



Trump Tariffs and the Rebirth of European Defense

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The period marked by the second Trump administration brought with it a series of economic and political challenges that tested the solidity of transatlantic relations, particularly in the context of trade and defense policies. The effects of the unilateral tariffs imposed by the United States on the European Union and its industries were not limited to the commercial sector alone, but also had repercussions on the defense landscape, forcing Europe to reconsider its security and strategic autonomy.

The Beginning of American Pressure

Trump's policies, and in particular **the tariffs imposed on various sectors, including steel, aluminum, and technological products, sparked a wave of reactions in Europe.** The American administration used these tools as part of a strategy to favor domestic industry, but **also triggered a series of internal discussions in Europe regarding dependence on American supplies, both in commercial and defense fields.**

In the defense context, the tariffs raised crucial questions: how to respond to the pressures from **Washington demanding European allies to increase defense spending, while at the same time the United States strengthens its protectionist policies**? The effects were multiplied by the need to find a response to other global challenges, such as Russia's growing aggressiveness and the uncertainties arising from the management of the war in Ukraine.

Intra-European Consultations: Responses and Adaptations

If Trump's approach raised concerns, it also pushed the European Union to a deeper reflection on the future of its collective defense. With the election of Joe Biden and the return to a more traditional rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy, Europe found itself facing increasing pressure to reduce its dependence on NATO and the United States.

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During 2025, the defense ministers of European countries met more frequently to discuss possible responses to this challenge. In particular, NATO became the center of a series of consultations, with the **intent to reorganize and strengthen European defense so that it can be less vulnerable to the fluctuations of American policy**. The possibility of increasing European defense spending, as requested by the United States, intertwined with the need to define a new funding model and a review of cooperation methods among European countries.

Europe and the Issue of Defense Spending

The European Union has engaged in a more intense dialogue on the best way to respond to defense challenges, with a growing awareness that an increase in spending should not be a mere acceptance of American demands, but an internal strategic necessity. The proposal to invest in military infrastructure, such as military mobility and cybersecurity, was one of the most concrete European responses to face American pressure.

In parallel, **the European Commission promoted the idea of strengthening investments in EU defense capabilities, focusing on a joint acquisition system and direct investments in the research and development of new military technologies**. A

significant initiative is the creation of a European defense mechanism, similar to the one in 2012 for managing the eurozone crisis, which could help finance common defense projects, avoiding the risk of internal divisions.

The Role of NATO and the Response to Global Scenarios

NATO, under the pressure of American tariffs and the growing strategic needs in Europe, has begun to explore new ways to integrate European resources more efficiently. An example is the proposal to create a European-led "reassurance force," capable of intervening in scenarios like Ukraine, reducing dependence on American structures and logistical support.

This "reassurance force" could be supported by a network of shared infrastructure and intelligence, with logistical support that only an integrated structure like NATO could guarantee. However, the realization of such a project depends on Washington's willingness to support the process, at least in its initial stages.

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Uncertainties on Buy American vs. Buy European

Another crucial issue is the acquisition of military equipment. The European Union is trying to stimulate purchases within the bloc, focusing on common armament programs that can strengthen Europe's defensive autonomy. However, **American pressures for a "Buy American"** remain strong, creating a conflict of interest between the need to maintain close ties with Washington and the intent to strengthen its own European industrial capacity.

A possible balance could be found, with the acquisition of American equipment that cannot be easily replicated at the European level, while at the same time promoting long-term initiatives that favor European armament production.

Conclusions: A New Defense Mosaic in Europe

Europe, under the pressure of Trump's tariffs and global geopolitical challenges, is slowly building a new defense mosaic. While NATO remains the fundamental pillar, the European Union is seeking to diversify its resources to ensure a more autonomous and resilient defense. The

initiatives to strengthen common defensive capabilities, along with the possibility of creating a European defense mechanism, indicate that Europe is trying to assert its strategic role in the global landscape, without abandoning its fundamental link with the United States, but also seeking to reduce its vulnerability to Washington's unilateral policies.