unprecedented move by the United States to acquire Greenland – whether through purchase or coercive annexation – has introduced a profound destabilising variable into an already fragile global order. While the specific mechanics of this potential acquisition remain opaque, the geopolitical shockwaves are immediate. This decision does not merely represent a bilateral dispute between Washington and Copenhagen – it signifies a potential collapse of the transatlantic unity that has defined global security for decades

The decision of the US to challenge the territorial integrity of a NATO ally directly affects the possibility of Ukraine defending against Russia, fundamentally altering the calculus of the war. Regardless of the outcome of the Greenland bid, the consequences for Ukraine, and largely for Europe, are negative, corrosive, and likely lasting.

Historically, the unification of the United States and Europe has constituted the world's most formidable geopolitical bloc. Together, NATO, the EU, and their allies command nearly 60% of global GDP and possess unmatched military capabilities. There was virtually no issue in which the combined political will of the US and the EU could be prevailed over by any rival power. Until recently, Russian aggression had been rolled back largely due to the immense sacrifice of the Ukrainian people, bolstered by the unshakeable Western solidarity. However, the lack of a single voice in the West has already caused significant disruptions in policy effectiveness against Russia. The first year of the new Trump administration has been remarkably turbulent in relations with Europe, characterised by transactional diplomacy that often treats allies as rivals.

This weakening coordination has handed Russia a golden opportunity to reclaim the diplomatic initiative, allowing Moscow to effectively deploy a "divide-and-rule" strategy that exploits the widening gap between Washington and Brussels.

Crucially, the US pursuit of Greenland inadvertently validates the Kremlin's narrative regarding the invasion of Ukraine. **By elevating the argument that a great power can annex territory for "reasons of its own security," Washington mirrors the very rationale Vladimir Putin used to justify his assault on Ukraine.** This pivot creates a dangerous moral equivalence, one that portrays Russia not as a rogue state violating international law, but as a rational actor behaving exactly as a country with military capabilities can do. It effectively neutralises the West's moral high ground. Moreover, **it gives Russia a powerful psychological boost to continue its invasion, reinforcing the belief that might makes right.** This shift creates a permissive environment for other revisionist powers as well; if the US disregards the sovereignty of an ally for security reasons, it becomes increasingly difficult to argue against China's potential ambitions toward Taiwan based on similar «essential security» claims. In this new landscape, international law and moral arguments appear to be totally disregarded.

THE DISPLACEMENT OF STRATEGIC FOCUS AND MILITARY SUPPORT

The current situation does more than just damage the basic underpinnings of the alliance – it creates a significant, tangible problem for keeping the West focused on helping Ukraine defend itself. We have already witnessed how the war in Gaza and the escalation between Israel and Iran caused the world's attention to drift away from Eastern Europe.

The issue of Greenland, however, threatens to move the focus from Ukraine more dramatically than any other conflict before it. Because this dispute strikes at the heart of NATO's internal cohesion, the political impact will be much stronger and more distracting than external crises.

Europe has been the core supporter of Ukraine for the last couple of years, intensifying its efforts significantly over the last twelve months. However, the Greenland crisis will likely force European capitals to dedicate less attention to Ukraine and more to their own immediate territorial security.

While Ukraine's defence is integral to Europe's security, the threat of an ally annexing sovereign European territory presents a security dilemma of a different order. As the Trump administration announces tariffs on European countries that support Denmark in defending principles of territorial integrity, **it is virtually impossible to envisage effective coordination on Ukraine between US and European leaders. In this context, Ukraine will need to fight to keep Europe's attention at least to the same level as now.**

These tensions – mutual tariffs, diplomatic insults, and a lack of strategic coordination – will inevitably have repercussions on the practicalities of the war effort. Just last week, President Zelenskyy appealed to Ukraine's partner countries to make new contributions to NATO's PURL initiative. This critical mechanism allows for the shipment of US weapons to Ukraine based on a payroll scheme funded by partner countries, mostly in Europe.

PURL was a successful hybrid scheme which allowed Ukraine to access specific capabilities that only the US possesses, ranging from interceptors for Patriot systems to HIMARS ammunition. However, in the current climate, the mechanism is largely doomed.

It is quite difficult to imagine that any EU country will make new financial contributions to PURL – effectively subsidising the US defence industry – at the same moment President Trump is pitching Greenland's annexation and imposing punitive tariffs on them. The distancing of Ukraine from the US supply chain did not start today – it was spotted during the Biden administration when partisan gridlock delayed support packages. But under the current administration, the speed and scale of the withdrawal were highly underestimated. In these conditions, it becomes plausible that European countries will refuse to purchase US-made weapons to support Ukraine, opting instead to invest in their own industrial bases.

The consequences for Ukraine will be deeply negative, weakening its ability to offset Russian attacks in the short to medium term.

RE-EVALUATING THE FUTURE: A SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN EUROPE WITHOUT THE US?

The current dispute between the US and the EU has far-reaching consequences for any future peace settlement between Ukraine and Russia. The US has long been labelled, for good reason, as the key actor for providing credible security guarantees to Ukraine. European leaders made repeated, strenuous efforts to anchor the Trump administration in this process, often swallowing bitter pills to do so. Accepting unfair trade deals was only one example where the EU took a step back to preserve transatlantic unity. Ukraine did the same: the deal on critical minerals and various concessions made in the negotiation process – without receiving a single reciprocal concession from the Russian side – were all designed to keep the US engaged and committed.

However, the price for US engagement is becoming unattainable for both Europe and Ukraine. Ukrainian leadership likely never envisaged a scenario where they would be forced to choose between the United States and Europe, or that their concessions would only lead to demands for further concessions to keep the US on "our side." This transactional relationship no longer serves the purpose of stopping the Russians or strengthening European security.

Ukraine is undeniably a European nation, it will side with Europe not only because the EU represents its most reliable future partners, but because Kyiv has no moral arguments to do otherwise.

Therefore, thinking about security guarantees without the United States, albeit painful and difficult to imagine, needs to be considered as the main planning scenario. After the US administration displays intentions to acquire the territory of another NATO member, there are very few reasons to believe it would be serious about honouring Article 5 or any other security promise to Ukraine – even after someone like Dimitriev will offer to the US a great deal that would allow it to earn billions in rare earth or similar.

This grim scenario must be prepared for, even if the US and the EU eventually manage to find a civilised solution over Greenland.

Ideally, tensions could be diffused if the US were to lead a NATO mission in Greenland rather than seeking ownership.

This would grant Washington control over the security situation there and provide a strong sense that US security concerns are being met within an alliance framework. **Ukraine could even be a strong contributor to such a mission, particularly regarding drone operations, where the Ukrainian military has shown exceptional skill.** But until such a compromise is reached, Europe and Ukraine must prepare to stand alone, recognising that the era of American security guarantor may be over.



New Europe Center
Kyiv, Ukraine

- [!\[\]\(ef9d0f80c5c0f7b4bed9fcc98d310922_img.jpg\) http://neweurope.org.ua/](http://neweurope.org.ua/)
- [!\[\]\(999a5e3fc9b7a6ab64b477dbcd2c0571_img.jpg\) @ info@neweurope.org.ua](mailto:info@neweurope.org.ua)
- [!\[\]\(4a22a098f67aa2577f972ec4d67f1799_img.jpg\) https://www.facebook.com/NECUkraine/](https://www.facebook.com/NECUkraine/)
- [!\[\]\(cc98cec0bccb74dd8513e7d4ab71b1e8_img.jpg\) https://twitter.com/NEC_Ukraine](https://twitter.com/NEC_Ukraine)