

Report



Niklas Ebert and Claudia Major (eds):

Coalition of the Willing

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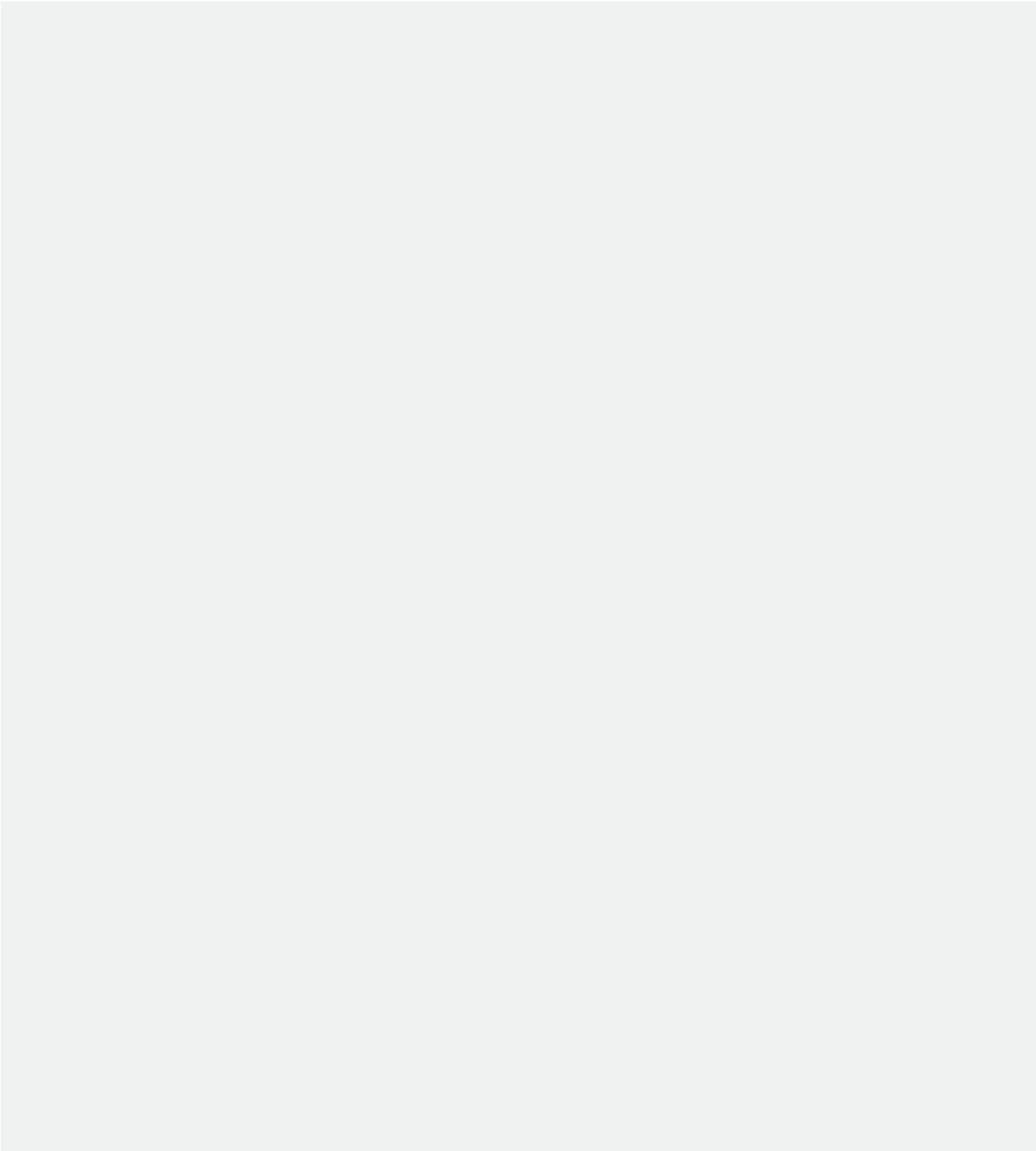


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A Coalition of the Willing for Ukraine: Europe tries to return to the negotiations table.

By Niklas Ebert and Claudia Major

The new buzzword in European defense is the “coalition of the willing”. Proposed by France and the United Kingdom in February 2025, the initiative is meant to support Ukraine’s sovereignty by upholding a ceasefire in the country and by deterring Russia once the fighting has stopped. So far, however, there is neither a ceasefire nor has Russia signaled acceptance for Western troops in Ukraine. The Europeans have started military planning although pledges remain limited. But there is much discussion about Europe’s taking responsibility for Ukraine, especially since the second Donald Trump administration appears to be redefining its commitment to European security and supporting an end to the war largely on Russia’s terms. The discrepancy between rhetoric and action puts Ukraine’s and Europe’s security, and the latter’s credibility, at risk.

To better understand the gap, GMF experts assessed the different national perspectives across North America and Europe (including Ukraine) on the value and probability of a coalition of the willing for Ukraine and potential national contributions to it. Their analyses provide an overview of the variety of European positions and explore the likeliness of the coalition’s success.

Each expert was given three sets of questions to guide their analysis:

- Does the country’s government support the idea of a coalition of the willing in Ukraine? Is there a national consensus?
- What tasks should this coalition have?
- Is the country willing to participate or contribute in another way? Why?

The experts analyze the thinking in their chosen countries and offer no personal opinions. The analyses are based on public statements and confidential interviews.

Key Parameters of the Coalition of the Willing

Until now, none of the approaches to convince Russia to end the war has succeeded. The Kremlin has rejected the proposal for a 30-day full ceasefire that Ukraine, under US pressure, agreed to in March 2025. Russia instead proposed a limited 72-hour ceasefire for May 8-10, when President Vladimir Putin hosted international leaders in Moscow to celebrate his country’s World War II victory. He showed no inclination to extend the ceasefire beyond the three days. Trump, on May 8, called for a longer-term ceasefire that would precede peace negotiations, thereby adopting a sequence that Ukraine and Europeans had consistently supported and Russia rejected. Two days later, French President Emmanuel Macron, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, during their joint visit to Kyiv, [proposed](#) a 30-day ceasefire, which Trump also supported. In unusual (and eventually short-lived) unanimity, they threatened to jointly increase pressure on Russia if Putin rejected the idea. He did but called for negotiations to start directly without an immediate stop to the fighting,

thereby reversing the sequence.

There is currently no evidence that Russia wants to end the fighting without a victory. Putin pretends to be open to talks but seems to consider them another way to reach his war goals. The Kremlin pays lip service to the need for negotiations, but its preconditions remain tantamount to Ukraine's capitulation.

Despite Moscow's lack of interest, planning for a potential ceasefire continues. In fact, upholding a ceasefire and deterring further Russian aggression will be paramount to ensure Ukraine's (and Europe's) security if the war were to stop. As long as Moscow maintains its goals, rejects an independent Ukraine, and seeks to change Europe's security order—and as long as it possesses the military and non-military means to pursue these goals—Ukraine's and Europe's security remain under threat. Credible deterrence and defense are consequently key to Ukraine's survival (and Europe's security) after a ceasefire. Kyiv is unlikely to accept a deal without such reassurance.

The Trump administration clearly stated that it sees the task of upholding a ceasefire as a European responsibility. The president's announcement in February 2025 of direct negotiations with Russia (without consulting Ukrainians or other Europeans), and the hostile transatlantic atmosphere at that month's Munich Security Conference (MSC) and thereafter, convinced Europeans that they urgently needed to develop their own proposals if they were to play a role. Macron [hosted in Paris a crisis meeting](#) of leaders immediately after the MSC, on February 17.

Subsequently, European states, led by France and the United Kingdom, have met regularly to agree a European response. Their deliberations resulted in a coalition of the willing, a group of countries that meets frequently in Paris, London, and virtually, and aims to define how Europe can support Ukraine and restore the continent's role in negotiations ([see chronology on p. 9](#)). Some meetings have included [more than 33 delegations](#), including those from Ukraine, NATO, and the EU, with France and the United Kingdom leading the talks. Negotiations among political leaders have been complemented by meetings of their military counterparts and a trip by the French and British defense chiefs to Ukraine to advance military planning. The United States seems to approve the concept and planning so far.

Europeans want to demonstrate to the United States, Ukraine, and Russia that they are willing to stand up for their own security. By showing such willingness and producing tangible results, they hope to be at the negotiation table and convince Washington to support their efforts through a US "backstop".

Questions Remain

Despite many meetings, a coalition of the willing's task remains murky. This is also because Russia has so far refused any idea of Western troops being present in Ukraine as part of a potential ceasefire. For Starmer, the coalition would be "[ready to operationalize a peace deal whenever its precise shape turns out to be](#)". For the French and British defense ministers, Sébastien Lecornu and John Healey, the objective is "[to reassure, support and protect Ukraine to ensure that any peace settlement secures against the risk of future Russian aggression](#)". [For security reasons, no one will outline details.](#)

There seems to be agreement on three broad axes of support that can take place independently from each other. First is the regeneration and strengthening of the Ukrainian armed forces to increase their capacity to defend themselves (mainly through equipment, training, and advice). The second is investment in the Ukrainian defense industry and industrial cooperation. The third is a potential Western presence in Ukraine. While the first two are already underway and largely uncontroversial, the third raises the most attention and creates confusion. There seems to be agreement that potential deployments would not to be stationed on the Russian border but in western Ukraine, behind a potential ceasefire line and a demilitarized zone that Ukrainian forces would oversee. Coalition forces would guard Ukrainian strategic locations and critical infrastructure, such as cities, ports, airports, and power plants. They would also create safe zones and act as a deterrent against Russia.

The concept has evolved from a primarily land-focused approach into a multi-domain operation that includes air and sea. But force numbers remain undetermined. Various [models have been discussed](#), ranging from 20,000 to 150,000 personnel. Current planning aims toward the lower end, considering what Europe has, not what Ukraine needs.

The coalition of the willing is trying to make the best out of its limited resources. Politically, it is choosing a flexible format outside NATO and the EU so that only truly willing actors are included. Militarily, it is proposing a sui generis model that builds on limited capabilities that aim to strengthen Ukraine's armed forces and defense industry, and focuses on small deployments in western Ukraine with air and maritime elements, all supported from NATO territories.

Key Results of Country Reports

The analysis of one EU and ten national analyses finds:

1. **Ukraine's survival is crucial.** All national reports recognize that support for the country is crucial and that its security is interlinked with that of Europe. The Baltic states, for example, view ["a sustainable peace in Ukraine as the best path to keeping \[themselves\] safe"](#).
2. **A US backstop is key.** Most countries insist that US military support is critical for the coalition's success despite signals from Washington that it is unlikely to provide it. The United States has needed military capabilities that Europeans lack (e.g., air and missile defense; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); deep precision strike capability, and strategic airlift). Europeans would also prefer to have US assurance in case of military escalation. Several countries see such support as a prerequisite for their participation. Finland has stated that the ["US must be involved somehow"](#).
3. **The coalition's task remains vague.** Ambiguity surrounds the coalition's actual remit. Given that a reliable ceasefire does not seem likely in the short-term, and that Russia has so far rejected any Western presence, several participating countries seem to relish this opacity as an opportunity to avoid taking a position on this key aspect.

- 4. National and NATO defense remain priorities.** Most countries included in this study are reluctant to contribute troops, fearing it would come at the expense of their own security. Most also have committed almost all their armed forces to NATO planning. These countries would need to reassign troops to Ukraine, thereby potentially weakening national and NATO defense plans.

Unanimity on supporting Ukraine, therefore, accompanies a reluctance by many to committing troops. They prefer instead to contribute via other means, such as training or financial support, focusing on the first two axes of coalition activity. Most states do not see themselves as having the capacity to send troops, others don't have the permissive political environment (such as elections complicating the public debate). Still others insist on a US backstop as precondition for any deployment.

When US President Joe Biden was in the Oval Office, European governments were willing to accept gaps in their own defenses, such as those following Poland and the Baltic countries' using their own military stockpiles to supply Ukraine. They felt confident in the US commitment to their security. But doubts now swirl around the current US administration, with fears that it may pressure Ukraine into a de facto capitulation and that it might not defend Europe. That makes Europeans particularly reluctant to put their national or NATO defenses at risk. European allies have locked the majority of their forces into NATO's defense planning, which would have to be revised to accommodate a shift of forces to Ukraine. NATO allies would thereby consciously weaken the protection of their own territory and take risks to secure a non-NATO state (Ukraine). Such a weakened posture, the argument goes, could entice Russia to test, on NATO's eastern flank for example, the alliance's resolve. Exposed allies (e.g., Finland), despite being strong supporters of Ukraine, are thus less willing to send their troops or support other deployments at the expense of existing commitments.

A US backstop is, therefore, a prerequisite for many European countries' participation in a Ukraine mission. Franco-British steering of a coalition may be an encouraging display of European leadership, but for many it is insufficient on its own to run a military operation.

The Dilemma

This leaves most countries examined in this study politically engaged but militarily hesitant. They are committed on the first two axes of support (regeneration of the Ukrainian armed forces and industrial cooperation) but are reluctant to provide a military presence in Ukraine beyond training activities. Most Europeans believe themselves unable to simultaneously deter Russia, defend NATO territory, and secure Ukraine, at least in their current posture. Their military contribution to a coalition, accordingly, must be considered carefully. Failure in one of the three aforementioned defense tasks could increase the likelihood of another war in Europe, one that Europeans might need to fight with less, if any, US assistance.

All three European defense tasks, then, must be dealt with comprehensively to ensure success and prevent the Kremlin from undertaking any reckless maneuver. Inadequate Western efforts to uphold any ceasefire in Ukraine could invite Russia to test Western resolve and expose the West's weakness. Providing too few troops, or tripwire forces without credible reinforcements, would amount to a bluff that could invite Russia to test the waters. A "bluff and pray" approach that relies on the hope that the Kremlin will not test the West's readiness to support Ukraine could increase the likelihood of a Russian probe. The same is true if ensuring Ukraine's security involves a

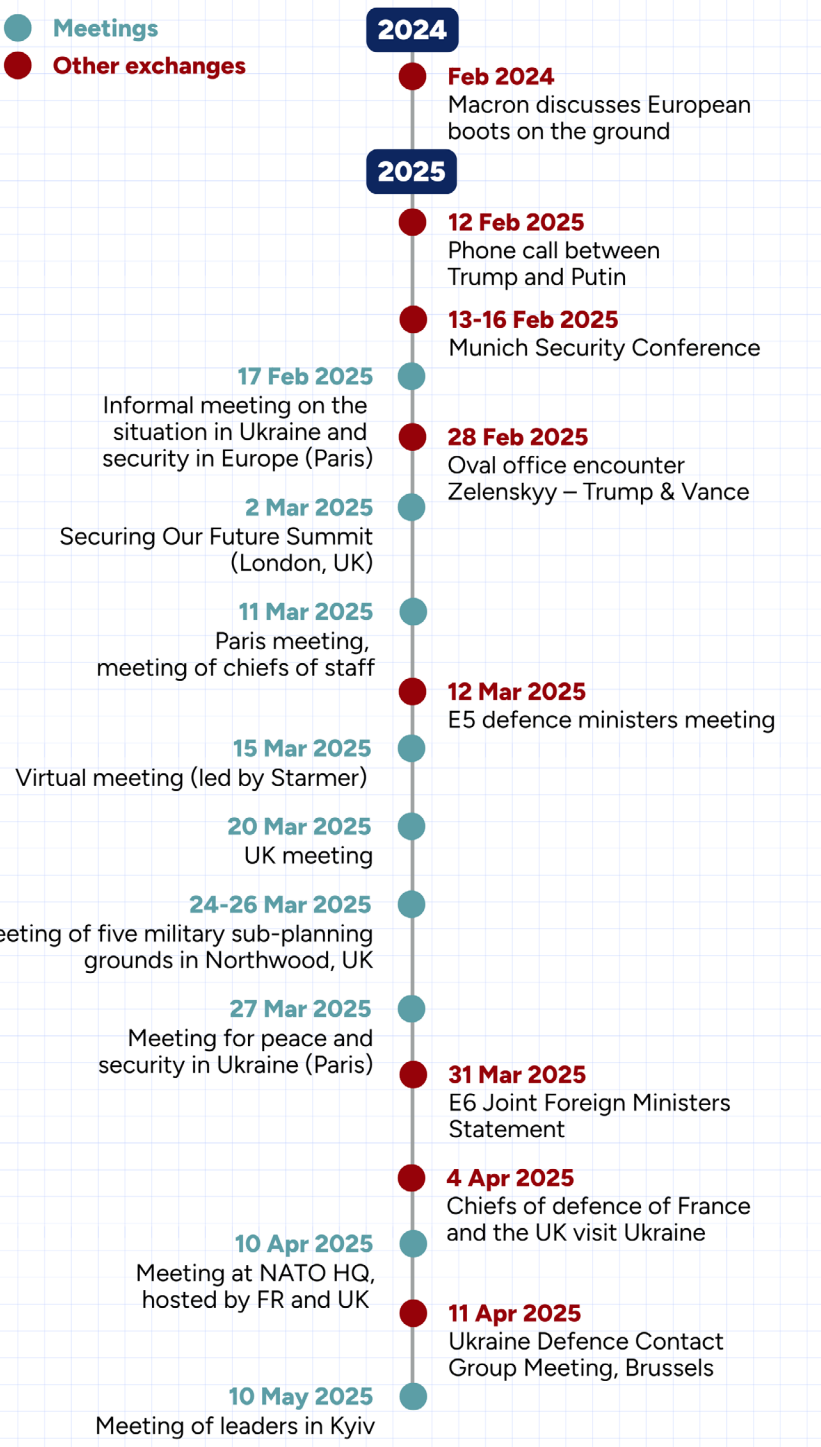
large number of Western troops in Ukraine at the expense of the defense of NATO territory.

If Russia were to attack again, Europeans wonder whether the United States would really stay out of the conflict. A scenario in which Russia attacks while Washington stands by seems hard to imagine, even under Trump. But if it were to happen, Europeans would be at risk, and NATO would have lost its credibility. The US role is, therefore, decisive, and greater American support could unlock European contributions. US support thus substantially increases the likelihood and credibility of any Western commitment.

Regarding Ukraine, any coalition must clearly show that it can and will act to secure the country and ensure its sovereignty, even if a refusal to become directly involved in the conflict has been the Western approach since 2022 and even if NATO membership is currently off the table (despite the promises allies made at recent NATO summits). A coalition must also show credibility given that it will potentially operate in a limited geographical area. Could Western air defenses in Lviv deter Russia from bombarding Kharkiv? Could such a limited deployment lead to a de facto dismemberment of Ukraine, separating the country into a safe and protected zone in the south and west, leaving the north and east within Russia's reach and at risk? Would the population in those threatened areas leave to reach safer regions, thereby eventually fulfilling Russian goals?

The coalition of the willing has, for now, attempted to serve political purposes. It has meant to show Washington that Europe is stepping up and aims to be part of the negotiations, to Ukraine that it can rely on European support, and to Moscow that Europe stands with Ukraine even if the White House is flirting with the Kremlin. It has made progress on the first two axes, but the coalition still lacks the necessary military means for a credible deterrence force. Europeans want to be willing, but in practice they are hardly capable. Meanwhile, instability in Ukraine could create new opportunities for Russian aggression in Europe. This is the dilemma that Europeans have yet to solve. They are trapped between rhetorical commitment and a reluctance to tangibly engage. Without US support, or a major crisis, a coalition force is unlikely to deploy.

THE COALITION OF THE WILLING



The Baltic Countries: Keen to Participate, but Worried About Their Own Security

By Kristine Berzina

The three Baltic countries—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—want an ambitious coalition that would meaningfully aid Ukraine’s future security. The region views sustainable peace in Ukraine as the best path to keeping itself safe. The Balts feel they have to practice what they preach: they cannot just call for support for Ukraine, they have to do it themselves. For the Balts, participating in European efforts to improve Ukraine’s future security is a priority. The three countries were excluded from the first two coalition conversations led by French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Society in the region widely perceived the omission as an insult. The Balts do not want to become afterthoughts in the development of European security mechanisms, and reporting out of a recent summit suggests that they [are willing to commit troops](#) to the coalition.

Full details about the nature of commitments are not public, and there is barely any public debate on the matter. Government officials have been hesitant to define how the Balts will contribute to the coalition because of questions about how many troops to commit, how not to weaken deterrence in the Baltics, and how to get the United States to offer security support.

The Baltic countries must determine the number of troops they can spare without hurting their own defenses. The standing armies in the Baltics are tiny compared to Ukraine’s own forces, and leaders [feel](#) they cannot create vulnerabilities on their own borders with Russia. Balts also worry that a coalition could pull troops out of NATO defense planning and more precisely from the forward-deployed NATO forces in their region. The United Kingdom is leading NATO’s brigade in Estonia and has [reduced its troop presence](#) there in recent years. Some Estonian and British analysts [fear](#) that London’s commitments to a reassurance force for Ukraine would weaken NATO missions. UK Defense Minister John Healey [assured](#) Estonians that this will not happen.

Details on precise contributions are still developing. Latvian Defense Minister Andris Sprūds [suggested](#) training Ukrainian troops as part of Latvia’s plan, and he linked potential troop contribution numbers to Latvia’s ability to protect its border and to the nature of the ceasefire that is negotiated. The Latvian [parliament](#) expressed support for a peace-keeping force earlier in the year, but it suggested caveats to limit impacts on territorial defense.

Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur [stated](#) that his country is still planning its contributions and has not announced what they would entail, but like his neighbor, he emphasized the need to avoid weakening NATO defenses and to know the terms of the ceasefire. Unlike in Latvia, only [one of four](#) Estonian opposition parties supports sending troops to Ukraine over concerns about Estonia’s own defense.

Lithuania has not yet announced the tasks or contributions it foresees. Defense Minister Dovilė Šakalienė [committed to her country’s joining the coalition](#) and has [pressed](#) the need for US participation: “For the US to actually participate in this, they need to see that we are doing a lot.” This echoes the remarks of Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, who has [called](#) a reassurance force “a necessity,” but pushed for US involvement.

As details become firm in the coming weeks, it is likely that Baltic contributions will reflect the region’s deep commitment to Ukraine and desire for an ambitious approach to European security. The Balts are among the most forward-leaning of Ukraine’s partners, but not so forward that they hurt their own defenses.

Canada: Willing But Constrained

By Sophie Arts

As the United States threatens to reduce its transatlantic engagement, Europeans and Ukrainians have high hopes for Canada. The election victory of Prime Minister Mark Carney and his Liberal Party, which is projected to fall just a few seats short of a parliamentary majority, heralds a potential deepening of Canada's transatlantic ties.

US tariffs and President Donald Trump's [threats to make Canada the 51st state](#), both resoundingly rejected by a vast majority of Canadians, significantly impacted the vote. The resulting calls for bolstering sovereignty and decoupling from Ottawa's most important economic and defense partner grew across society and the party spectrum. These developments shattered the prospects of victory for Conservative Pierre Poilievre, a small-government advocate, whose policies and rhetoric led to [unfavorable comparisons with Trump and the MAGA movement](#). The Liberals benefited from this. They had been bracing for a historic defeat before former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, [facing the lowest approval ratings](#) of his tenure, announced his resignation.

Carney is expected to continue Trudeau's strong backing for Ukraine, with broad support from the public, including the world's second-largest Ukrainian diaspora. The recently published [Liberal Party platform](#) states that "If the United States no longer wants to lead [on the issue], Canada will", including by seizing "Russian sovereign assets ... to fund Ukraine's reconstruction; and, if needed, build on [Canada's] peacekeeping heritage and step up to guarantee Ukraine's security".

In a March poll, [60% of Canadians supported sending "peacekeepers"](#) if a ceasefire is reached, with 81% of Liberal and 42% of Conservative Party supporters in favor. [In a recent election debate](#), Carney noted that "in [his] first month as prime minister", Canada had "joined the coalition of the willing to support Ukraine as the US stepped back". [European leaders](#) have lauded Ottawa's "active role" in the grouping. While the details of the coalition's mandate still need to be worked out, Canada will likely follow the United Kingdom and France's lead in sending forces if a ceasefire is reached. As the former governor of the Bank of England, Carney has a deep connection to Britain. Significantly, he [made his first official visits](#) as prime minister to London and Paris, instead of Washington. His decision to do so reflects his conception of Canada's role in a shifting global order.

Committing a credible Canadian force to Ukraine will be challenging. Canada's armed forces [face personnel](#) and [equipment shortages](#), and the country will need to double its defense spending to hit—by 2032—the NATO [goal](#) of 2% of GDP for such expenditures, not accounting for higher targets pushed by the US administration. Carney [has promised an "unprecedented acceleration of investment" in line with growing popular support](#), but he will need to balance domestic defense needs (including in the [Arctic](#)) with European commitments and a potential recession at home.

It will take time for investments to translate into tangible assets. In the meantime, Canada will have to rely on its limited [existing expeditionary forces](#) and capabilities. Ottawa is [scaling up its presence in Latvia](#), where it heads NATO's multinational battle group, to 2,200 troops by 2026. If the United States reduces its European commitments, the Baltic states will need all the support they can get to deter Russia.

With this in mind, additional Canadian contributions to Europe and Ukraine would likely start out modest and include analytical support and intelligence-sharing. At a minimum, they [could initially draw on the 400 Canadian troops](#) already on the ground training Ukrainian forces and then gradually create a bigger force that includes civil personnel.

European Union: Unable and Unfit

By Gesine Weber

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth [stressed at the February 2025](#) Ramstein Coalition Meeting that upholding a ceasefire in Ukraine would be a European task. Interestingly, however, EU leaders, although adamant about the alliance's [geopolitical aspirations](#), have not actively promoted an EU role in this. Positions have changed over time: High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Kaja Kallas warned in February 2025 that the deployment of European troops to Ukraine would mean falling into a "Russian trap". Then in April she mentioned that EU member states [were discussing](#) how the mandate of the EU training mission to Ukraine could be adapted to contribute to the Coalition of the Willing. Remarkably, the EU leadership has attended the state leaders' meetings, organized by France and the United Kingdom, that aim to establish a Coalition of the Willing outside the EU. Even so, any contribution other than training within the EU framework is highly unlikely, for both military and political reasons.

In reality, member states preferred launching a coalition of the willing outside the EU because it allowed them to circumvent the Hungarian veto on EU support for Ukraine, include non-EU states such as the United Kingdom, and avoid the often slow and cumbersome EU processes. Forming this coalition outside EU structures was thus more efficient. To launch it under the EU's article 44 TEU, which allows the Council to delegate tasks to a subgroup of member states, the Council would need to agree unanimously, meaning that all member states need to at least politically endorse a possible action. Besides Hungary, which has blocked decisions in past, some key EU member states, including [Italy](#), have expressed reservations toward or openly opposed the deployment of European "boots on the ground" to Ukraine, even without their direct involvement.

In fact, there is little added value in organizing such a coalition within EU structures: the EU has neither the planning and command structures, nor the necessary military capabilities (from intelligence to air and missile defense). Lastly, the United Kingdom, with its considerable capabilities, is not an EU member state, but a contribution from London will greatly benefit the European effort. By leading the Coalition of the Willing together with France, London has also succeeded in revitalizing its relationship with the EU. This intergovernmental format allows London to show—in a flexible and agile way—its value for Europe's security. It also encourages trust in the formal EU-UK security pact that is likely to be signed in May 2025.

The extent to which the EU could contribute to the Coalition of the Willing [depends on the mandate of a potential "reassurance force"](#), but ensuring complementarity and cooperation with the EU training mission can be a key contribution. More generally, the current discussion confirms the division of responsibilities between the EU and individual European states: While the EU can support Ukraine with financial tools or crisis management, ambitious military initiatives must be driven by national capitals—and implemented outside the EU's institutional framework.

Finland: Support From a Front-Line Nation

By Frida Rintakumpu

Finland supports the Franco-British-led Coalition of the Willing as a way to strengthen European backing for Ukraine. Yet, as a front-line state, Finland supports Ukraine's security arrangements in line with its own security interests. Finland has ruled out sending troops to Ukraine but has expressed willingness to contribute in other ways.

In the early stages of the coalition planning, Finland has emphasized [strengthening European support for Kyiv](#) to fortify its negotiation position for future peace talks—above all by meeting the [urgent need to bolster](#) Ukraine's armed forces. Finland's President Alexander Stubb has urged countries to put "[maximum pressure on Russia](#)" through sanctions and freezing of assets, a message that he also delivered in a March [meeting with US President Donald Trump](#) on behalf of the coalition. Accordingly, Finland has [announced](#) a memorandum of understanding with Ukraine to deepen defense cooperation, initiated a program with Kyiv to procure new defense materiel from the Finnish defense industry, and continued sending arms assistance packages to Ukraine.

In the military realm, Finland has [ruled out](#) deploying peacekeeping troops to Ukraine. Prime Minister Petteri Orpo has said that the decision refers primarily to potential [forces at the contact line](#). He [explained](#) the decision in terms of Finland's need to defend its own borders, and of the escalation potential if the Finnish troops deployed found themselves at risk of direct military confrontation with Russian forces. Similarly, Minister of Defense Antti Häkkinen has stated that Finland's [first priority](#) is to defend its 1,340 km (830 mi) border with Russia.

Nevertheless, Finnish leaders [assert](#) that they are open to supporting the coalition in other ways. While Finland has not yet officially announced the specifics, President Stubb has provided some indication that Finnish contributions, based outside of Ukraine, could [be related to intelligence, training, airspace, or the navy](#). The type and level of Finnish participation will depend on the [location and depth](#) of the potential European operation. Another pending question is the level of the US involvement, with Helsinki underlining that the United States "[must be involved somehow](#)". Finland, which has [built heavily](#) on its alliance relationship with the United States since joining NATO, is likely to see Washington's support as decisive when considering how it will participate.

President Stubb has emphasized that the [process involved](#) in achieving peace in Ukraine will be lengthy, and urged leaders [to be more specific](#) in their objectives. He has highlighted the differences between the ceasefire stage, which is still a state of war and entails monitoring a line of contact, and the peace agreement stage, which may eventually involve internationally mandated crisis-management troops. By making this distinction, he differentiates between various capability contributing phases, [leaving the door open](#) for wider Finnish participation at later stages.

The Finnish public is very supportive of assistance for Ukraine. Since February 2022 Helsinki has allocated [3.2 billion](#) euros in aid, making Finland [the fifth-largest contributor](#) as a proportion of GDP. According to a December 2024 poll, [more than 80%](#) of the population supports either maintaining or increasing financial and military assistance to Ukraine, and [85%](#) agreed that Finland and the EU should either increase or maintain current sanctions against Russia. Correspondingly, [the two greatest security concerns for Finns](#) are developments in Russia and Moscow's war in Ukraine. Finland's military cooperation with allies and partners also continues to receive [strong support](#). It is likely, then, that the Finnish public would support some level of participation in the coalition.

France: Leadership of the Willing and Able

By Gesine Weber

French President Emmanuel Macron is at the forefront of shaping a European coalition of the willing for Ukraine. The debate on a potential European deployment there started with his remarks in spring 2024, when [he refused to rule out putting “boots on the ground” in the country](#). That sparked massive outrage among France’s partners. But since then, discussions have evolved. Any action is now linked to a ceasefire, which has allowed the idea of a European deployment to gain traction. Also helping the cause is the idea’s Anglo-French co-leadership, a reaction to Washington’s shifting approach to Ukraine. Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer have already convened four high-level meetings and additional gatherings for military officials to shape a coalition. The most recent was [April 10 in Brussels](#).

France and the United Kingdom are now actively shaping a deployment. [Macron outlined in a March 27 press conference](#) that a potential “reassurance force”, as the Anglo-French proposal calls it, would be deployed only in “strategic locations” in Ukraine to help deter further Russian aggression. While this potential deployment would be part of the “package” Europeans could bring to any peace negotiations, Paris believes the coalition could take shape even without European consensus. In the meantime, the scope and mandate remains undecided, even if it is clear, as Macron has repeated on several occasions, that nothing will happen without a ceasefire deal signed by the Kremlin. European troops would otherwise find themselves in a direct military confrontation with Russia, a scenario Paris does not want to provoke. For its part, the United Kingdom is emphasizing the importance of a so-called US backstop, which would comprise air defense or intelligence sharing, even if Macron says that the coalition could be implemented “[with or without](#)” the United States. What the French president has ruled out, though, is a European deployment that would take troops to the line of contact, replace Ukrainian forces, or serve as a substitute for an international peacekeeping force. The French contribution to the coalition has yet to be clarified, but Paris, having led the thinking on this effort, is unlikely to shy away from sending troops.

French foreign and security policy is almost exclusively defined by the president. The opposition and parliament have no say in decisions regarding the deployment of French forces, but parliament would need to authorize its continuation after four months. The legislature could also influence support to Ukraine more generally, such as via the budget, especially since Macron lacks a parliamentary majority. On this issue the far-right and far-left parties are likely to have little sway, in part because they are internally divided on how to proceed. Jordan Bardella, head of the Rassemblement National, regularly expresses more skepticism of Russia than Marine Le Pen, who heads the party’s parliamentary group. Within the left bloc in parliament, France Insoumise is unlikely to even consider the possibility of a deployment even if their mainstream partners, namely [the Socialists, are much more likely to do so](#). Given their limited political leverage on Ukraine, these opposition parties are more involved in other matters that allow them better opportunities to score political gains.

Germany: Waiting for a New Government To Act

By Niklas Ebert

While France and the United Kingdom have led the debate on a potential Coalition of the Willing in support of Ukraine, Germany, Europe's most economically powerful country, has been remarkably absent. This was, in part, a result of the strained relationship between former Chancellor Olaf Scholz and many other European leaders. But it was due mainly to a leadership vacuum created when the Scholz government lost its parliamentary majority, in November 2024, prompting an early election. The new chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has cautiously positioned himself in support of the coalition although there is no official government position on it yet. Berlin's new government, comprising the Christian Democratic Union, the Christian Social Union, and the Social Democratic Party, however, is expected to act quickly to change this.

Apart from the far left and the far right, which are critical of any military assistance for Kyiv, support for Ukraine remains strong among Germany's mainstream political parties (those in power and the Greens) and the public. Yet, the country's military support has often been calibrated given concerns that it could incite Russia to escalate and Berlin's insistence that it must not become a party to the war. But Merz, in his previous position as leader of the largest opposition party, had continuously [pushed](#) for more support for Ukraine. Expectations are now high for him to deliver, figuratively and literally.

In public statements since the February 23 election, Merz has been cautious yet ambitious. He emphasized that any troop deployment would presuppose a ceasefire, but that Germany would, in concert with its European partners, live up to its responsibilities. In fact, most observers expect the new chancellor, who claimed that Germany should move from a dormant middle power to a leading one, cannot shy away from a substantial contribution to a coalition. To date, however, officials have not clarified the responsibilities of such a grouping.

Even if a Merz-led government is willing to contribute, it could struggle to do so for two reasons.

First, like most European countries' armed forces, Germany's are [almost entirely committed](#) to NATO structures and planning. Any troops devoted to Ukraine would create gaps in existing NATO defense plans, which are already under pressure from concerns that the United States may reduce its commitment to Europe. Berlin thus finds itself confronted with a dilemma. It will likely have to choose between national and allied security on one hand and Ukraine's security on the other, knowing that both are linked.

Second, Berlin is struggling to bolster and fully equip its military, especially the land forces. Part of this plan targets a new brigade in Lithuania, an effort to strengthen NATO's eastern flank through Germany's first permanent postwar deployment on foreign soil. The brigade itself should be [fully operational by 2027](#). In the meantime, just [fitting out the unit properly and quickly](#) is proving a challenge.

Given the European debates about potential land, maritime, and air components of a coalition, Germany will likely receive a request to contribute to the first and, with Eurofighters, to the last. That would also strain capabilities since the German air force is almost completely committed to NATO tasks.

Germany's participation in a Coalition of the Willing is a question of tradeoffs, capabilities, and leadership. But it seems certain that Berlin is unlikely to commit troops unless the United States provides key capabilities to reinforce any European action.

Poland: National Security First, No Boots on Ukrainian Soil

By Oscar Luigi Guccione

While Warsaw fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty and views Russia's aggression as a direct threat to regional and national security, its position on deploying troops to Ukraine to support a ceasefire is unequivocal across all parties and the public: It will not happen. Instead, Warsaw will sustain Kyiv through logistical support, including operation of the [Rzeszów-Jasionka hub](#), where the bulk of Western aid converges before being sent on to Ukraine, and through training. Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski [has remarked](#) that the only durable security guarantee for Ukraine is a resilient, well-equipped Ukrainian army.

Poland's caution stems from centuries of geopolitical vulnerability. The 2022 Russian invasion and the current unpredictability of the US commitment sparked the fear that Europe's security is entering a more dangerous phase. Poland has already transformed itself into NATO's eastern bulwark. Yet, Polish leaders are concerned that the United States might negotiate a ceasefire favoring Russia, using it to justify military disengagement, and shift the burden of long-term support for Ukraine onto Europe. Such an outcome, paired with only vague US security guarantees, would leave Poland exposed and heighten its sense of strategic vulnerability.

Since 2022, Warsaw has provided extensive military aid and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. However, opinion polls increasingly indicate a rise in scepticism and "Ukraine fatigue" among the Polish public and a growing worry about national security. For Poland, given the finite military resources and the many soldiers already employed in defending the border with Belarus, Poland finds itself trapped in a decision between guaranteeing national security and supporting Kyiv.

Poland insists that Europe must first define strategic goals, starting with a clear pathway for Ukraine's EU membership. For Warsaw, that is the minimum attainable deterrent against future Russian aggression. Without that, any coalition risks being another short-term fix in a long-term crisis. Warsaw has acknowledged the impossibility of inviting Kyiv to join NATO in the short-term following US Defense Secretary [Pete Hegseth's recent statement](#).

While Warsaw appreciates initiatives like President Macron's proposed "reassurance forces", it sees them as politically ambiguous and operationally limited. A precondition for Polish support within Ukraine would be US commitment, and this seems unlikely to materialize. Officials argue that Polish soldiers should deploy only under a NATO mandate or as part of a UN-sanctioned mission, fearing "mission creep" that could feed Russian propaganda and entangle Poland in prolonged conflict.

Yet, Poland is heading towards the [presidential elections in May](#), and security is the main topic of discussion. All three top candidates now see sending troops to scale up engagement in Ukraine as an electoral risk. However, Poland's position may change after the election, especially if the government-supported candidate, Rafał Trzaskowski, prevails.

Ultimately, Poland's skepticism toward participating with boots on the ground in the coalition is driven by existential fear and long-term strategy. Poland is aware of the risks arising from the withdrawal of US engagement in the region. Yet, it does not see the London-Paris alliance as ready to offer the protection Poland needs as a frontline country. From a Polish perspective, the commitment for Ukraine should not weaken NATO's eastern flank. Warsaw is not against sending troops, but it is focused on defending Poland first.

Türkiye: Diplomacy Yes, But Troops Only After a Ceasefire

By Elene Kintsurashvili

Signaling its intent to influence Europe's postwar security framework, Türkiye has consistently participated in meetings of the "Coalition of the Willing" and broader security discussions on Ukraine. Most recently, in mid-April 2025, Ankara [hosted a high-level meeting](#) on Black Sea security with military officials from Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and France. This underscored its active diplomatic role in regional defense conversations. Ankara's goal is to secure a seat at the table where crucial decisions are made in its direct neighborhood.

Türkiye's support for Ukraine remains carefully calibrated. Decades of managing a complex relationship with Moscow—often marked by clashing interests from Syria to the Caucasus—have taught Ankara how to speak the dual languages of diplomacy and strength. While Türkiye supports Ukraine's sovereignty, including its claim over [Crimea](#), and continues to sell weapons to Kyiv, it avoids joining in Western sanctions against Russia. Ankara's relationship with Moscow is often described as "enemies with benefits", and is marked by mutual dependence. Russia's provision of natural gas via TurkStream and Ankara's control over Black Sea access through the Bosphorus are examples. This approach allows Türkiye to maintain diplomatic relations with both capitals while positioning itself as a credible mediator in the conflict.

From the outset of the war in Ukraine in 2022, Türkiye has positioned itself as a mediator between Kyiv and Moscow, offering to host peace talks between the two parties. One of Ankara's notable diplomatic achievements was brokering [the Black Sea Grain Initiative](#), which allowed Ukrainian grain exports to continue despite the shelling. In February 2025, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan separately [conveyed](#) to both Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that Türkiye would be open to sending a peacekeeping force to Ukraine, if deemed necessary. However, no official plans have been made public. This commitment to mediation and peacekeeping was further underscored during the Turkish Ministry of National Defense (MoD) debrief following the March 20 London Summit on Ukraine. While military chiefs discussed the potential for such a force, the Turkish MoD spokesperson stated: "[It is too early to discuss sending a peacekeeping force to Ukraine. A ceasefire must be established first.](#)"

Following these discussions and confidential talks, a clearer picture has emerged of Türkiye's conditions for joining any future peacekeeping coalition. Even if a ceasefire were to be put in place, Ankara's involvement would likely be limited to non-combatant units tasked with monitoring and stabilization, rather than enforcement. Crucially, Türkiye demands a central role in shaping the mission's mandate, structure, and implementation as it aims to avoid marginalization in decisions that could affect its security interests and regional clout. While some European countries view Washington's participation as essential to legitimizing and securing such a mission, Ankara does not condition its involvement on a US backstop. Instead, it underscores its strategic autonomy and ambition to lead in its immediate neighborhood. Importantly, Türkiye sees the mission as a peacekeeping endeavor focused on post-conflict stabilization, not as a tool to deter or confront Russia directly.

Domestically, although both the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) express support for Ukraine's sovereignty, there is consensus on the question of military involvement. The CHP, in particular, adopts a more cautious stance, citing concerns over potential escalation with Russia. In parallel, domestic priorities continue to dominate national discourse, limiting broader public engagement with foreign policy debates such as the one about Türkiye's prospective role in the Coalition of the Willing.

The United Kingdom: Charging Ahead – Blindly or Boldly?

By Georgina Wright

London has played a leading role, in tandem with Paris, in shaping the “coalition of the willing”. For London, the proposal is driven by necessity and conviction. Necessity, because without credible security guarantees, any ceasefire risks unravelling. And conviction, because the United Kingdom sees a sovereign, secure Ukraine as essential to Euro-Atlantic security more broadly. The coalition of the willing also provides London with another opportunity to reconnect with Europe after Brexit. From the outset, the United Kingdom has stood firmly behind Kyiv, providing military aid, financial support, intelligence, and training. Public support for Ukraine remains high and all political parties have signed onto the government’s push for close coordination with European partners.

Neither Russia nor the United States wants a NATO-led force deployed to Ukraine, and the EU lacks the capabilities and know-how to mount such a mission. That leaves one viable alternative: a coalition of willing nations, stationed 200–300 kilometers from the frontlines. In London’s eyes, the force would not replace the Ukrainian military but would act as a buffer to deter violations.

In recent months, Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have alternated hosting international summits. Their respective chiefs of defense have led confidential military planning that has entailed frequent travel to Ukraine. The details are likely to be kept firmly under wraps as long as the war continues. Options range from a more modest “reassurance” or “deterrence” force of up to 20,000 troops (potentially under the leadership of the Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force), to a medium-sized force of 30,000–40,000, or even a full-scale deployment of 60,000–100,000 troops.

Yet, despite the UK government’s public backing of the coalition of the willing, behind closed doors, many worry that not all conditions will be met to guarantee its success. There is the question of how much coalition countries could do without the support of the United States—be that military or intelligence assistance. Hopes that Washington will provide a backstop are fading, but London, for now, is keeping the door open to a possible US role. The British believe that a clear stance from Washington will be essential to prepare the public for the risks and long-term commitment a coalition of the willing would require.

Then there are questions around capacity and resources—particularly whether the United Kingdom and other nations can deploy a larger force without creating vulnerabilities on NATO’s eastern flank. That is also why London wants Ukraine to be in the best position to defend itself. Intelligence-sharing, logistical support, and financial assistance for Ukraine’s reconstruction, as well as maintaining sanctions on Russia, are all top UK priorities.

Finally, there is the challenge of long-term commitment. No one knows how long such a force would need to remain in place. The prime minister would be taking a gamble on a potentially generational deployment without certainty that all coalition partners would stay the course. Meanwhile, the possibility of a far-right French presidency in 2027 would, for example, undermine the stability of a joint Franco-British-led force.

Ultimately, the United Kingdom’s position is clear: Europe support Ukraine to win the war and guarantee its long-lasting security. If US support remains limited and NATO is sidelined, a coalition of the willing may be the only viable path to lasting peace. Britain will stand by Ukraine—but whether the coalition can succeed will depend on bridging legal, logistical, and political gaps. Behind closed doors, those challenges remain front of mind.

Ukraine: A Coalition for Security, But NATO Remains the Goal

By Yuliia Korotia

The Ukrainian government, in alignment with public sentiment, views the idea of a “coalition of the willing” as a pragmatic and timely response to the absence of reliable formal security guarantees from allies. With no clear timeline for NATO or EU membership, the United States’ open abandonment of support for Ukraine’s NATO accession, and growing fatigue within some European governments, Kyiv sees value in flexible, solution-oriented coalitions that can respond more quickly to urgent needs.

The official position is broadly supportive. Ukrainian leaders, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and senior members of the government such as Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, have publicly welcomed efforts by individual allies including France and the United Kingdom to take the initiative and provide support through less formal, faster-moving channels. The message from Kyiv is clear: Ukraine is open to any coalition that produces real, tangible outcomes. This approach is not new for Ukraine. The country is already engaged in a number of ad hoc coalitions, for instance the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the “Ramstein Group”). In this context, a coalition of the willing is seen less as a revolutionary concept and more as an extension—or political elevation—of ongoing coalition-based support.

While there is no significant opposition to this approach within Ukraine, certain reservations persist. The Ukrainian government consistently emphasizes that such coalitions can offer valuable short-term support but must not replace the long-term goal of NATO membership. This position is widely supported by the public and echoed in Ukrainian media, which underline the importance of Article 5 guarantees and warn against any framework that could entrench Ukraine as a “grey zone” between the West and Russia. Ukraine’s military leadership, like the government, views it as a complement—not an alternative—to full Euro-Atlantic integration. There are also open questions about what the coalition would actually do. Could it evolve into a protective presence on Ukrainian soil? Can it offer credible reassurance or deterrence? And who would lead it, politically and operationally? Without clear answers, both the Ukrainian government and expert community worry that the initiative could lose focus or deliver less than expected.

Ukrainian officials avoid publicly defining the coalition’s scope, but their statements and diplomatic engagement indicate clear priorities: air defense, long-range weapons, military training, and protection of critical infrastructure. At the same time, they keep the strategic focus on eventual NATO membership. Importantly, while Kyiv is open to the possibility of foreign troop deployments, particularly in the context of future security guarantees or peacekeeping missions, it has so far refrained from making formal requests for such a presence. The Ukrainian leadership understands that such a move could provoke direct retaliatory actions from Russia. Instead, the emphasis remains on a framework that is politically viable for allies and strategically useful for Ukraine.

It is also important to note that Ukrainian officials acknowledge the indispensable role of US involvement in any coalition. While European nations have taken significant steps to support Ukraine, there is a shared understanding that without US participation, such coalitions may lack the necessary weight and coordination to be fully effective.

From Ukraine’s perspective, a coalition of the willing is worth pursuing if it brings real resources, credible leadership, and political resolve. But it must be designed to support, not replace, Ukraine’s path toward full Euro-Atlantic integration. In the end, its success will depend on whether it can translate political will into concrete outcomes that strengthen Ukraine’s position in the war and its future security architecture.

United States: Unwilling to Join

By Brent Hardt

Although the United States has been instrumental in forging and leading “coalitions of the willing” to deal with Afghanistan, Iraq, and ISIS, the current administration in Washington seems determined to do as little as possible to support the Anglo-French effort for a sovereign and secure Ukraine. President Donald Trump’s decision to pause US support to Kyiv left Washington’s future role in the war in doubt. His recent statements blaming Kyiv, the victim, for the conflict and his refusal to acknowledge Russia as the aggressor reinforce the impression that little will be done to support any European-led Coalition of the Willing for Ukraine. The administration’s subsequent threats to “move on” and focus on “other priorities” affirm an abrupt reorientation of US policy toward Ukraine.

Europe is nevertheless assiduously working diplomatic and military channels to seek American backing. The continent’s leaders recognize that they must lead the initiative but regard US support as essential to a coalition’s ability to achieve its [threefold objectives](#) of keeping military aid flowing to Ukraine, boosting Ukrainian defense capabilities, and defending any diplomatic agreement with a multinational force. This backstop could include air support, logistics, and the intelligence that has proved vital to Ukraine’s defense.

Washington, however, has sent no signal that it is prepared to help. Neither has the White House indicated if it even supports the objectives of defending Ukraine against further Russian aggression and ensuring the implementation of any agreement. Trump insists he wants the war to end but seems to have remarkably little interest in how that is achieved. In fact, the administration seems prepared to abandon Ukraine by insisting that Kyiv accept Russia’s territorial gains and agree not to seek NATO membership. Washington has also indicated an intention to recognize Crimea as Russian territory. These are all gifts to Moscow.

While unpredictability and sudden shifts may be the US president’s hallmarks, the administration’s actions consistently reinforce a hands-off approach. The president’s envoy to Russia, Steve Witkoff, recently dismissed the coalition as “[a posture and a pose](#)”, while Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth skipped the April 10 Contact Group meeting in Brussels, prioritizing travel to Panama. (He joined the gathering virtually.) [Hegseth had previously insisted](#) that US troops and NATO should play no role in any future military mission and that allied troops involved in a reassurance mission would not receive Article 5 NATO support.

Outside the administration, support for Ukraine remains strong in the Senate but less so in the House of Representatives. Democrats in both chambers strongly back assisting the coalition, but Republicans will follow the administration’s lead even if most have a long-standing record of strong backing for Ukraine. Among the American public, support for doing more in Ukraine is higher than at any time since Russian President Vladimir Putin’s 2022 invasion. Fully 46% believe that the United States is not doing enough. To date, neither congressional nor public opinion seem to have influenced White House action.

Despite the growing recognition among Trump and his team that Putin has no intention to agree to a ceasefire or to abandon his larger ambitions to control Ukraine, there is little likelihood that the Kremlin leader’s actions will prompt a recalibration of the White House’s broadly hostile approach to Kyiv. The only prospect for US support for a coalition of the willing would require sustained progress by the Europeans that reassures Washington of the continent’s willingness and ability to lead the mission. Should this happen, and if domestic American political winds shift against Trump’s current deference to Russian demands, there may be a small chance that the US government will again recognize the threat that Putin poses and reconsider its unwillingness to commit itself to Ukraine’s defense and sovereignty.