

## **Recalibration Under Pressure**

**Trade, Security, and the Evolution of U.S.–European Relations, 2016–2025**

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## I. Introduction

Transatlantic relations have long rested on shared political traditions, institutional habits, and practical cooperation, yet the years from 2016 to 2025 forced both sides to consider how these foundations performed under pressure. At a roundtable hosted by the Krasno Global Policy Forum at the University of North Carolina, Ambassador Philip Reeker described the partnership as “not a fling” but a long marriage in need of recalibration, a comparison that reflected a steady tone among diplomats who did not share the panic expressed by some political leaders.<sup>1</sup> Earlier volumes of the Foreign Relations of the United States include instances such as disputes over Europe’s defense spending and Western trade policy during the late twentieth century, indicating that newer disagreements follow patterns already visible in the historical record.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary public documents from the Trump and Biden administrations show shifts in tone and argument, yet each administration relied on the same institutions and acted within procedures that guided earlier periods of tension. The evidence suggests that the years between 2016 and 2025 produced recalibration rather than rupture, and this claim becomes stronger when the recent period is placed within the longer development of transatlantic diplomacy.

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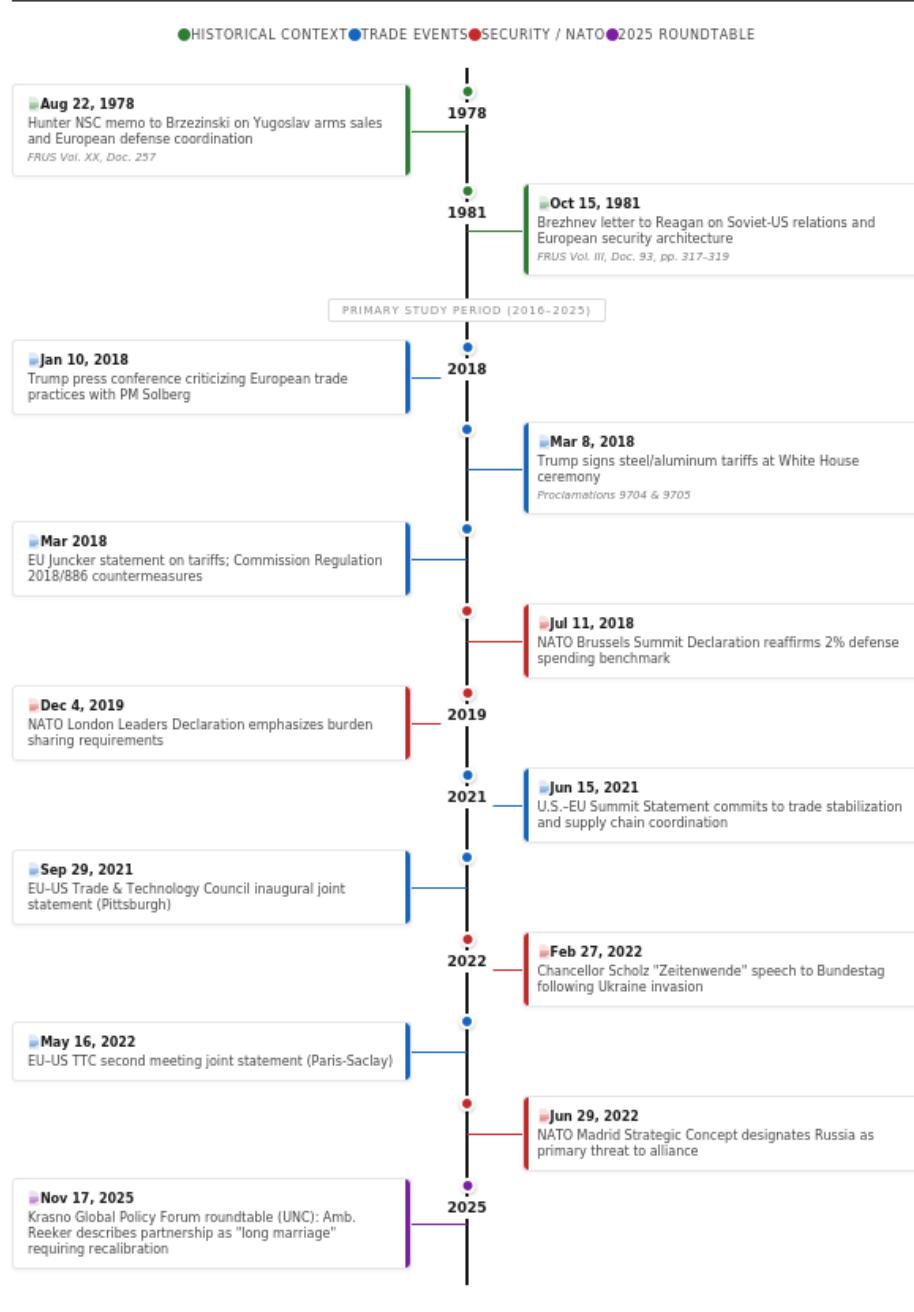
<sup>1</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum. “Transatlantic Relations Roundtable.” UNC Chapel Hill, November 17, 2025. <https://www.krasnoevents.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum from Robert Hunter of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), Washington, August 22, 1978, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XX: Eastern Europe*, doc. 257. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v20/d257>

As Figure 1 illustrates, recent disputes follow patterns visible in earlier periods of transatlantic negotiation and adjustment.<sup>3</sup>

### Timeline: Transatlantic Recalibration 2016-2025

Key Events in Trade, Security, and Institutional Continuity



**Figure 1.** Timeline of key events in transatlantic trade, security, and diplomacy, 1978-2025. Historical context documents from FRUS demonstrate precedents for contemporary disputes.

Sources: Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS); White House Archives; NATO Official Texts; European Commission; U.S. Congressional Records; Krasno Global Policy Forum.

<sup>3</sup> Figure created by the author based on primary and secondary sources cited in this essay.

## **II. Trade Recalibration, 2016 to 2025**

### **A. Confrontation and Adjustment in the Trump Years**

#### ***1. The 2018 Tariff Crisis***

The introduction of tariffs on steel and aluminum in 2018 marked one of the clearest disruptions in recent transatlantic economic relations. Presidential Proclamations 9704 and 9705 framed the restrictions as necessary to protect national security and emphasized the risk that foreign producers posed to domestic industries.<sup>4</sup>,<sup>5</sup> President Trump reinforced this position during the tariff signing ceremony, where he argued that the United States experienced decades of unfair treatment by its closest partners and stated that the new measures were long overdue.<sup>6</sup> His public remarks described the tariffs as a corrective action rather than a departure from established relationships, although European officials interpreted the announcement as an escalation. The European Union responded through Implementing Regulation 2018/886, which presented its countermeasures as proportionate steps designed to stabilize the market during a period of uncertainty.<sup>7</sup>

Historical materials within FRUS show that similar arguments appeared in earlier debates when U.S. officials claimed that foreign competition harmed key industries and threatened

<sup>4</sup> Presidential Proclamation 9704, “Adjusting Imports of Aluminum Into the United States,” March 15, 2018. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/15/2018-05477/adjusting-imports-of-aluminum-into-the-united-states>

<sup>5</sup> Presidential Proclamation 9705, “Adjusting Imports of Steel Into the United States,” March 15, 2018. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/15/2018-05478/adjusting-imports-of-steel-into-the-united-states>

<sup>6</sup> Donald J. Trump. Remarks at the White House on Steel and Aluminum Tariffs, March 8, 2018. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-steel-aluminum-tariffs/>

<sup>7</sup> Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/886, June 20, 2018. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018R0886>

national interests.<sup>8</sup> These documents demonstrate that the logic underpinning the 2018 dispute did not originate with the Trump administration but reflected older patterns of conflict about trade and industrial policy. The aggressive tone of the 2018 rollout amplified these tensions, since Trump frequently asserted that European governments benefited from American restraint while refusing to adjust their own practices. In a January 2018 press conference, he stated that long-standing partners “took advantage of the United States for many years” and that European leaders resisted fair outcomes because they preferred the existing imbalance.<sup>9</sup> Despite this sharp language, both the proclamations and the implementing regulations showed that the dispute remained contained within legal channels that preserved the broader structure of the partnership.

Reactions to the tariffs varied across governments, but the European Commission insisted that a full break with the United States was not plausible. Commission President Juncker stated that he disagreed with the decision yet remained confident that institutional mechanisms could prevent a deeper rupture.<sup>10</sup> This view contrasts with the rhetoric of some U.S. and European politicians who warned of an impending separation between the United States and the European Union. Comments offered during the Krasno roundtable, including observations by Ambassador Georg Sparber and The Hon. Mark Kennedy, made clear that diplomats did not share this sense of impending crisis and viewed the moment as confrontational but manageable.<sup>11</sup> These remarks

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<sup>8</sup> FRUS, 1977–1980, vol. XX, doc. 257.

<sup>9</sup> Donald J. Trump. Press Conference with Prime Minister Erna Solberg of Norway, January 10, 2018. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-erna-solberg-norway-joint-press-conference/>

<sup>10</sup> European Commission. Statement by President Jean-Claude Juncker on U.S. Tariff Announcement, March 2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_18\\_1927](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_18_1927)

<sup>11</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, “Transatlantic Relations Roundtable.”

align with primary evidence from the period and show that speculation about a transatlantic divorce overstated the severity of the dispute.

## ***2. Negotiation Channels and Institutional Stability***

Although the tariff dispute generated strong political reactions, both sides relied on established negotiation channels to prevent the disagreement from escalating. The European Commission, represented by President Jean-Claude Juncker, stressed the need to restore predictability and reaffirmed support for rules-based governance in its response to the U.S. tariff measures.<sup>12</sup> Statements from the European Commission stressed the need to restore predictability and reaffirmed support for rules-based governance as the foundation for future discussions. These responses demonstrated that leaders worked within existing institutions even when public rhetoric suggested deeper conflict. Earlier FRUS materials show that past administrations treated comparable disputes as issues to be managed rather than as evidence of structural decline, which reveals consistency in how the United States responded to economic challenges involving strategic sectors.<sup>13</sup>

Trump's public statements often contrasted sharply with the quieter diplomatic work that continued behind the scenes. His language portrayed European leaders as unwilling to meet American expectations, and he repeated this claim in several briefings during the rollout period. Yet the negotiation process did not break down, and officials from both sides met regularly to stabilize the economic environment. This gap between political rhetoric and institutional practice is visible in the primary record, since the proclamations and subsequent fact sheets described

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<sup>12</sup> European Commission, Statement by President Jean-Claude Juncker on U.S. Tariff Announcement, March 2018, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_18\\_1927](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_18_1927).

<sup>13</sup> FRUS, 1977–1980, vol. XX, doc. 257.

cooperation mechanisms that remained intact. The Krasno roundtable comments align with this point, because speakers such as Ambassador Georg Sparber and Dietmar Rieg emphasized that they never believed the dispute threatened the core relationship and viewed the concerns voiced by political actors as exaggerated.<sup>14</sup> The evidence indicates that although the tariff crisis produced tension, it also reaffirmed the resilience of the systems that managed transatlantic commerce.

## **B. Stabilization and Coordination Under Biden**

### ***1. Efforts to Recenter the Partnership***

The Biden administration approached transatlantic trade with the stated intention of reducing friction and restoring regular diplomatic dialogue. The U.S.–EU Summit Statement of June 2021 described a renewed commitment to consultation on economic matters and placed particular emphasis on coordinated responses to supply chain instability<sup>15</sup>. Meetings of the Trade and Technology Council in 2021 and 2022 expanded this framework by presenting shared goals for investment screening and technology governance during a period of global market volatility.<sup>16, 17</sup> FRUS volumes from earlier decades show that U.S. administrations often turned

<sup>14</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, “Transatlantic Relations Roundtable.”

<sup>15</sup> “U.S.–EU Summit Statement,” Brussels, 15 June 2021. White House archived text: <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/15/u-s-eu-summit-statement/>

<sup>16</sup> “EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council Inaugural Joint Statement,” Pittsburgh, 29 September 2021. European Commission / Digital Strategy page: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/eu-us-trade-and-technology-council-inaugural-joint-statement>

<sup>17</sup> “Joint Statement of the EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council,” Second Meeting, Paris-Saclay, 16 May 2022. European Commission joint statement: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/joint-statement-second-meeting-eu-us-trade-and-technology-council>

to institutional mechanisms to rebuild trust after periods of strain, which places the recent stabilization effort in line with previous diplomatic responses.<sup>18</sup> These public documents reveal that the partnership regained a sense of routine through steady engagement rather than dramatic policy redesign.

## ***2. Evidence of Structural Continuity***

Economic data published by the Bureau of Economic Analysis show that trade and investment flows between the United States and the European Union remained strong throughout the years of tension.<sup>19</sup> These figures demonstrate that underlying commercial ties continued to support the political relationship even when leaders exchanged criticisms of one another's policies. The Council of the European Union released similar data, and these reports show that both sides benefited from high levels of reciprocal trade and extensive investment networks.<sup>20</sup> Older FRUS documents confirm that this interdependence has historically softened the impact of political disagreements, because both sides relied on shared economic interests to limit the consequences of conflict.<sup>21</sup> The recent period therefore reflects a familiar dynamic in which structural depth constrained short-term disputes and preserved the foundation of the relationship.

## **III. Security Recalibration After 2016**

### **A. Burden Sharing and Strategic Tension in the Trump Period**

<sup>18</sup> FRUS, 1977–1980, vol. XX, doc. 257.

<sup>19</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis, “U.S. International Trade and Investment Data.” Main data portal:  
<https://www.bea.gov/data/intl-trade-investment>

<sup>20</sup> Council of the European Union, “EU–US trade” infographic. Official infographic page:  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eu-us-trade/>

<sup>21</sup> FRUS, 1977–1980, vol. XX, doc. 257.

## **1. NATO Evidence**

Security cooperation faced renewed pressure as the Trump administration increased demands that European allies improve their defense spending. The NATO Brussels Summit Declaration of 2018 recorded this expectation, since it reaffirmed the two percent benchmark and stressed the need for stronger national commitments.<sup>22</sup> The London Leaders Meeting Declaration of 2019 repeated this position and framed burden sharing as a requirement for future cohesion within the alliance.<sup>23</sup> FRUS material from the early 1980s shows that similar concerns appeared during a different period of geopolitical strain, which indicates that debates over allied obligations follow a long-standing pattern.<sup>24</sup> The recent period therefore demonstrated a shift in tone rather than a change in the core assumptions that guided the American approach to NATO.

A broader review of these sources shows that the United States applied public pressure in order to influence allied behavior while continuing to rely on NATO structures. The declarations affirm that European governments understood the need to meet higher expectations even when they disagreed with the administration's rhetoric. FRUS materials confirm that earlier episodes followed this model, since American officials often used direct statements to prompt budgetary changes in partner states.<sup>25</sup> The combination of firm language and continued participation proved

<sup>22</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Brussels Summit Declaration,” 11 July 2018. Official NATO text:  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_156624.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm)

<sup>23</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “London Declaration,” Meeting of NATO Heads of State and Government, 4 December 2019. Official NATO text:  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm)

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Reagan, Moscow, October 15, 1981, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Volume III: Soviet Union, January 1981–January 1983*, doc. 93, pp. 317–319, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d93>

<sup>25</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317–319.

effective because it allowed the alliance to absorb political tension without weakening shared commitments. These developments reveal that competition over burden sharing created friction but did not undermine the larger framework of cooperation.

## ***2. Congressional Influence***

Domestic political conditions within the United States shaped the environment in which security diplomacy occurred. Hearings in the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee documented concerns that appropriations delays and procedural disputes could limit the government's ability to respond to allied needs.<sup>26</sup> These hearings showed that members of Congress believed the institution needed greater stability in order to send consistent signals to European partners. Earlier FRUS documents recorded similar tensions during previous administrations, and they demonstrated that internal disagreements could restrict the executive's capacity to support allied initiatives.<sup>27</sup> The persistence of this pattern indicates that domestic politics remained an important factor in alliance management during the recent period.

A closer reading of the hearing transcripts reveals that these institutional pressures influenced both funding decisions and the pace of legislative action. Members of Congress argued that short-term disputes created uncertainty for defense planning, and they urged their colleagues to adopt more stable processes when dealing with matters involving NATO. FRUS evidence provides context by showing that previous administrations faced comparable challenges

<sup>26</sup> U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Oversight, Transparency, and Accountability of Ukraine Assistance,” Hearing, 28 March 2023.  
congress.gov hearing record (with link to PDF transcript):  
<https://www.congress.gov/event/118th-congress/house-event/115597/text>

<sup>27</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

when presenting foreign policy goals to lawmakers who questioned resource allocations.<sup>28</sup> These continuities highlight that Congress plays a significant role in shaping the tools available for security cooperation. The combined material shows that institutional limits influenced policy execution even when broad strategic goals remained unchanged.

## **B. Post-2022 Strategic Convergence**

### ***1. Impact of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine***

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reshaped the strategic environment in Europe, and this new reality appears directly in the NATO Strategic Concept adopted later that year.<sup>29</sup> The document identified Russia as the most direct threat to European stability and presented collective defense as the central principle of allied security. NATO Defence Expenditure Reports show that European governments increased their military budgets in response, which confirms that the invasion accelerated plans already under discussion.<sup>30</sup> These public materials show that the crisis generated convergence among allies even when national debates differed. The evidence indicates that the invasion increased the value of coordinated action and clarified the partnership's strategic priorities.

Further analysis shows that the Strategic Concept served as both a descriptive and prescriptive document. It summarized the conditions created by the invasion and provided

<sup>28</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

<sup>29</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2023)*, Public Diplomacy Division, 2024.  
NATO PDF:  
[https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/240314-def-exp-2023-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/240314-def-exp-2023-en.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2023), Public Diplomacy Division, 2024.  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49198.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm)

guidance for the adjustments that member states needed to make. Defence expenditure data supports the claim that governments used the document to justify new investments as they prepared for long-term instability. FRUS material shows that earlier administrations adopted similar approaches during periods of heightened tension, which demonstrates that this response followed a familiar pattern rather than producing a new understanding of allied cooperation.<sup>31</sup> The convergence documented in 2022 therefore reflected structural continuity shaped by external threat.

## ***2. Security Coordination and Sanctions***

The invasion also produced greater coordination between the United States and the European Union in sanctions, technology controls, and energy security. Congressional research on Russia sanctions described how U.S. measures, often coordinated with European partners, targeted Russian financial institutions and restricted access to resources that supported the Russian state.<sup>32</sup> These measures showed that economic tools became part of the broader security response, and they required close communication between allied governments. The use of coordinated sanctions highlighted the importance of shared procedures that developed over previous decades. The evidence shows that officials treated economic and security objectives as interconnected, which reinforced the partnership's institutional foundation.

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<sup>31</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

<sup>32</sup> Olaf Scholz, “Policy Statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, on the Russian Attack on Ukraine,” German Bundestag, Berlin, 27 February 2022 (“Zeitenwende” speech). Federal Government English translation:  
<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/government-policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

The primary material reveals that this cooperation strengthened the alliance's ability to respond to a fast-moving crisis. Governments acted within established mechanisms, and they relied on clear channels to implement restrictions designed to limit Russia's options. Earlier FRUS documents contain examples of similar coordinated efforts in different contexts, which suggests that the practice of linking economic and strategic aims has long supported transatlantic security.<sup>33</sup> The joint statements confirm that the partners used these procedures to address both immediate and long-term threats. These developments show that the events of 2022 produced a more unified approach that aligned national responses with broader alliance goals.

#### **IV. Country Notes and Anecdotal Evidence**

##### **A. Germany**

Germany's strategic position changed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and this shift is clear in Chancellor Scholz's *Zeitenwende* address to the Bundestag in February 2022.<sup>34</sup> Scholz described the moment as a turning point that required Germany to reconsider long-standing assumptions about defense and the structure of its foreign policy. This view aligned with a statement at the UNC roundtable, where Ms. Robin Quinville noted that Germany's economic pressures and political climate made previous expectations about peace and stability unsustainable.<sup>35</sup> NATO Defence Expenditure Reports show that Germany increased its military budget after 2022, and these figures support the claim that political commitments translated into

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<sup>33</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

<sup>34</sup> BROW Hub. "Position Document Regarding the National Defense Strategy of the Country 2025–2030." BROW Hub Policy Institute, 2024. <https://brodhub.eu/en/news/position-document-regarding-the-national-defense-strategy-of-the-country-2025-2030/>

<sup>35</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, "Transatlantic Relations Roundtable."

material changes.<sup>36</sup> Earlier FRUS documents record that the United States urged German governments to expand their defense contributions during other periods of geopolitical tension, which indicates that the recent adjustment fits a pattern visible across previous decades.<sup>37</sup>

A deeper review of these sources shows that Germany's response reflects a combination of internal constraints and external demands. The Scholz speech defined security as a national priority, but the country's slow economic growth created limits on rapid military expansion. NATO expenditure data shows that progress has been uneven, which suggests that German leaders balanced fiscal pressures against strategic expectations. FRUS material demonstrates that U.S. officials have long viewed German capabilities as central to alliance effectiveness, which places current debates within a familiar framework rather than a new dispute. The roundtable remarks by Ms. Robin Quinville confirm that Germany's choices continue to influence broader European security planning in ways that affect the pace and scope of transatlantic recalibration.<sup>38</sup>

## B. Romania

Romania presented a clear strategic direction in its position statement on the 2025–2030 National Defense Strategy, which introduced the idea of solidary independence.<sup>39</sup> The document defined national security through a combination of sovereign authority and alliance cooperation, and it reflected the country's intention to strengthen its place within NATO and the European Union. A Romanian representative, Minister Counselor Mihaela Osorio, explained at the UNC roundtable that this balance shaped the country's commitments during a period of regional

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<sup>36</sup> NATO, 2022 Strategic Concept.

<sup>37</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

<sup>38</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, "Transatlantic Relations Roundtable."

<sup>39</sup> Scholz, "Zeitenwende Policy Statement."

uncertainty.<sup>40</sup> NATO Defence Expenditure Reports show rising Romanian spending after 2022, which confirms that its stated objectives aligned with measurable increases in defense investment.<sup>41</sup> FRUS documents from earlier decades identify Southeastern Europe as an area of interest for U.S. policymakers, which helps explain why Romania's alignment fits the broader structure of transatlantic relations.<sup>42</sup>

Further analysis of the sources shows that Romania used this period to position itself as a reliable contributor to regional security. The solidary independence concept placed cooperation with NATO at the center of national planning, and this framing showed that alliance participation supported national sovereignty rather than limiting it. NATO expenditure data confirms that Romania acted on these principles by directing resources toward defense during a period of heightened risk. FRUS material shows that U.S. administrations treated Romanian stability as important to European security, which reveals continuity between past and present priorities. A roundtable discussion, including remarks by Minister Counselor Mihaela Osorio, supported this interpretation by noting Romania's location on the eastern flank, which increases the strategic value of its decisions.<sup>43</sup>

### C. Kosovo

Kosovo's political development has been shaped by its close alignment with the United States and Europe, and this position appears in the text of its constitution, which identifies Euro

<sup>40</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, "Transatlantic Relations Roundtable."

<sup>41</sup> NATO, 2022 Strategic Concept.

<sup>42</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

<sup>43</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, "Transatlantic Relations Roundtable."

Atlantic integration as a national objective.<sup>44</sup> The UNC roundtable remarks by Ambassador Ilir Dugoli emphasized this orientation by stating that Kosovo's major achievements depended on cooperation with the transatlantic community.<sup>45</sup> U.S. State Department documentation presents Kosovo as a partner committed to democratic institutions and regional security, which provides additional evidence of alignment.<sup>46</sup> FRUS material from the late twentieth century shows that U.S. officials regarded Balkan stability as essential to European security, which offers context for Kosovo's present approach.<sup>47</sup> These sources show that Kosovo's foreign policy choices reflected long-term patterns rather than short-term reactions.

A close reading of these sources shows that Kosovo treats transatlantic partnership as a structural guarantee rather than a diplomatic preference. The constitution outlines integration goals that anchor the country's political identity, and this text shows that Euro Atlantic alignment is built into its institutional framework. State Department material confirms the durability of this relationship, since it records continuous cooperation across political and security matters. FRUS documents show that Kosovo's region has held strategic significance for multiple U.S. administrations, which explains the consistency of American support. The roundtable remarks by

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<sup>44</sup> U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations With Kosovo," Fact Sheet. State Department country page:  
<https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-kosovo/>

<sup>45</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, "Transatlantic Relations Roundtable."

<sup>46</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Russia's War in Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Aspects*, R47068, updated 14 September 2023. CRS public access page:  
<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47068>

<sup>47</sup> FRUS, 1977–1980, vol. XX, doc. 257.

Ambassador Ilir Dugoli reinforce this view by framing Kosovo as a partner that stabilizes relations at a time when larger states negotiate more complex obligations.<sup>48</sup>

#### **D. Comparative Observation on the Three Cases**

The three cases illustrate how national responses to recent crises influenced the direction of the transatlantic partnership. Germany advanced its defense commitments while managing domestic constraints, Romania strengthened its institutional ties to NATO while expanding defense spending, and Kosovo maintained clear alignment through constitutional and political commitments. NATO expenditure data and official government statements support these observations, and the similarities across them show that each state acted within established alliance structures.<sup>49, 50, 51</sup> FRUS materials demonstrate that these regions have long mattered to U.S. policymakers, which explains why their recent choices reinforced continuity in the partnership.<sup>52, 53</sup> The roundtable discussion confirmed that these developments contributed to recalibration rather than fragmentation, since each country adjusted its policies while remaining within the shared diplomatic and security framework.<sup>54</sup>

### **V. Institutional Pressures Within the United States**

#### **A. Problems in Congressional Functioning**

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<sup>48</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, “Transatlantic Relations Roundtable.”

<sup>49</sup> NATO, 2022 Strategic Concept.

<sup>50</sup> Scholz, “Zeitenwende Policy Statement.”

<sup>51</sup> Constitution of Kosovo.

<sup>52</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

<sup>53</sup> FRUS, 1977–1980, vol. XX, doc. 257.

<sup>54</sup> Krasno Global Policy Forum, “Transatlantic Relations Roundtable.”

Congressional hearings reveal that internal political divisions limited the government's ability to act consistently during a period when European allies sought clarity.<sup>55</sup> Testimony from members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee shows concern that delays in appropriations or unexpected procedural conflicts risked undermining the credibility of U.S. commitments. Published transcripts indicate that lawmakers regarded these issues as structural problems rather than temporary obstacles created by partisan disagreement. FRUS documents from earlier decades show that domestic political divisions regularly shaped the resources available for foreign policy, which places recent debates within a recurring pattern of institutional constraint.<sup>56</sup> This continuity suggests that congressional conditions influenced the diplomatic environment as much as executive preferences did.

## **B. Administrative Shifts Across the Two Presidencies**

A closer comparison of the two strategies shows that the change in tone shaped how each administration communicated expectations to European partners while relying on the same strategic foundation visible throughout earlier periods. The 2017 strategy used competitive framing to argue that allied governments should assume greater responsibility, yet it still identified the alliance as central to American security planning. The 2022 strategy reversed the rhetorical emphasis by stressing shared democratic commitments, although it preserved expectations about collective action and common planning. FRUS evidence supports this interpretation because earlier administrations adjusted their language after elections without altering the structural purpose of cooperation, which reveals a stable pattern of adaptation.<sup>57</sup> The

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<sup>55</sup> House Foreign Affairs Committee, “Ukraine Assistance Hearing.”

<sup>56</sup> FRUS, 1981–1988, vol. III, doc. 93, pp. 317-319.

<sup>57</sup> FRUS, 1977–1980, vol. XX, doc. 257.

combined material demonstrates that the differences between the strategies reflected political messaging rather than a shift in the core principles that guided the transatlantic relationship.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The years between 2016 and 2025 introduced significant challenges to the transatlantic partnership, yet the primary sources reviewed in this study show that these pressures unfolded within institutions that preserved cooperation. Public documents demonstrate that tariff disputes and burden-sharing debates created friction, although they also revealed the stability of long-standing diplomatic practices that allowed both sides to manage disagreements. The response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine confirmed that shared security interests guided the partnership, as European governments increased defense spending and deepened coordination with the United States through NATO structures that had supported earlier periods of strain. Economic data and official statements show that commercial interdependence limited the impact of political disputes, since both partners retained incentives to maintain predictable relations across sectors influenced by global volatility. The combined evidence from contemporary records and earlier FRUS materials supports the conclusion that the period represented recalibration rather than rupture, with institutions, economic ties, and shared security commitments shaping the evolution of transatlantic relations.

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