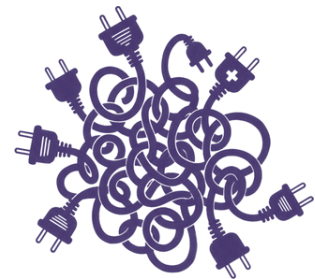


Could Europe defend itself without the US?

In resources, yes; in organization, not yet. Europe outmatches Russia on every measure except unity of command – a gap that is a choice, not fate.



Most answers to this question are 60-page think-tank PDFs. Here is the same math in plain language.

Three numbers tell the story

Europe's economy is about eight times the size of Russia's. European NATO members field around 1.9 million active troops to Russia's 1.3 million. And in 2025, European allies spent over \$574 billion on defense – even against Russia's real war spending, which German intelligence puts near €250 billion once purchasing power and hidden budgets are counted, Europe spends more.

By the arithmetic of population, money and industry, this is not a close contest. Russia is a middle-sized economy running a war machine at nearly 40 % of its federal budget – a pace it cannot hold forever. If the question were only “who has more,” the page could end here.

So what's the problem?

The problem is that “Europe” does not exist as a military actor. Those 1.9 million troops serve in about thirty separate armies, each with its own general staff, procurement office and parliament. A few years ago Europe operated 178 different weapon systems; the United States, thirty. Seventeen types of main battle tank. Every duplicate is money that buys organization charts instead of firepower.

Then there are the capabilities Europe simply never built, because America provided them: reconnaissance satellites, aerial refueling, heavy transport, the suppression of enemy air defenses.

Without them, a modern army sees poorly, flies short and moves slowly. And there is the nuclear asymmetry – roughly 515 French and British warheads against 5,459 Russian ones. Enough to make attacking Europe existentially dangerous; not the American umbrella.

The price tag of independence

Bruegel and the Kiel Institute did the honest sums: defending Europe without American forces would take about 300,000 additional troops – some 50 brigades – and at least €250 billion more per year, around 3.5 % of GDP. That sounds enormous until you notice it is exactly the core target all NATO members except Spain signed up to at The Hague in 2025. Europe is not being asked to do the impossible. It is being asked to do, deliberately, what it already promised.

The verdict

Today: with difficulty. A short, sharp war over the Baltics, fought tomorrow without US forces, would be a dangerous gamble – the command, logistics and enablers aren't there yet. A long war, against an economy eight times larger, Russia cannot win, and Russian planners know both halves of that sentence. That is why their scenarios are about quick tests, and why Europe's are about being ready from hour one.

The real question

Notice what kind of problem this is. Not talent, not money, not people – organization. Thirty armies that would fight for each other but cannot yet

fight as one. A continent that acted as one would not be asking whether it can defend itself, any more than America asks. Which turns a military question into the political one this site keeps arriving at: how much unity does Europe actually want?

[All questions →](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED

How many more troops would Europe need without the US?

About 300,000 – roughly 50 new brigades – according to Bruegel and the Kiel Institute. European NATO members already field around 1.9 million active troops; the gap is in ready, deployable land forces.

How much would European self-defense cost?

Roughly €250 billion more per year in the short term, taking defense spending to about 3.5 % of GDP – the same core target NATO members adopted at The Hague in 2025, to be reached by 2035.

Does Europe have its own nuclear deterrent?

Yes, a small one: France holds about 290 warheads and Britain about 225, against Russia's roughly 5,459. It is deterrence enough to make attacking Europe existentially risky, but nothing like the American umbrella.

Is Europe actually rearming?

Yes. European allies spent over \$574 billion on defense in 2025, nearly 20 % more than the year before, and committed at The Hague to reach 3.5 % of GDP on core defense by 2035.

When could Russia be ready to test NATO?

German intelligence estimates Russia could be capable of a large-scale conventional war around 2030; the Bundeswehr's chief says 2029 at the earliest. These are readiness estimates, not predictions of attack.

SOURCES

- Bruegel / Kiel Institute: Defending Europe without the US (2025)
- NATO: defence expenditure of European allies, 2025 (\$574bn+, 2021 prices)
- The Hague Summit Declaration (June 2025): 5 % commitment, 3.5 % core
- Munich Security Report: 178 weapon systems in Europe vs 30 in the US
- FAS/SIPRI nuclear forces data; BND and Bundeswehr readiness estimates 2029–2030