



Between Mediator Ambitions and Real Leadership: France's Role to Support Ukraine in the Face of Growing U.S. Isolationism

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ABSTRACT

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The paper focuses on a systemic analysis of the trilateral interaction between France, the United States, and Ukraine amid the profound transformation of the international security environment following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022. At the core of the analysis is the evolving nature of Western support for Ukraine, shaped by the strategic reassessment of the United States' global role and the growing determination of European states to operationalize the concept of strategic autonomy. The study examines the consequences of declining transatlantic cohesion for the redistribution of responsibility in guaranteeing European security, with particular emphasis on France's increasing activity within both bilateral and multilateral support frameworks for Ukraine. French policy is acquiring a new systemic quality, combining diplomatic engagement, military-technical assistance, and economic cooperation, with a specific focus on joint defense production initiatives and strategic coordination within the EU framework. In parallel, the United States is experiencing rising domestic political polarisation, external policy inconsistency, and a tilt toward isolationism—all of which significantly affect allied strategic behaviour and drive a reconfiguration of responsibilities within the Western coalition. The socio-political dynamics in France reveal a growing public endorsement of support for Ukraine, coupled with a critical perception of the United States' reliability as a long-term ally. The findings point to the emergence of a new trilateral configuration in which France increasingly assumes a stabilizing role within Europe's security architecture, while the United States is perceived as a strategically unpredictable actor. For Ukraine, this shift necessitates a strategic recalibration toward diversified formats of partnership, intensified engagement with European actors, and a reconsideration of its foreign policy priorities in response to a dynamically evolving global order.

KEYWORDS

France, foreign policy, Ukraine, USA, war.



Між амбіціями посередника та реальним лідерством: роль Франції в підтримці України в умовах зростання ізоляціонізму США

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СТАТТЯ

АНОТАЦІЯ

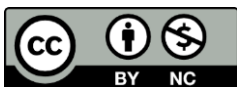
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Дослідження зосереджено на системному аналізі тристоронньої взаємодії між Францією, США та Україною в умовах глибокої трансформації міжнародного безпекового середовища після повномасштабного вторгнення Російської Федерації в Україну у 2022 році. У центрі уваги — трансформація підходів до підтримки України з боку ключових західних акторів на тлі стратегічної переоцінки ролі Сполучених Штатів у глобальній політиці, а також посилення прагнення європейських держав до реалізації концепції стратегічної автономії. Розглядається вплив зниження трансатлантичної згуртованості на новий розподіл відповідальності за гарантування європейської безпеки, що особливо проявляється у зростаючій активності Франції в межах двосторонніх і багатосторонніх форматів підтримки України. Французька політика набуває нової системної якості, синтезуючи дипломатичні інструменти, військово-технічну допомогу та економічну співпрацю, з акцентом на спільне виробництво оборонної продукції та стратегічну координацію з партнерами в межах ЄС. США, водночас, демонструють зростання внутрішньої політичної поляризації, тенденції до зовнішньополітичної непослідовності та ізоляціонізму, що безпосередньо впливає на поведінкові орієнтири союзників і сприяє перегляду конфігурації відповідальності всередині західної коаліції. Соціально-політична динаміка у Франції підтверджує стабільну громадську підтримку допомоги Україні, супроводжувану критичним сприйняттям надійності США як довгострокового союзника. Результати дослідження засвідчують формування нової конфігурації тристоронньої взаємодії, у якій Франція дедалі більше виконує стабілізуючу функцію у європейській безпековій архітектурі, тоді як США постають як фактор стратегічної мінливості. Для України це означає необхідність стратегічної адаптації до нових форматів партнерства, розширення політичної і військово-економічної взаємодії з європейськими державами та переосмислення пріоритетів зовнішньої політики в умовах динамічної трансформації глобального порядку.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

Франція, зовнішня політика, Україна, США, війна.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, systemic transformations in international relations have profoundly reshaped the architecture of European security and redefined the paradigms of interaction among key global actors. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 served as a critical catalyst—not only altering the regional security landscape but also triggering a broader reconfiguration of strategic alliances and diplomatic priorities on a global scale. Within this context, the evolving dynamics of trilateral relations between the United States, France, and Ukraine have acquired analytical significance, serving as a lens through which to examine broader trends in contemporary international politics and the structural challenges confronting the global order.

This study investigates the structural interplay among these three pivotal actors over the period 2014–2025, identifying a marked qualitative shift, especially following the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 and the subsequent change in U.S. political leadership in 2025. This transformative phase merits rigorous scholarly inquiry to delineate the emerging contours of European security and assess the trajectories of the evolving international system.

The central hypothesis posits that the relations among the United States, France, and Ukraine have transitioned from a model of asymmetric interdependence to a more intricate, multipolar framework characterized by the redistribution of strategic responsibilities and leadership initiatives. It is argued that the gradual retrenchment of U.S. engagement in European security affairs—especially evident after the 2024 presidential elections—has generated a strategic vacuum. France, leveraging its status as a European nuclear power with a tradition of autonomous diplomacy, has sought to fill this gap by assuming a more assertive role in regional crisis management.

France's role within this strategic triangle has undergone significant evolution: from an intermediary between Ukraine and Russia within the framework of the Normandy Format to a provider of direct military and diplomatic support for Kyiv and, more recently, a mediator between Ukraine and the United States in the aftermath of Donald Trump's election in 2024. These developments reflect Europe's broader strategic challenges amid growing U.S. isolationism and the rise of new regional security dynamics—highlighting the urgent imperative to consolidate a credible and operational framework for European “strategic autonomy.”

2. Problem Statement

This study seeks to explore the qualitative evolution of structural relations among these three key actors—France, the United States, and Ukraine—over the period 2014–2025, with particular emphasis on the transformative developments following the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2022 and the political leadership transition in the United States in 2025. The paper aims to identify the underlying patterns and driving forces shaping this trilateral interaction and to evaluate their broader implications for the future configuration of European security and the international order.

3. Methods and Materials

The research methodology employs an interdisciplinary qualitative approach that integrates the analysis of diplomatic sources, political statements, and both economic and statistical data. The study examines the evolution of trilateral relations between France, the United States, and Ukraine against the backdrop of increasing geopolitical volatility. Its empirical foundation consists of official governmental documents, publications from leading international media outlets, economic indicators produced by state institutions and research organizations, as well as public opinion data. Methodologically, the research is grounded in a chronological reconstruction of diplomatic sequences, a comparative analysis of strategic narratives, and a contextual assessment of the foreign policy orientations of Washington and Paris vis-à-vis Kyiv. Special emphasis is placed on official statements by representatives of the three governments and transcripts of joint press conferences, which offer valuable insights into the evolution of diplomatic rhetoric and strategic positioning. The study follows a chronological structure, delineating the key phases in the transformation of trilateral relations. Quantitative changes in the intensity of cooperation were assessed through statistical data on bilateral trade and military-technical assistance, while qualitative shifts in strategic priorities were analyzed through content analysis of official declarations and policy initiatives. The research acknowledges the political sensitivity of the topic and ensures analytical reliability through critical triangulation, cross-verification of national positions, and

strict adherence to academic standards of research ethics. A comparative assessment of French and American approaches to supporting Ukraine highlights the distinctive characteristics of their respective foreign policy strategies and identifies the key drivers shaping the emerging European security architecture. This is analyzed within the broader framework of increasing EU strategic autonomy and the ongoing transformation of transatlantic relations.

4. Results and Discussion

The transformational dynamics of the contemporary international environment underscore the urgent need for a systematic re-evaluation of the foundations of interstate cooperation. Heightened security risks, growing economic volatility, and the realignment of global alliances are collectively shaping a new configuration of political relations. Within this evolving context, the strategic dimension of the trilateral interaction among the United States, France, and Ukraine has undergone qualitatively new characteristics since 2022. In the wake of a substantial reshuffling of global influence and the shift in U.S. leadership in 2025, a reorientation of foreign policy priorities is underway—reshaping the core foundations of the three states' external strategies and deepening their mutual strategic interdependence.

4.1. Diplomatic formats and models of France's partnership over the war in Ukraine in 2014–2021

French policy towards the war in Ukraine between 2014 and 2025 reveals a consistent and adaptive evolution, shaped by a combination of internal political considerations and external geopolitical shifts. During the initial phase (2014–2021), France's involvement was primarily limited to diplomatic engagement, with a focus on preserving the unity of the European Union and fulfilling its international commitments within frameworks such as the G7 and the United Nations Security Council [19]. The second phase, triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, marked a significant recalibration of France's position, as Paris intensified its support for Kyiv while maintaining a delicate balance between bilateral solidarity and alignment with overarching European interests [32]. A new foreign policy dynamic emerged following Donald Trump's return to power in the United States, prompting France to reassess its strategic posture and to assume a more proactive role in supporting Ukraine amid the partial retrenchment of American engagement.

In analyzing the first phase, it is essential to underscore that in the context of shifting transatlantic relations and evolving U.S. foreign policy priorities, France's increased engagement was reflected in its active participation within the Weimar Triangle—an informal trilateral platform comprising Paris, Berlin, and Warsaw. In response to the absence of a unified EU stance on Russian aggression, the Weimar Triangle gained importance as a potential mechanism for political coordination and the formulation of common European security strategies [17]. Beginning in 2014, France, alongside Germany and Poland, engaged in a series of diplomatic initiatives, including acting as a guarantor in negotiations between the Ukrainian government and the opposition and issuing joint condemnations of the annexation of Crimea. These efforts positioned Paris as a key mediator in shaping European policy toward Ukraine and expanded its capacity to influence the strategic trajectory of the EU's eastern flank [10].

However, the Weimar Triangle ultimately failed to deliver an effective mediation framework in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This shortcoming exposed the institutional limitations of European multilateral diplomacy, particularly in the face of divergent national interests and strategic visions. A major constraining factor was the Russian Federation's persistent opposition to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration and its instrumentalization of the Donbas conflict as a tool of geopolitical leverage. The lack of consensus among the Triangle's members—especially regarding Ukraine's strategic relevance to European security—and the inconsistent positions of Berlin and Paris vis-à-vis Moscow hindered the development of a coherent and unified European response to Russian aggression [36].

In February 2014, amid the intensifying political crisis in Ukraine, Poland initiated a high-level emergency diplomatic mission under the auspices of Weimar Triangle coordination [13]. In response to the rapidly deteriorating situation in Kyiv, the foreign ministers of France (Laurent Fabius), Germany (Frank-Walter Steinmeier), and Poland (Radosław Sikorski) jointly undertook a mission to the Ukrainian capital. These talks represented a prompt foreign policy intervention by key European actors, aimed at de-escalating tensions and stabilizing the domestic political environment. The diplomatic efforts culminated in the signing of a political agreement on February 21, 2014, which symbolized a

temporary diplomatic breakthrough and underscored France's role as a formal guarantor of compromise at a critical juncture in regional security dynamics [16].

Given the escalation of hostilities in eastern Ukraine necessitated the creation of a new negotiation format involving the direct parties to the conflict. France's active engagement within the Weimar Triangle and its role in the February 2014 diplomatic mission laid the groundwork for its involvement in a new diplomatic mechanism. This format, subsequently referred to in contemporary political discourse as the Normandy Four, was inaugurated in June 2014 on the sidelines of the 70th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy. It brought together Ukraine and Russia as the primary actors in the conflict, with France and Germany serving as mediators, and was aimed at achieving a diplomatic resolution to the war in the Donbas. From the outset, the positions of the involved parties diverged markedly: while Kyiv demanded the full restoration of its territorial integrity, Moscow sought to legitimize the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR/LPR) under its influence [29].

Although a ceasefire was initially declared under the Minsk I agreement, the ongoing violence necessitated a second agreement—Minsk II—adopted in February 2015. This subsequent package of measures included provisions for local elections, amnesty for combatants, special status for the occupied territories, and, as a final step, the restoration of Ukrainian control over the state border. The deferral of this latter provision became a significant point of contention and internal criticism within Ukraine [10].

The Normandy Format meeting in Paris in October 2015 reaffirmed the absence of viable alternatives to the Minsk framework. Ukraine insisted that any elections in the occupied territories be held strictly under Ukrainian legislation, while the separatist forces—backed by the Russian Federation—pushed for implementation on their own terms. France and Germany, serving as intermediaries, advocated compromise to preserve the continuity of political dialogue [25].

At this stage, France's diplomatic strategy prioritized the pursuit of regional stability through de-escalation (*désescalade*). Paris adopted a more moderate stance toward Moscow compared to other European actors, such as the United Kingdom or Poland, reflecting its broader strategic priorities, particularly in the Middle East [16].

The Paris 2015 summit became emblematic of a temporary diplomatic compromise. While the agreements facilitated further negotiations, they failed to resolve the core strategic contradictions among the parties. Despite growing skepticism in Ukrainian society, the Normandy Format retained its relevance as a rare and functional platform for political communication in the absence of viable alternatives. Throughout this period, Russia repeatedly violated the provisions of the Minsk Agreements. In parallel, the United States introduced additional restrictive measures, expanding its sanctions regime to target critical sectors of the Russian economy—including energy, finance, and defense [29]. These measures were not only a reaction to the escalation in the Donbas but also a strategic effort to limit the Kremlin's capacity to sustain military operations. The administration of President Barack Obama consistently encouraged the European Union to align its sanctions policy with that of Washington, offering both political and technical support to EU member states in overcoming internal divisions regarding the scope and necessity of anti-Russian measures [33].

The experience of the Normandy Format exposed the fundamental limitations of European mediation mechanisms when dealing with conflicts involving actors that systematically challenge the foundations of the international order. Despite Paris's ambitious vision—grounded in the idea of constructive dialogue with Russia and the aspiration to build a "new security architecture" in Europe—French diplomacy failed to achieve a breakthrough either in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements or in curbing the Kremlin's escalatory actions. Efforts to balance relations between Kyiv and Moscow, combined with pressure on Ukraine to implement controversial political provisions without reciprocal guarantees from Russia, undermined both the effectiveness of the process and its legitimacy from the perspective of the victim state. As a result, although France's engagement was substantial and sustained, it did not lead to lasting stabilization in the Donbas region, nor did it succeed in halting the neo-imperial trajectory of the Russian Federation [20].

Simultaneously with France's diplomatic engagement and participation in European security efforts, the United States significantly increased its support for Ukraine, contributing to the construction of a new deterrence architecture vis-à-vis Russian aggression. In response to the annexation of Crimea and the intensification of the Donbas conflict, the U.S. Congress adopted the Ukraine Freedom Support Act in December 2014, authorizing up to \$350 million in defense assistance to Ukraine [5]. Although the scope and nature of U.S. assistance remained the subject of domestic political debate, the coordinated actions of the Obama administration—including the Department of State, the Department of Defense,

and NATO command structures—signaled Washington’s strategic resolve to counter Russian influence through a multidimensional approach combining military support, economic pressure, and targeted sanctions [33].

Since 2014, U.S. military assistance has become a systematic instrument for enhancing Ukraine’s defense capabilities. By the end of 2021, the cumulative value of U.S. security assistance surpassed USD 2.5 billion, accounting for approximately 92% of all external military aid received by Ukraine during this period. The majority of these funds were disbursed through the U.S. Department of Defense, increasing from USD 87 million in 2014 to USD 338 million in 2021. An additional 25% of contributions originated from other U.S. government agencies and were allocated to security-related projects. Over 80% of the total assistance was designated for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, while the remainder supported the State Border Guard Service and the National Guard [24].

Although this assistance constituted only 5–6% of Ukraine’s overall defense budget, it played a critical role in strengthening Ukraine’s technical capacity and consolidating its strategic partnerships. Structurally, more than USD 2 billion was allocated under two key programs: USD 1.35 billion through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) and USD 720 million via Foreign Military Financing (FMF). These initiatives facilitated the delivery of advanced communications equipment, Javelin anti-tank missile systems, tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), night vision devices, Mark VI patrol boats, medical evacuation kits, and satellite intelligence support [24].

Alongside material support, the United States launched a series of military training programs—most notably Fearless Guardian and Rapid Trident—aimed at preparing Ukrainian military units to operate in accordance with NATO standards [33]. Moreover, Washington coordinated international sanctions against the Russian Federation, spearheaded Moscow’s exclusion from the G8, and imposed financial restrictions on individuals and entities implicated in the violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty.

In 2021, President Joe Biden approved a targeted assistance package of USD 60 million, reaffirming Washington’s continued commitment to Ukraine [22]. However, despite the scale of support, analysts note that U.S. aid during the 2014–2021 period did not significantly alter the military balance in the Donbas or halt Russian aggression. This outcome underscored the necessity of not only technical support but also a strategic reassessment of the conflict’s underlying causes, including Russia’s resistance to Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration.

In response to these evolving dynamics in U.S. foreign policy, France began to expand its presence in both humanitarian and politico-military dimensions of cooperation with Ukraine, notwithstanding internal budgetary constraints and political challenges [1].

According to French strategic policy documents adopted after 2022, the United States remains one of France’s primary partners, yet increasing emphasis has been placed on the development of autonomous European security capabilities.

4.2. Instruments of security and economic support for Ukraine after 2022: strategies of the United States and France

The emergence of new security challenges was paralleled by an intensification of economic cooperation, particularly with Ukraine’s principal European and transatlantic partners. Notably, the transformation of French-Ukrainian relations revealed a growing convergence between the economic and security dimensions, which had previously evolved as largely separate spheres. According to the State Customs Service of Ukraine, bilateral trade between Ukraine and France reached USD 2.2 billion in 2023—an increase from USD 1.8 billion in 2022. Imports from France accounted for USD 1.7 billion of this total. Moreover, French investment in the reconstruction of Ukraine’s defense-industrial base grew substantially, rising from €17 million in 2022 to €189 million by 2025. A key focus has been the establishment of joint ventures for the production of components for military equipment [6].

In parallel, Ukraine’s trade relations with the United States also intensified. In 2024, Ukrainian exports to the U.S. reached USD 874.9 million—representing a 68.7% increase compared to the estimated USD 518.6 million in 2023. Meanwhile, imports from the United States to Ukraine in 2024 amounted to USD 3.5 billion, marking a 21.3% increase from USD 2.89 billion in the previous year [6]. The structure of Ukraine’s exports to the U.S. was dominated by three primary categories: metallurgical products (ferrous and non-ferrous metals), agricultural commodities, and machinery and equipment. A pivotal role in advancing the bilateral economic agenda was played by U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine’s Economic Recovery, Penny Pritzker, who facilitated investment flows and the coordination of joint recovery initiatives. Inter-parliamentary engagement also expanded, with regular visits by Verkhovna Rada delegations to Washington to discuss strategic defense and security cooperation [34].

France's approach to military assistance has been distinguished by its emphasis on high-tech capabilities rather than volume. According to the French Ministry of Defense, since February 24, 2022, France has provided Ukraine with military equipment worth €2.615 billion and contributed an additional €1.2 billion to the European Peace Facility (EPF) [18]. Unlike the United States—which prioritized large-scale deliveries of artillery ammunition—France adopted a selective strategy focused on technologically advanced systems. These included 49 Caesar self-propelled howitzers (as of 2023), 18 SCALP-EG long-range missile systems, Milan anti-tank weapons, and Crotale and Mistral air defense systems. While more limited in quantity, the qualitative structure of French assistance significantly enhanced Ukraine's defense capabilities [34]. According to estimates by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, France provided Ukraine with approximately €4.8 billion in aid between 2022 and 2025—equivalent to 0.2% of its GDP [15]. Although this figure remains lower than the contributions of the United States, Germany, or the United Kingdom, the high technological value of French aid has amplified its strategic utility to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. A distinctive feature of the French communication strategy is its restrained public disclosure of assistance volumes. In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon model of transparency, France opts for limited publicity, consistent with its diplomatic tradition of discretion and its intent to avoid exacerbating tensions with the Russian Federation [28].

4.3. Europe's strategic autonomy and France's adaptation to shifting transatlantic dynamics

In the context of deepening isolationist tendencies in the United States and the evolving American approach to international obligations, France and its European partners have faced the imperative of reassessing their own strategic orientation. The primary challenge for Paris has been the development of a capable, mobile, and autonomous European security system that can operate independently of Washington's security guarantees.

Against this backdrop, the concept of strategic autonomy has evolved from a normative aspiration into a functional necessity. The trajectory of political declarations and diplomatic initiatives illustrates a gradual shift away from structural reliance on the transatlantic framework toward the articulation of independent European defense agency. France, assuming a pivotal role in this process, has consistently advocated for strategic independence as a natural extension of its national doctrine of security sovereignty [30]. As early as 1950, French Prime Minister René Pleven proposed the creation of a supranational European army under the authority of common political institutions. Although this initiative was ultimately rejected by the French Parliament due to concerns over national sovereignty, it established the conceptual foundation for future defense integration formats [9]. In line with this strategic vision, Paris has implemented a multifaceted agenda, including the launch of the European Intervention Initiative in 2017, active participation in the development of the European Defence Fund, and the institutional promotion of the concept of a "Europe of defence." While aligning national interests with the broader collective security agenda, France continues to recognize NATO's foundational role in guaranteeing continental stability—positioning strategic autonomy not as a substitute for, but as a complement to, transatlantic cooperation [21].

The notion of European strategic autonomy has gained renewed relevance in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the resulting transformation of the European security landscape. It is progressively transitioning from a declarative political postulate to an operational framework for enhancing the European Union's institutional capacity to respond swiftly and comprehensively to emerging threats. A significant milestone in this evolution was the adoption of the Strategic Compass in 2022, a doctrinal roadmap that defines the EU's security and defense objectives through 2030. Key priorities include the establishment of a rapid deployment capacity, enhanced cybersecurity capabilities, and institutionalized partnerships with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. As the principal ideological and political advocate of this paradigm, France actively promotes deeper defense integration, the advancement of joint technological capabilities, and the reduction of critical dependencies on external suppliers in strategically vital sectors [3]. Within the framework of the Strategic Compass, France has taken consistent steps to expand bilateral defense cooperation with Ukraine, particularly in areas such as military training, operational coordination, and political-military partnership. Importantly, the Strategic Compass reiterates NATO's central role as the structural guarantor of European security, framing strategic autonomy not in opposition to the United States or the Alliance, but within the logic of a "twin-pillar" architecture. This concept envisions the simultaneous strengthening of the European Union's internal defense capabilities and the intensification of

coordination with transatlantic allies, thereby ensuring a more resilient and balanced security framework for the continent [26].

The strengthening of France's role within the European security architecture is accompanied by a set of strategic challenges that have become increasingly pressing in light of a potential reduction in U.S. engagement. Sustaining long-term support for Ukraine will not only require substantial resources from Paris and its European partners, but also a readiness to accept heightened political and operational risks. At the same time, the absence of a unified intra-European consensus on policy toward Russia continues to complicate the formulation of a coherent and effective common strategy. In this context, maintaining political resolve amid economic constraints and rising internal polarization within the European Union is of particular strategic importance.

Within the framework of intergovernmental dialogue, France and Ukraine have coordinated arms deliveries, sanctions policy toward Russia, and matters of European integration. Parliamentary diplomacy has also played a supporting role in deepening bilateral dialogue and reinforcing Ukraine's reform trajectory. A notable initiative in this regard has been the creation and training of the Anna Kyiv Brigade, a flagship project symbolizing an enhanced defense partnership. The program included the training of approximately 3,500 Ukrainian soldiers and the provision of French-made weapons. However, the brigade's operation faced several difficulties, including instances of desertion, personnel redeployment, and improper use of military equipment. These challenges raised concerns within French defense institutions and caused temporary frictions in bilateral military cooperation [15].

In 2024, Ukraine–U.S. cooperation remained robust and strategically aligned. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visits to the United States, his address to the UN General Assembly, and frequent engagements with the U.S. administration and members of Congress underscored the continuity of key priorities in the bilateral agenda—including defense support, arms control, postwar economic recovery, and institutional transformation [12; 23].

Contrary to simplified interpretations, the U.S. hesitation to sustain military and financial assistance to Ukraine cannot be attributed solely to the rise of isolationist sentiment. Instead, it reflects a complex interplay of historical precedents, strategic calculus, and evolving geopolitical considerations. Among these are concerns about Ukraine's capacity to achieve a decisive military victory, the absence of a shared vision for postwar settlement, and a growing strategic prioritization of the U.S.–China rivalry [11].

Amid intensified diplomatic activity and shifting transatlantic dynamics, public opinion in France has become an increasingly important factor shaping national policy. A survey conducted by the Elabe Institute for BFMTV in March 2025 revealed widespread public skepticism toward U.S. foreign policy commitments: 73% of respondents stated that they no longer view the United States as a reliable ally, and 64% expressed concern over the potential spillover of the war into French territory. While 68% opposed direct French military involvement before the conclusion of hostilities, 67% were in favor of deploying French forces in a postwar peacekeeping context. Furthermore, 64% supported the continuation or increase of military aid to Ukraine. However, over 70% of respondents opposed increased taxation to fund such assistance. The survey also highlighted prevailing perceptions of political leadership: 86% of respondents viewed Russian President Vladimir Putin negatively, while 80% held similarly unfavorable views of U.S. President Donald Trump. In contrast, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was perceived positively by 65% of those surveyed. These sociological findings—particularly reactions to the public confrontation between Trump and Zelenskyy in February 2025—underscore growing public demand for a coherent and autonomous European position in managing relations with the United States and sustaining support for Ukraine [8].

In this context, the domestic political dynamics of the United States have become a factor of particular importance. Former President Donald Trump's public criticism of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy—whom he labeled a “dictator” in a post on the TruthSocial platform on February 19, 2025—sparked strong reactions from across the American political spectrum. Following what was reported as a “stormy meeting” with Ukrainian officials, the Trump administration temporarily suspended intelligence sharing with Kyiv. This development reflects broader concerns highlighted by analysts from the Stimson Center's Rethinking U.S. Grand Strategy initiative, who argue that U.S. global leadership may no longer be central to ensuring peace and prosperity, particularly as Europe moves toward greater defense self-reliance [4]. In parallel, Trump falsely accused Ukraine of provoking the war, a claim that clashed with President Zelenskyy's public call for “more truthfulness from the Trump team” [2]. These exchanges intensified domestic debates in the U.S. concerning the nature of the war, its origins, and the acceptable limits of presidential rhetoric. Several Republican senators—including Susan

Collins and Thom Tillis—publicly reaffirmed Russia's responsibility for the conflict. However, reports of U.S.–Russia negotiations held without Ukrainian participation raised concerns among both Kyiv's international partners and members of the U.S. Congress. While some legislators, such as Senators Kevin Cramer and John Thune, advocated for preserving diplomatic space to pursue peace, others expressed skepticism about bypassing Ukrainian agency in any settlement process [14].

Public opinion in France, shaped in part by these diplomatic frictions between Washington and Kyiv, has been reflected in the official rhetoric of French leadership. In a national address on March 5, 2025, President Emmanuel Macron declared the onset of a “new era” in European security. He emphasized the aggressive character of Russian policy, the erosion of transatlantic guarantees, and the need to develop an independent European defense capability. Macron advocated for increased financial mobilization without additional taxation and signaled openness to deploying a European military presence once peace is achieved in Ukraine. He also initiated a strategic dialogue on extending France's nuclear deterrent to allied European states and warned of the potential consequences of prospective U.S. trade restrictions [27].

On April 17–18, 2025, multilateral consultations were held in Paris with the participation of U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and representatives from France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ukraine. Rubio stressed the urgency of securing a ceasefire, warning that the United States could otherwise redirect its strategic focus to other global priorities. However, French and German officials reacted critically to proposals made by U.S. Special Representative Steve Vitkoff, particularly those involving potential territorial concessions by Ukraine. President Macron underscored the imperative of full European involvement in any peace settlement, while the Ukrainian delegation categorically rejected territorial discussions prior to a formal ceasefire. President Zelenskyy's statement on the need for a unified and coordinated implementation strategy further underscored the necessity of forming a consolidated transatlantic and European position [31].

The evolution of France's role in resolving the war in Ukraine illustrates a significant transformation—from its original function as a mediator within the Normandy Format, to that of an active military and diplomatic supporter of Ukraine, and, following Donald Trump's return to the U.S. presidency, to a balancing intermediary in the Kyiv–Washington dialogue.

5. Conclusions

The trilateral interaction between France, the United States, and Ukraine following 2022 reflects a qualitative transformation shaped by both shifts in the global security order and evolving domestic political dynamics—particularly in the United States. France, having transitioned from a cautious mediator to one of Ukraine's principal allies, has developed a balancing strategy that integrates principled support for Kyiv with pragmatic considerations of national interests and broader European security imperatives. The United States, while remaining the primary provider of military assistance, has experienced fluctuations in its strategic orientation following the 2025 change in administration, raising critical questions regarding the redistribution of security responsibilities among European partners.

Within this context, France has not only intensified its military and diplomatic engagement but has also assumed a prominent role in Ukraine's post-war recovery. By advancing a support model rooted in bilateral cooperation, strategic partnerships with international institutions, and sectoral specialization, Paris has successfully integrated both territorial and functional approaches. Its assistance focuses on decentralized governance, regional reconstruction, and institutional resilience, delivered through mechanisms such as the DREAM platform and collaborations with national infrastructure operators. Agreements concluded with the Government of Ukraine and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) provide for the financing of projects in critical infrastructure, energy, and digital transformation—reflecting France's strategic vision of linking humanitarian support with long-term stabilization instruments [13].

France's leadership in crisis diplomacy, its capacity to mobilize international coalitions, and the technological sophistication of its support for Ukraine have strengthened its role as one of the foremost European actors in the current geopolitical landscape. For its part, Ukraine—despite the scale of external and internal challenges—has preserved its strategic agency within this trilateral configuration. It has demonstrated institutional resilience, an ability to embed international assistance within domestic reform trajectories, and an openness to developing new partnership frameworks.

The consolidation of transatlantic and European policy vectors toward Ukraine—with France acting as a strategic intermediary—is essential in the run-up to a conditional phase in the redefinition of the continent's security architecture. The future effectiveness of this trilateral partnership will depend on the participants' collective ability to sustain unity, adaptability, and political resolve amid intensifying external threats, the realignment of global alliances, and the imperative of securing not only Ukraine's military victory but also its transformation into a stable and modern European state.

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