

US foreign policy

Trump wants 5% Nato defence spending target, Europe told

US president-elect's closest foreign policy aides indicate he will continue arming Ukraine while pursuing end to war



Donald Trump meets Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris this month © Ukraine Presidency/Ukrainian PresidencyZUMA Press Wire/dpa

Lucy Fisher in London, **Henry Foy** in Brussels and **Felicia Schwartz** in Washington
YESTERDAY

Donald Trump's team has told European officials that the incoming US president will demand Nato member states increase defence spending to 5 per cent of GDP, but plans to continue supplying military aid to Ukraine.

The US president-elect's closest foreign policy aides shared his intentions in discussions with senior European officials this month, according to people familiar with the talks, as he firms up his policies towards Europe and [Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#).

During his White House campaign, [Trump](#) vowed to cut off aid to Ukraine, force Kyiv into immediate peace talks, and leave Nato allies undefended if they failed to spend enough on defence — spooking European capitals.

But in a boost for allies deeply concerned over their ability to support and protect Ukraine without Washington's backing, Trump now intends to maintain US military supplies to Kyiv after his inauguration, according to three other people briefed on the discussions with western officials.

At the same time Trump is to demand Nato more than double its 2 per cent spending target — which only 23 of the alliance's 32 members currently meet — to 5 per cent, two people briefed on the conversations said.

One person said they understood that Trump would settle for 3.5 per cent, and that he was planning to explicitly link higher defence spending and the offer of more favourable trading terms with the US. “It’s clear that we are talking about 3 per cent or more for [Nato’s June summit in] The Hague summit,” said another European official briefed on Trump’s thinking.

Nato allies are already in discussions about [increasing the target](#) to 3 per cent at that meeting of leaders in June, but many capitals are concerned about the difficult fiscal decisions that would be required to do so.

According to the White House’s [office of management and budget](#), the US will spend about 3.1 per cent of GDP on defence in 2024. During the last year of Trump’s first presidency in 2020, Pentagon spending hit 3.4 per cent.

Key European Nato allies — including France, Germany, the UK, Italy and Poland — met Nato secretary-general Mark Rutte and Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Brussels on Wednesday night to discuss how the continent would [adapt defence policies](#) in response to Trump’s return.

German chancellor Olaf Scholz separately had a telephone call with Trump on Thursday during a summit of EU leaders. Scholz later told reporters that he was “quite confident that the US and Europe will continue their support to Ukraine”. Senior British security officials travelled to Washington earlier this month to assess the president-elect’s plans.

While Trump still believes Ukraine should never be given membership of Nato, and wants an immediate end to the conflict, the president-elect believed that supplying weapons to Kyiv after a ceasefire would ensure a “peace through strength” outcome, they added.

After 24 hours of meetings with Nato and EU leaders in Brussels this week, Zelenskyy said on Thursday that European pledges to defend Ukraine would [“not be sufficient”](#) without US involvement.

Additional reporting by George Parker in London

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