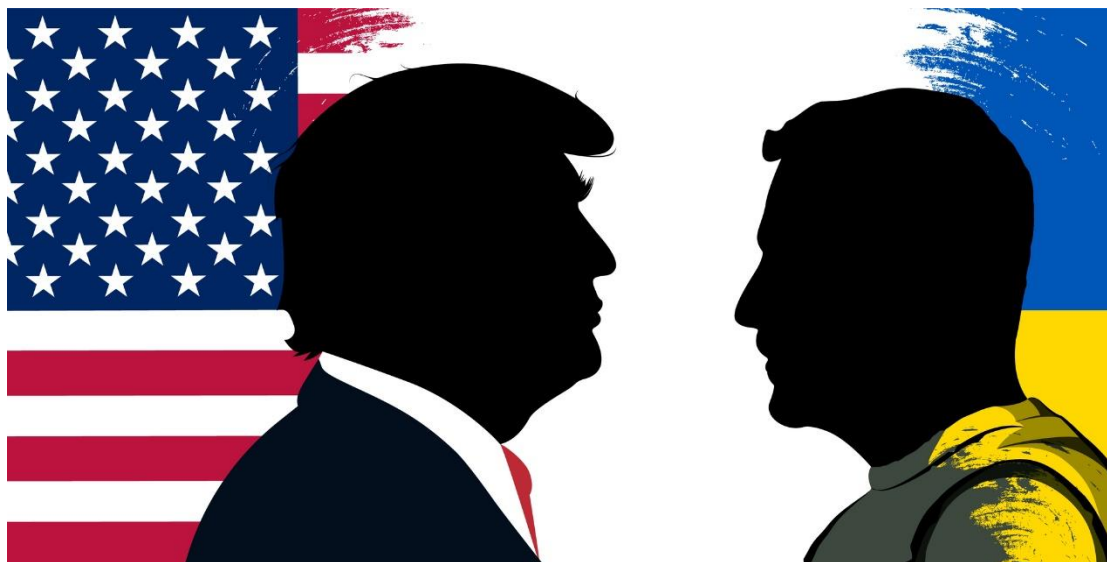


Prospects & Perspectives



Republican candidate Donald Trump's victory has sparked a number of discussions about the future of the world's security infrastructure. One of the main topics of discussion is the future of Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian war, topics that occupy an essential place in the rhetoric of the newly elected U.S. president.

Picture source: Depositphotos.

Ukraine and Trump's Re-Election: What to Prepare for

By Mariia Makarovych

The U.S. elections in the autumn of 2024 and Republican candidate Donald Trump's victory have sparked a number of discussions about the future of the world's security infrastructure. U.S. assistance, including military aid, is a significant part of security and defense plans for many regions. Given that Trump and candidates in his future administration have issued many statements,



sometimes contradictory, regarding U.S. foreign policy, the global expert community is trying to predict what changes will occur and how they will affect different countries. One of the main topics of discussion is the future of Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian war, which occupies an essential place in the rhetoric of the newly elected U.S. president.

Trump's plans to end the war

During his election campaign, Trump repeatedly said that the war in Ukraine should end and promised to achieve this result before officially taking office. He has stated his plans to do this through a negotiation process. However, the details of his plan and other information about changes in U.S. foreign policy during his presidency are unclear. The unpredictability of Trump's actions and future policy on the war in Ukraine has prompted Ukrainian officials to be cautious in their reactions and predictions about what a Trump presidency will bring to Ukraine.

According to estimates by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, the U.S. share of military aid to Ukraine from the start of the full-scale invasion until the summer of 2024 stands at almost 43%, the highest among all Ukraine's partner countries. The main concern is the possibility of reducing such assistance in order to force Ukraine to peace talks with Russia.

Peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia

For Trump, peace talks are a quick way to fulfill his campaign promise to end the war in Ukraine. Therefore, Ukrainian officials are preparing for possible attempts to organize this process. The position of President Zelenskyy and official Ukraine is that the country is ready to negotiate and end the war diplomatically. Such negotiations should include the full de-occupation of the country's territory and the withdrawal of all Russian troops to Russia. This position does not coincide with Russia's uncompromising desire to gain a foothold in four regions of Ukraine — Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia. According to Zelenskyy, Russia is not interested in ending the war but rather in creating the illusion of such a desire. Starting the negotiation process would be politically beneficial for Moscow, as it could reduce its international isolation. At the same time, Ukraine does not plan to make territorial or political concessions to Russia. Freezing the war with the partial occupation of Ukraine will only allow Russia to prepare for the next offensive, taking into account all



the lessons that Russian troops have learned since 2022.

Due to the lack of concessions from Russia and their unwillingness to withdraw from the occupied territories of Ukraine, Trump's desire for quick peace will not be realized shortly. It is in the U.S. interest to organize the process of negotiations from a strong position. At the moment, Russia is making some progress in its offensive in the Donetsk region, in part to gain a better position for itself in the event of negotiations the United States may demand. However, Russia also lacks an understanding of what to expect from the president-elect. This can be seen in the different reactions of Russian officials or state propagandists. In 2016, after Trump's victory, Russian media and statements were highly favorable. Currently, their information field is dominated by restraint and cautious statements, sometimes with pessimistic forecasts.

The situation on the battlefield does not yet give the democratic world much leverage to persuade Russia to embrace peace. Therefore, to implement such a plan, it is necessary to increase assistance to Ukraine to obtain better negotiating positions.

At the same time, Ukraine is preparing for a possible reduction in U.S. support due to the lack of a clear foreign policy plan in the new Trump administration and a plan for cooperation with Kyiv. This preparation includes active cooperation with European partners. EU countries have recently been focused on developing their military capabilities to reduce the dependence of their military-industrial complex on U.S. military capabilities. However, assistance from EU partners cannot be a complete substitute for assistance due to significantly lower production volumes. It can be a temporary solution to the problem in case of delays in supplies from the United States.

Trump's attitude towards Russia

During his first presidential term (2017-2021), Trump imposed more sanctions on Russia than the Obama administration. At that time, his administration increased military support for Ukraine, including the provision of lethal weapons. This experience may indicate that his actions after taking office regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war may differ from his statements during the pre-election campaign and after the results were announced. During the campaign, Trump took an oppositional stance to the Democrats' rhetoric, which



suggests that it may be incorrect to assume that all of his previous statements will be a clear basis for his administration's foreign policy.

In addition, the surrender of Ukraine would not be beneficial for the United States. First of all, it would significantly weaken its political position on the world stage, especially in the face of China, which is a geopolitical adversary of the United States. China is studying Russia's experience in waging war against Ukraine to develop plans to attack Taiwan. Thus, the democratic world's loss in one war could provoke or make the next one likelier. Such actions would also negatively affect Trump's reputation as a strong leader — a clear contradiction of the political image he has cultivated.

China's influence on the Russian-Ukrainian war

At the national level, Ukraine understands that changes are coming to the country with Trump's inauguration. However, it is not certain whether these changes will be positive or negative. Given that pre-election polls in the United States did not show a large gap between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, Ukraine had to prepare for any results. The United States will continue to be a strategic partner of the country, as it has been in all previous years. However, in order to achieve the best results in terms of cooperation, Ukraine should consider changing its approach to international politics. This is especially true of its attitude toward China.

In July 2024, NATO Allies declared China to be a “decisive enabler” of Russia's war against Ukraine. This is because, without the economic, information, military, and political support provided by China, Russia would not have been able to conduct successful offensive operations in Ukraine and continue the war.

In 2023 alone, exports from China to Russia reached US\$111 billion. This is 47% more than in 2022. About 90% of Russian microelectronics came from China in the same year. This allowed Russia to restore its weapons arsenal, some of which were destroyed in Ukraine's successful offensive operations in 2022. In the summer of 2024, the United States expanded the parameters for imposing secondary sanctions, making it almost impossible to make payments between China and Russia, even in Renminbi. Nevertheless, the countries are trying to circumvent these sanctions and even discussing the possibility of barter trade.



How Ukraine should prepare for changes

During his previous term, Trump pursued a strict policy of reducing China's global influence through economic sanctions. It is more likely that this practice will continue after he retakes office. Thus, China may face more serious economic sanctions and restrictions. American companies are already looking for ways to diversify their supply chains for various products to minimize cooperation with China. The practice also shows that European countries often follow U.S. policy. This also applies to their cooperation with China.

At the same time, Ukraine does not support this policy at the state level and continues to perceive China as a partner. This position has harmed Ukraine's interests at the international and national levels.

Ukraine's information work with the United States should include narratives about China's involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian war. China poses a direct threat through its cooperation with Russia. Ukraine should emphasize this and join the efforts of democratic countries to reduce the nefarious aspects of China's influence in the world. Weakening China, especially economically, would weaken Russia's position. This would create an advantage for Ukraine, the United States, and the EU and allow them to use diplomatic and economic levers to end the war in accordance with generally recognized international law — namely the liberation of Ukrainian territories and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. Such an approach to communication does not mean always playing along with Trump's or U.S. policy, an undeniable fact that Ukraine is trying to avoid accepting. Recognizing this fact will have a positive impact on the Kyiv's position in its relations with Washington, D.C. After all, containing China is one of the U.S. priorities that unites Republicans and Democrats.

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