



### [Lingering Unease Following Rubio's Munich Security Conference Speech](#)

After U.S. Vice President JD Vance's controversial speech last year at the Munich Security Conference, European leaders were on edge in anticipation of U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's remarks at this year's latest iteration. Vance's 2025 speech was widely derided for its harsh and confrontational tone, as well as the hypocrisies surrounding his European freedom of speech and "threat from within" suppression of dissent criticisms given the Trump administration's own actions in these areas. Analysts noted that the speech served as a significant questioning of transatlantic relations and cooperation, prompting many European leaders to call for greater strategic independence from the United States. This year, observers contended that Rubio's speech struck a softer tone – quelling some of the anxiety surrounding the state of U.S.-European ties – however it still elicited a degree of concern due to it containing some of the same uncompromising Trump narratives related to areas like "civilizational erasure" via mass migration, U.S. isolationism, and the current administration's preparation to act alone on the global stage.

Even with the softer tone of Rubio's speech compared to Vance's last year, a lingering sense of caution persists among some European officials who still feel that they must pursue a greater level of strategic independence. Experts have tried to classify Rubio's remarks as ones which intended to affirm the continuation of transatlantic relations, but while at the same time making clear that U.S. interests under the Trump administration are evolving. Regarding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), for example, Rubio appeared to be signaling that the alliance must adapt to shifting strategies and priorities. President Trump's repeated contention that Europe should rely less on the United States for defense purposes has long sparked substantial apprehension that the U.S. is scaling back its support. A large-scale detachment from these ties remains unlikely, but it does appear that the United States under the Trump administration is edging away from Europe. Notable figures such as President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen agree that Europe relies too heavily on the U.S. for defense purposes. Furthermore, United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer mentioned at the security conference that the ability to preserve NATO the way it is needed for years to come can only occur if the European dimension is strengthened.

Rubio's underlying messages echoed much of the Trump administration's longstanding policy positions and stances. The Secretary of State reiterated that Europe must assume more

responsibility for its own defense, stating that while the U.S. prefers to act together, it is prepared to act alone if necessary. He warned that “mass migration” is a threat to the “cohesion of our societies,” urging European nations to do more to “regain control of their borders.” Rubio also argued for a more transactional and “pragmatic” approach to the transatlantic alliance, emphasizing “reciprocity” over traditional open-ended security guarantees. It is evident that many European leaders have already perceived a sense that the U.S. under the Trump administration is “pulling away” from these traditional guarantees, as various countries have increased their defense spending and voiced concerns over the U.S. becoming a less reliable partner. During the one-plus terms of the Trump administration, the United States has withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris Climate Agreement – both of which were moves that dismayed much of Europe. The ongoing Ukraine War also remains a primary issue for European leaders, with concern over the belief that the Trump administration has put pressure on Ukraine to accept terms that would benefit Russia more so than Kyiv. In contrast, the majority of Europe views Russia as the aggressor and the entity which should be forced to concede to terms that are much more favorable towards Ukraine.

Additionally, Trump’s pursuit of Greenland and the shift towards restricting immigration and downplaying climate initiatives represent stances that Europe does not necessarily share. The idea of acquiring Greenland, a territory of Denmark, was perceived by many European leaders as dismissive of sovereignty norms. For various European governments, proposals such as this suggested a more nationalistic posture. On immigration, while Europe remains divided internally on the issue, many governments still think that it is a humanitarian issue requiring multilateral cooperation and assistance as opposed to the viewpoint of the U.S. under Trump which reflects an emphasis on other priorities over cooperation. With respect to climate change policy, the European Union (EU) plays a central role in implementing environmental regulations and changes. Thus, there is large-scale agreement on long-term strategies and investments in green energy. As such, the EU interprets Trump skepticism on climate change policy as a shift away from the idea of shared global responsibility. For many observers, climate cooperation is not merely environmental policy but also a vital commitment to international stability and prosperity. All of this is why Rubio’s speech highlighted the U.S. shift under Trump, even if it was disguised with a softer tone and more reassuring language than Vance’s 2025 remarks. Still, other U.S. officials who spoke at the recent conference – including California Governor Gavin Newsom – sought to stress their belief in a climate-focused message and both remind and assure traditional European allies that “Trump is temporary” and that in the bigger picture, the U.S. will remain a reliable and stable partner in the coming years.