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## NEW APPROACHES OF THE USA FOREIGN POLICY TO CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: CASE STUDY OF THE BOARD OF PEACE

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This article examines the profound transformation of United States foreign policy toward Central and Eastern Europe (hereinafter CEE), marking a decisive shift from liberal hegemonism to rigid strategic selectivity and transactionalism. Characterized as the «Donroe Doctrine», this realignment synthesizes Western Hemisphere hegemony with a strictly conditional approach to European security. This reversal is driven by the prioritization of the Indo-Pacific theater and an ideological shift toward national conservatism, demanding that European allies assume primary responsibility for their defense.

To empirically evaluate this shift, the article presents a case study of the U.S. «Board of Peace» proposal introduced in January 2026. The research investigates the divergent responses of Czechia, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. The theoretical foundation relies on Alex Mintz's Poliheuristic Theory and Robert Putnam's two-level game framework. These theories explain how domestic political constraints and international bargaining environments dictate foreign policy decision-making.

The main findings demonstrate that U.S. assertiveness does not guarantee alignment among its smaller regional allies. Instead, reactions are deeply mediated by domestic institutional architectures. In states experiencing institutional cohabitation or constitutional complexities, like Czechia and Poland, the win-sets for accepting the proposal are significantly narrowed, leading to delays. In Romania and Slovakia, fragile coalitions create decision-making limbo or rejection, as governments seek to maintain alignment with European Union norms. Conversely, Hungary serves as a structural counterexample, where a consolidated political environment enabled unequivocal support. Ultimately, as long as coalition weaknesses persist, CEE elites will prioritize domestic survivability over alignment with Washington.

*Key words:* United States foreign policy, Donald Trump, Central and Eastern Europe, Board of Peace, Poliheuristic theory, Two-level game.

The 2025 Munich Security Conference represents a definitive bifurcation point in the contemporary architecture of transatlantic relations, marking a formalized departure from the paradigm of liberal hegemonism toward a model of rigid strategic selectivity. Vice President J.D. Vance's address functioned not merely as a reiteration of historical burden-sharing grievances, but as a declarative manifesto of the new administration's foreign policy calculus, which fundamentally alters the security posture for European allies, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe. As insightfully highlighted in the analysis by the German Marshall Fund [1], Vance's rhetoric clarified a new structural division of labor wherein the United States intends



to manage macroeconomic and geopolitical negotiations, while simultaneously delegating the immediate financial and security burdens of implementation directly to Europe. This strategic realignment is inextricably linked to Washington's accelerated reorientation toward the Indo-Pacific; as Vance explicitly articulated regarding the Asia Pivot, «it is an important part of our shared alliance that Europeans have to step up while America focuses on the regions of the world that are in profound danger» [2]. Consequently, this geopolitical pivot exposes the collapse of the unconditional transatlantic idealism that previously guaranteed European defense, shifting the discourse away from collective military budgets toward a fundamental societal and values-based divide between the U.S. and its traditional partners [3].

At the core of this geopolitical recalibration is the implicit codification of what can be conceptually defined in international relations theory as the «Donroe Doctrine» – a synthesis of the traditional Monroe Doctrine's territorial hegemony and radical transactionalism. This emerging paradigm delineates a bifurcated global theater: while the Western Hemisphere remains a zone of indisputable U.S. strategic primacy, the rest of the world, including the European continent, is relegated to a transactional zone where security guarantees are contingent upon strict *quid pro quo* arrangements. Researchers at the Wilson Center [4] emphasize that Vance deliberately shifted the discourse away from conventional NATO commitments toward internal political compliance, thereby establishing a strategy of «services conditional on total compliance» rather than mutual interdependence. This commodification of security signifies that alliances outside the immediate U.S. hemisphere are no longer sustained by the shared defense of democratic values – a desinsecration Vance underscored by warning European leaders that «if you govern a country in fear of your own voters, America is going to be able to do nothing for you» [2]. Ultimately, the United States is transitioning from its historical role as a principled protector to a transactional dominator, compelling CEE states to adapt to a reality where American military and diplomatic support is no longer an inherited right, but a commodity that must be continuously purchased through reciprocal economic and strategic concessions.

### **Determinants of the Strategic Reversal: Reasons for the Trump Administration's Change in Approach**

The primary catalyst for the Trump administration's strategic realignment is rooted in a fundamental reassessment of global threat hierarchies, specifically the definitive prioritization of the Indo-Pacific theater over the traditional Euro-Atlantic axis. This structural «Asia Pivot» is driven by the prevailing macroeconomic and security consensus within the administration that the People's Republic of China poses an existential, systemic challenge to American hegemony, whereas the Russian Federation is increasingly compartmentalized as a localized European disruptor that does not warrant the indefinite expenditure of finite U.S. military-industrial resources. As Vance unequivocally articulated at the 2025 Munich Security Conference, the operational and financial realities of the United States necessitate a strict division of labor wherein «Europeans have to step up while America focuses on the regions of the world that are in profound danger» [2]. This geographical reprioritization is inextricably linked to the administration's economic nationalism, which vehemently rejects the historical paradigm of European defense subsidized by American taxpayers. Consequently, the bilateral discourse has shifted from fostering transatlantic interdependence to enforcing stringent burden-shifting, a process that fundamentally transforms the United States from a benevolent protector into a transactional enforcer. The explicit expectation is that European nations must assume the primary logistical and financial responsibility for their own security architecture, a demand starkly summarized by Vance's assertion that Europe must «make a decisive step forward for its own defense» in the immediate future, thereby relieving Washington of its disproportionate geopolitical burden [2].

Furthermore, this strategic reversal is underpinned by a profound ideological metamorphosis within the Republican establishment, characterized by the definitive marginalization of neoconservative interventionism in favor of an unapologetic national conservatism. This insular ideological framework evaluates foreign policy engagements exclusively through the prism of immediate, tangible dividends for the domestic American electorate, effectively dismantling the illusion of a globalized security apparatus predicated on shared liberal values. In this context, the rhetorical justification of «protecting democracy» – which historically mobilized bipartisan American support for alliances in Central and Eastern Europe – has been systematically desacralized and subordinated to raw transactional utility. Vance explicitly challenged the moral authority of European allies to demand unconditional support, arguing that policies framed as the defense of democracy are fundamentally hypocritical when European institutions themselves face internal crises of legitimacy and electoral integrity [2]. Moreover, this national conservative doctrine inherently minimizes the severity of external, specifically Russian, threats to allied nations if their internal institutional resilience is deemed inadequate. By dismissively noting that a democracy vulnerable to a «few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising from a foreign nation» was never truly robust to begin with [2], Vance signaled that Washington will no longer underwrite the security of fragile states based on ideological affinity. Ultimately, this ideological shift cements a purely utilitarian approach, dictating that any U.S. engagement outside the immediate strategic perimeter of the Western Hemisphere will be strictly conditional, transactional, and devoid of inherited democratic obligations.

#### **Case Study: The U.S. Board of Peace Proposal and Reactions in Central and Eastern Europe**

In January 2026, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, U.S. President Donald Trump formally unveiled the «Board of Peace». The initiative has demonstrated the growing divide between the U.S. and the EU, increased American assertiveness, and the neglect of the UN-centered international law system. The EU's official position was publicly unveiled by President of the European Council António Costa who noted: «We have serious doubts about a number of elements in the charter of the Board of Peace related to its scope, its governance and its compatibility with the UN Charter» [5] and highlighted that the EU is «ready to work together with the US on the implementation of the comprehensive Peace Plan for Gaza, with a Board of Peace carrying out its mission as a transitional administration» [5]. The EEAS noted that the proposed governance structure in Trump's board charter departs from what was agreed by the United Nations (UN) [6].

The EU's Central and Eastern European states' response was not unilateral, though. The leaders of the respective states have demonstrated varying approaches to the American initiative, ranging from full acceptance of the proposal to explicit rejection. The nature of the political decisions of Central and Eastern European politicians can be explained by combining the poliheuristic theory coined by Alex Mintz [7] and with Robert Putnam's two-level framework [8], which are analytically complementary but conceptually different. Poliheuristic Theory is a model that explains how political leaders make foreign policy decisions. It was developed to bridge cognitive and rational approaches to decision-making by explaining how political choices are made and what their outcomes are. The theory suggests that, at a cognitive level – «stage 1» – the choice set is reduced to politically acceptable alternatives to the decision maker. Afterwards, the process moves to a «stage 2», during which the decision maker engages in more analytical processing to minimize risks and maximize benefits. At this stage, the application of Putnam's two-level game framework can be particularly valuable, as it explains how the combination of risks and benefits (both domestically – at Level 2 and internationally – at Level 1) shapes the win sets.

Both approaches prove that the way governments and political elites in Central and Eastern Europe reacted to the invitation was driven by an adaptive foreign policy logic. Rather than producing a uniform external response, the invitation intersected with domestic political constraints, intensified existing institutional fragmentation, and altered strategic calculations, while external messages reverberated within domestic arenas and were mobilised for internal political purposes.

Among the key political constraints, there is institutional cohabitation [9] that correlates with higher levels of intra-executive conflict and cabinet instability (when a prime minister and a president share executive powers in the field of foreign policy while representing different political parties, as is the case in the Czech Republic, and Poland); weak coalitions lacking the shared ideology cementation (the cases of Romania, Slovakia, and, arguably, Poland); limitations imposed by the third actors (e.g. security dependence on the United States, and economic and normative dependence on the EU).

In **Czechia**, government officials publicly acknowledged an invitation to join the Board. On 22 January 2026, the government spokesperson announced that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was preparing a position for the cabinet [10], signaling institutional caution and procedural deliberation. However, the Czech President's immediate reservations about the lack of a publicly available charter or mandate for the BoP, and the lack of clarity on its operational mechanisms, indicated his readiness to resist governmental decisions. The President, Peter Pavel, also highlighted the financial implications of long-term membership and questioned whether the BoP was intended to serve as an alternative to, or to bypass, the United Nations Security Council, a point echoed in broader European critiques of the initiative. The burden of domestic constraints was compounded by the indirect limitations imposed by the EU.

Poliheuristic logic prompts that «stage 1» likely removed joining because it was politically complicated and could trigger domestic backlash between the President and the government. Therefore, already in February, facing potential escalation stemming from cohabitation with the President and the risk of consequences at the EU level, the government abstained from accepting the President Trump administration's proposal. Simultaneously, the need to satisfy EU commitments and respond to signals from Washington, alongside fragmented foreign policy authority, narrowed the winset in this regard. EU alignment concerns were internalized as domestic political costs. Prime Minister Babiš stressed that Czechia does not want to act alone on the issue. The Czech prime minister also acknowledged there could be potential benefits to membership, particularly economic ones. However, he emphasized that these considerations do not outweigh the political and procedural hurdles at home [11].

**Romania's** response was similarly cautious and prompted President Nikușor Dan to ask the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to analyze the proposal with particular attention to its compatibility with Romania's international obligations, including those under the UN Charter [12]. Romania's prime minister emphasized that any decision should be made in coordination with European Union partners and grounded in a clear assessment of national interest and economic context. By contrast, the leader of the coalition party Social Democratic Party (PSD), voiced unequivocal support for participation, positing that for security objectives, «the price is never too high» [13] and that financial resources could be identified to join the initiative. Applying poliheuristic theory in this regard suggests that explicit rejection was initially a non-option since it could have ruined the ruling coalition. At «stage 2», Romania calculates both the risks and benefits, though. The likelihood of delayed decisions is high, since elimination is too costly but endorsement is too risky.

A relatively similar approach was applied by **Poland**. President Karol Nawrocki had received the invitation to join Donald Trump's initiative. The country's recent electoral cycles resulted in institutional cohabitation, as a centrist, pro-European government of Donald Tusk was

challenged by the President, who held veto power. The president's unilateral acceptance of the invitation would inevitably lead to an escalation in relations with the government. Similarly, the rejection could have undermined the coalition's unity. Therefore, at «stage 1» both immediate acceptance and immediate rejection were filtered. Instead, at «stage 2» the strategic calculus includes both argumentation related to the Level 1 of Putnam's two-level game. Foreign Minister Sikorski was tasked with preparing a formal pros and cons assessment for the President, including legal and political implications, as well as questions about taxpayer burden and legitimacy relative to UN structures. Alongside the cohabitation challenge, there are constitutional requirements for parliamentary approval before any formal accession. This means the domestic win-set for joining is narrow unless the proposal is well-defined and normatively acceptable. Basically, likewise, in the case of Romania, delayed decisions are likely.

In **Slovakia**, internal debates demonstrated how domestic politics mediate foreign policy choices in practice. The nationalist SNS explicitly called on Prime Minister Robert Fico to reject the BoP invitation, arguing that permanent membership would require a \$1 billion contribution and, in their view, could represent a U. effort to bypass established international institutions like the UN. Meanwhile, members of the government and pro-EU factions insisted that any engagement with the Board first undergo a robust legal and political analysis. Neither the defense minister nor the coalition partners publicly committed to membership, illustrating how fragmented authority and competing domestic priorities shape cautious foreign policy postures. Finally, Robert Fico said that Slovakia should refuse the invitation to join Donald Trump's Peace Board [14]. He argued that the project lacks clear details and would create a parallel structure to the United Nations and emphasized that Slovakia should remain anchored in existing international institutions.

The only country that unequivocally supported the idea of the Board of Peace was Hungary. Applying Putnam's two-level game frame, it can be explained by minimized domestic ratification constraints and a consolidated populist win set. Victor Orbán controls a disciplined parliamentary supermajority, and there is no meaningful uncertainty about ratification. Moreover, the government dominates narrative framing, whereas institutional veto players are weak or politically aligned.

From a Mintz perspective, the option of joining passed the noncompensatory political filter at «stage 1» because it aligned with the government's sovereignty and «peace» narrative and did not threaten coalition stability. Consequently, decision-making shifted rapidly to Stage 2 compensatory evaluation, where ties with Washington, and symbolic differentiation within the EU could be weighed without high domestic cost.

**Summarizing**, the Central and Eastern European reactions to the U.S. Board of Peace initiative have demonstrated differentiated structural positioning within a transforming transatlantic order and reflected the impact of domestic institutional architectures and coalition configurations on the foreign policy choices. The Czech and Polish cases demonstrate how executive cohabitation and constitutional ratification procedures narrow win-sets and decisions that threaten intra-executive equilibrium are filtered at «stage 1» before calculating strategic benefits. Romania illustrates a different situation when the weakness of the coalition leads to the decision's limbo, when neither rejection nor endorsement is politically viable. Slovakia, in its turn, shows how even electorally weaker coalition actors can function as win-set spoilers when their cost of non-agreement is low.

Hungary, in this regard, is a structural counterexample. Consolidation power supported by a disciplined parliamentary majority expands the domestic win-set.

Interestingly, external assertiveness by a major power does not automatically produce alignment among smaller allies. The interaction between domestic political survivability and

international bargaining environments plays an important role. As long as cohabitation, coalition weaknesses, and EU normative gravity remain in place, Central and Eastern European political elites will remain cautious, demand conditionality, and abstain from prompt decisions bypassing institutional mediation.

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## НОВІ ПІДХОДИ ЗОВНІШНЬОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ США ЩОДО ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЇ ТА СХІДНОЇ ЄВРОПИ: ПРИКЛАД РАДИ МИРУ

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У статті розглядається глибока трансформація зовнішньої політики Сполучених Штатів щодо Центральної та Східної Європи (далі – ЦСЕ), що знаменує собою рішучий перехід від ліберального гегемонізму до жорсткої стратегічної вибірковості та транзакціоналізму. Ця переорієнтація, що характеризується як «доктрина Донро», синтезує гегемонію Західної півкулі із суворо умовним підходом до європейської безпеки. Цей поворот зумовлений пріоритезацією Індо-Тихоокеанського театру воєнних дій та ідеологічним зрушенням до консерватизму, що вимагає, щоб європейські союзники взяли на себе основну відповідальність за свою оборону.

Для емпіричної оцінки цієї зміни у статті представлено тематичне дослідження пропозиції США щодо «Ради миру», представленої у січні 2026 р. Дослідження досліджує різні реакції Чехії, Румунії, Польщі, Словаччини та Угорщини. Теоретична основа спирається на поліевристичну теорію Алекса Мінца та дворівневу ігрову структуру Роберта Патнема. Ці теорії пояснюють, як внутрішньополітичні обмеження та міжнародне середовище переговорів диктують прийняття рішень у зовнішній політиці.

Основні висновки показують, що наполегливість США не гарантує узгодженості між їхніми меншими регіональними союзниками. Натомість реакції глибоко опосередковуються внутрішньою інституційною архітектурою. У державах, що переживають інституційне співіснування або конституційні складнощі, як-от Чехія та Польща, можливості для прийняття пропозиції значно звужуються, що призводить до затримок. У Румунії та Словаччині крихкі коаліції створюють невизначеність у прийнятті рішень або відхилення, оскільки уряди прагнуть підтримувати відповідність нормам Європейського Союзу. І навпаки, Угорщина слугує структурним контрприкладом, де консолідоване політичне середовище забезпечило однозначну підтримку. Зрештою, доки зберігаються слабкі сторони коаліції, еліти Центральної та Східної Європи надаватимуть пріоритет внутрішньому виживанню, а не узгодженню з Вашингтоном.

*Ключові слова:* зовнішня політика Сполучених Штатів, Дональд Трамп, Центральна та Східна Європа, Рада миру, поліевристична теорія, дворівнева гра.

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