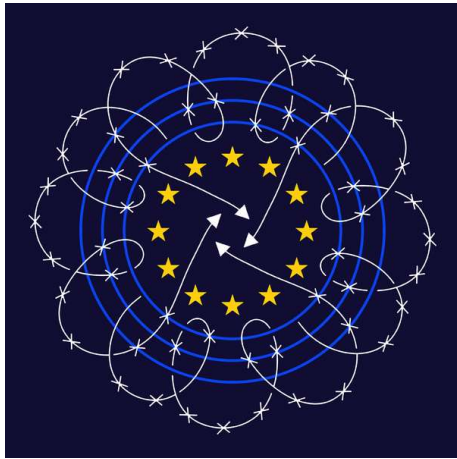


Guest Essay

# I'm the Foreign Minister of Poland. Europe Has Got the Message.

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Credit...Tim Boelaars

**By Radoslaw Sikorski**

Mr. Sikorski is the foreign minister of Poland.

I recently indulged in a guilty pleasure and rewatched “Independence Day,” the 1996 blockbuster movie about rapacious aliens trying to invade and plunder Earth. As I relished the visual fireworks — which, by the way, have aged well — one scene made me think about the real world.

Once Jeff Goldblum’s geeky scientist has figured out how to penetrate the magnetic shields of the huge, hostile spaceships, Americans rally the whole world to strike back. “About bloody time,” a British officer says. “What are they planning to do?”

The scene captured the spirit of the time. In the mid-1990s, we lived in a unipolar world in which the United States was the only unquestioned global power. In a moment of crisis, other nations expected America to come up with a solution. Thirty years later, those who turn to Washington looking for leadership might do so with less confidence.

In 2017, Mr. Trump spoke to thousands of Poles gathered on the streets of Warsaw. He told the enthusiastic crowd that “the trans-Atlantic bond between the United States and Europe is as strong as ever and maybe, in many ways, even stronger.” But, he added, “Europe must demonstrate that it believes in its future by investing its money to secure that future,” because “the fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive.”

As some allies grow weary of American power, Americans seem to be growing weary of their allies. For years — in his first term and in his recent campaign — President Donald Trump has been clear that he will put America first and has repeatedly reminded other members of NATO that the alliance is not a free ride.

Europeans finally got the message: Our security is not a service provided by the United States. It begins with us. But European security independence does not have to be incompatible with close collaboration with the United States. In an ideal world — in a safer world — there will be both.

In Europe we are acutely aware where our priorities lie. Since the start of Russia’s unprovoked war against Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union and its 27 member states have made more than \$140 billion in financial, military, humanitarian and refugee assistance available to Ukraine. European leaders have also agreed to commit up to \$54 billion, until 2027, to support Ukraine’s recovery, reconstruction and modernization. Last

November, for the [first time](#), the E.U. helped member states to make joint investments in weapons and ammunition. We are ready to do more.

Poland assumed the [presidency](#) of the Council of the European Union on Jan. 1 and put security at the top of its list. As the war in Ukraine rages just a few hundred miles from E.U. borders, we aim to lead Europe toward greater resilience *and* closer trans-Atlantic cooperation.

Mr. Trump has consistently pushed NATO allies to spend at least 2 percent of their G.D.P. on defense. These words have translated into decisions. Early in Mr. Trump's first term only [five countries](#) met the threshold — Poland among them. But last year 23 members, of 32, spent [at least 2 percent](#).

Now the bar has been raised. Mr. Trump said [in January](#) that NATO members “can all afford it, but they should be at 5 percent, not 2 percent.” Five percent is an ambitious goal for even the United States, where the Department of Defense budget is about 3.5 percent of G.D.P. But given the security threats the United States and Europe face, ambition is what we need.

Poland spends close to 5 percent of its G.D.P. on defense — the highest proportion in NATO. We have become one of the U.S. military industry's most important customers, ordering [tens of billions](#) worth of equipment since 2022. We buy Patriot missile systems, Abrams tanks, Apache helicopters and F-35 fighter jets produced in America. Europe and Poland's desire for closer military cooperation with the United States and its ambition to strengthen its own defense industry are not contradictory.

The trans-Atlantic alliance has never been a one-way street. The United States supported European defense for decades after World War II, but the only time NATO's [Article 5](#) has ever been invoked was [in response to Sept. 11](#), when allies came to America's aid. Poland sent brigades to Afghanistan and Iraq, and kept them there for almost two decades. It never sent a bill.

In 2025, those who do not wish us well are many. The [autocratic axis](#) comprising Russia, Iran, North Korea and China represents a grave threat to much of the world. To face such an alliance, America and Europe need each other more, not less — our adversaries want nothing more than to see us fragmented, plagued by economic disputes and unable to lead.

Instead, let's continue on the path of partnership, of peace through strength, as friends and allies.

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