



Ukraine, first contact group summit without the United States

Published on 04/04/2025

For the first time since the creation of the contact group for the defense of Ukraine, the United States will not participate in the meeting of the 50 countries scheduled for April 11 in Brussels. The absence of U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth marks a significant change in the coalition's leadership, which has so far played a central role in coordinating military aid to Kyiv.

The US steps back: a political signal

According to European and American sources, Hegseth will not participate either in person or virtually. The Pentagon will not even send a high-level representative, as has regularly happened in the previous 26 meetings of the group. This is a clear signal of the new line adopted by the Trump administration, increasingly reluctant to maintain a leading role in military support to Ukraine.

During the last meeting in February, Hegseth had already expressed a critical approach, urging European allies to take on greater responsibility for their own defense, reducing the historic dependence on the United States. He also stated that no decision would be made on Ukraine's entry into NATO without a direct assessment by the administration, attracting criticism even within the American Congress.

A leadership void in the coalition

The contact group, born on the initiative of then-Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in 2022, has so far been fundamental in mobilizing over 126 billion dollars in military aid to Ukraine, half of which came from the USA. Its symbolic headquarters is the Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

The only absence of Austin at a meeting was at the beginning of 2024 for health reasons. Even on that occasion, however, he participated remotely, delegating leadership to a senior Pentagon official, Celeste Wallander.

Now, with the American disengagement, Europe and the United Kingdom are considering a new leadership structure. Germany and Great Britain will chair the Brussels meeting, representing respectively the EU's largest economic power and one of the most operational European armed forces.

Concrete risks for the mission's effectiveness

Without the presence of the United States, partners fear a decline in the quality of shared information. Briefings conducted by Pentagon leaders and the US European Command have so far been crucial in outlining field needs and directing aid. The absence of these strategic contributions could limit the coalition's ability to effectively respond to the conflict's evolution.

To worsen the situation, the US recently suspended intelligence sharing with Ukraine for a week, immediately after a difficult visit by President Zelenskyy to the White House. At the same time, arms deliveries have also been temporarily halted.

Funds still available, but without future guarantees

The Pentagon still has **3.85 billion dollars** authorized for military supplies, but **no longer has funds for stock replacement**, an element that hinders further shipments. Meanwhile, the

American Congress **has no concrete plans for new allocations**, leaving Ukraine in a position of growing uncertainty.

Towards a more autonomous Europe?

This situation could accelerate the transformation of the European role in the continent's security. Some member countries are already developing alternative formats for managing aid and defensive strategies. However, as warned by Wallander, **the absence of the United States will have concrete costs**, both in terms of operational effectiveness and on the political level.

News link: <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2025/04/02/in-first-hegseth-to-skip-multinational-meeting-on-ukraine-support/>