



**America Votes 2024:
The Transatlantic Impact
1.11.2024 | Paper No. 1**

G | M | F
Geostrategy

**Consequences of the US 2024 Elections
for European Allies: Three Scenarios**
Rachel Tausendfreund

Consequences of the US 2024 Elections for European Allies: Three Scenarios

By Rachel Tausendfreund | 1.11.24

January is a time for fresh starts, but this new year brings the official start of an election year in the United States that is decidedly not fresh. While voting in the Republican primary battle among seven candidates will not start until January 15 in Iowa, today's odds—premature as they undoubtedly are—currently point toward a rematch between President Joseph R. Biden and former president Donald J. Trump. The matchup may not be novel, but it is critically consequential for many of the issues most important to Washington's European allies.

Support for NATO: Potential Shift Magnitude 8/10

The United States has been the indispensable member of NATO since the alliance's founding, but this standing is up for debate in the 2024 election. Biden's support for NATO and a leading US role in it is unquestioned. "Reinvigorating" key US alliances has been a central goal of the Biden administration, as evidenced by its leadership in NATO allies' response to Russia's war in Ukraine. A second term should be roughly consistent in terms of commitment to NATO, though calls for European allies to match and exceed 2% targets, and generally carry a greater share of the alliance's burden, will also be prominent.

Trump, in contrast, established his disregard for NATO during his presidency and has since floated the idea of withdrawing from the alliance. Congress has taken these comments seriously enough to introduce legislation that prevents any president from withdrawing from NATO without Senate approval or an act of Congress. The measure was included in the [National Defense Authorization Act](#) and approved by the Senate and House of Representatives with a strong bipartisan majority in mid-December. While Trump will not have the option of withdrawing from NATO, he can be expected to neglect and undermine the alliance, preferring bilateral and transactional cooperation. Trump can also be expected to pressure European allies to increase their military spending while advocating for decreased US engagement in NATO.

Of the other GOP presidential contenders, Vivek Ramaswamy is closest to Trump on NATO. He has also said that withdrawing from NATO is a "[reasonable idea](#)". Ron DeSantis is a NATO supporter, but a strong critic of European under-spending. Nikki Haley, in contrast, resembles the pre-2016 GOP as a supporter of US global leadership.

In one sentence: The election outcome has a strong impact on the United States' NATO commitment, but with varying potential outcomes among the GOP candidates.

Military Support for Ukraine: Potential Shift Magnitude 10/10

Recent developments have shown that the president's ability to assure continued military support for Ukraine is limited. The outcome of the congressional elections will therefore be just as crucial on this issue. Considering all the variables, it appears unlikely that levels of financial support in 2025 will equal those seen in the war's first 14 months. It is possible that support will be cut dramatically.

The Biden administration has shown consistent commitment to and leadership on Ukraine support (especially military, but also humanitarian). The president has pledged to support Ukraine for “as long as it takes”, and recently has been in a battle with Congress over an additional \$61 billion in supplemental aid. On December 12th, the [administration announced the 53rd tranche](#) of security assistance to Ukraine since August 2021, a \$200 million package using previously authorized funds. A second Biden administration will offer continued military support to Ukraine and push for high levels of aid, especially if Ukrainian forces seem to be gaining ground. But the makeup of Congress will determine what gets approved. Only with a Democratic majority in the House is continued support assured. However, even Democratic support will taper with time, especially if the outlook for Ukraine’s forces darkens.

A Trump victory would likely end White House support for Ukraine. Trump has claimed that he would be able to finesse a settlement to the war [“in one day. It’ll take 24 hours.”](#) He has also complained that Biden is putting [“Ukraine first”](#). Though in Trump’s first term his follow-through often did not match his promises, the sentiment behind the claims remained consistent. Given this and Trump’s complicated history with Russian President Vladimir Putin, there is every reason to expect that Trump would end US support for Ukraine and push for a quick settlement, with little concern over Ukrainian territorial losses.

The picture is mixed with the other leading GOP candidates. Nikki Haley is the outlier. She is a strong supporter of Ukraine and views the war as a battle to contain rogue states. A Haley White House would resemble the Biden Administration’s on Ukraine. Vivek Ramaswamy’s position matches Trump’s. He has argued that he would end all spending on Ukraine and that the United States must force [“major concessions”](#) from Ukraine in order to end the war quickly. Ron DeSantis has been less definitive. He has said that NATO membership for Ukraine is not in the United States’ interest, as it only adds [“more obligations to us”](#). Although he has not clearly advocated for ending support, he has stated that the Ukraine war is not a vital US interest. “It is for Europe”, he argued; “That is why Europe should be paying far more than we are, or equal.” Thus, a GOP victory in November of 2024 of any candidate other than Nikki Haley would leave Europe either largely or completely alone in supporting Ukraine’s defense and reconstruction.

In one sentence: Even with a second Biden term, Europeans will be expected to carry more of the Ukraine burden, while a Trump or Ramaswamy victory would leave Europe and Ukraine on their own.

US-Türkiye Relations and Support for Kurdish Armed Factions in Syria: Potential Shift Magnitude 5/10

Relations between Ankara and Washington have been tense and often fractious at least since the 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye. Washington’s support for, and reliance on, the Kurdish militia in Syria has been a central point of friction.

The Biden administration took a cool approach to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government until it became clear that securing Ankara’s support for Sweden’s NATO bid required some public wooing and high-profile deals. Although Erdoğan’s positive relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin has been helpful—for example, in negotiating the Ukraine grain deal—it does not foster warm relations with the Biden team. Neither do Erdoğan’s posturing in the region or his anti-democratic tendencies. Yet on the contentious issue of Kurdish areas in northern Syria, there has been something of a begrudging truce. A second Biden term would likely continue this pragmatic compromise, whereby Türkiye continues to target Kurdish forces near the Turkish border in Syria, but [abides by the 2019 agreement](#) that delineates Kurdish and Turkish territorial zones, while the Biden administration continues to support and work with Syrian Kurds but agrees to ignore most of Türkiye’s continued operations in Kurdish areas of northern

Syria. Although the Biden administration [understands](#) Ankara's displeasure with US support for Syrian Kurds—Türkiye claims they have ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which both Washington and Ankara consider a terrorist organization—it will not abandon the Syrian Kurds without a broad solution for Syria. Conflicts over weapons deals are unlikely to disappear. The recent deal to get Ankara the F-16 fighter jets it has been wanting for years in return for approval of Sweden's NATO membership should be considered an exception to the rule.

The Trump-Erdoğan relationship was warmer, and was at the root of one of the biggest congressional revolts of Trump's first term. Trump's rapport with Erdoğan led him to suddenly withdraw US Special Forces supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces, the United States' Kurdish partner in the fight against ISIS, and effectively greenlight a Turkish offensive in northern Syria. Congress condemned the move with a strong bipartisan supermajority of 354 to 60, leading the Trump administration to adjust course and negotiate limits to the operation in Syria. If Trump returns to the White House, it will likely be with a Congress less interested in opposing his foreign policy, leaving Erdoğan more room for maneuver against Syrian Kurds.

Ramaswamy would pursue a course similar to Trump's on this issue, with instincts toward disentanglement, whereas Haley's posture would resemble Biden's. In response to Trump's sudden troop withdrawal in 2019, [Haley tweeted](#): "We must always have the backs of our allies, if we expect them to have our back. The Kurds were instrumental in our successful fight against ISIS in Syria. Leaving them to die is a big mistake. #TurkeyIsNotOurFriend." DeSantis, who served with the US military in Iraq, has voiced somewhat contradictory positions. In October 2019 he said the United States should "[stand by the Kurds](#)". However, he also [questions US troop deployments in the region](#) and has [opposed arming Syrian rebels](#). It is thus unclear whether DeSantis would be more like Trump or Biden in his posture on the Turkish-Kurdish question.

In one sentence: A Trump or Ramaswamy presidency would bring a significant shift in US posture toward Ankara and Syrian Kurdish militias, while under Biden, Haley, or DeSantis, more of the same tense instability seems likely.

In sum, in two out of three cases, Americans' decision at the ballot box in 2024 will have momentous consequences for NATO allies, while the significance for US-Turkish relations are a bit foggier. There will be more to come in our coverage of the foreign policy implications of the 2024 US elections, including more of the allies' top issues, from economic competition to EU integration and conflict in the Middle East.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in GMF publications and commentary are the views of the author(s) alone.

As a non-partisan and independent research institution, The German Marshall Fund of the United States is committed to research integrity and transparency.

About the Author

Rachel Tausendfreund is a senior fellow with GMF's geostrategy team. From 2015 to 2022 she was GMF's editorial director, overseeing the organization's research output and publication planning. She co-created GMF's Out of Order podcast and is the co-host of Transatlantic Takeaways, a podcast produced in cooperation with Common Ground Berlin.

About GMF

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is a non-partisan policy organization committed to the idea that the United States and Europe are stronger together. GMF champions the principles of democracy, human rights, and international cooperation, which have served as the bedrock of peace and prosperity since the end of the Second World War, but are under increasing strain. GMF works on issues critical to transatlantic interests in the 21st century, including the future of democracy, security and defense, geopolitics and the rise of China, and technology and innovation. By drawing on and fostering a community of people with diverse life experiences and political perspectives, GMF pursues its mission by driving the policy debate through cutting-edge analysis and convening, fortifying civil society, and cultivating the next generation of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a tribute to the Marshall Plan, GMF is headquartered in Washington, DC, with offices in Berlin, Brussels, Ankara, Belgrade, Bucharest, Paris, and Warsaw.

Ankara • Belgrade • Berlin • Brussels • Bucharest

Paris • Warsaw • Washington, DC

gmfus.org