

## SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN US STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO SYRIA AND UKRAINE

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### Abstract

**The aim of the article.** The article is devoted to a comparative analysis of the strategic approaches of the United States and the European Union towards conflict resolution in Syria and Ukraine. The principles of objectivity, historicism and systematicity, using general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, generalization and comparative have become the **methodological foundation** of the research.

**Scientific novelty of the publication.** The research focuses on the main parameters that define the nature of foreign policy: the level of involvement, the legal status of partnerships, military and economic assistance, the energy and geopolitical dimensions, as well as the conditionality of support. Special attention is paid to the ways in which global actors adapt their strategies depending on the international recognition of the state, the scope of security threats, and the strategic significance of the region for their national interests. The findings demonstrate that the United States approach towards Ukraine is systemic and long-term, combining military, economic, energy, and political support aimed at integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and strengthening institutional resilience. In the case of Syria, the United States strategy is tactical and situational, focusing on counterterrorism, containing Russian and Iranian influence, and providing limited humanitarian assistance. Similarly, the European Union follows a differentiated strategy: Ukraine receives comprehensive political, economic, and institutional support, including macro-financial aid, energy diversification programs, and conditional reforms, while Syria remains the target of humanitarian assistance, diplomatic mediation, and limited stabilization initiatives without direct military engagement. It was concluded that the European Union's approach to Ukraine and Syria differs significantly depending on the legal status, strategic importance and security priorities of each country.

**Conclusions.** The overall conclusion is that both the United States and the EU pursue context-driven, differentiated approaches: long-term and systemic in strategically important regions, and limited, situational involvement where the stakes are lower. The practical significance of the study lies in its contribution to forecasting future scenarios of international support for crisis regions, as well as in assessing the adaptability of United States and EU foreign policies under conditions of increasing global instability.

**Keywords:** strategic approach, United States, European Union, Ukraine, Syria

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## СПІЛЬНІ ТА ВІДМІННІ РИСИ СТРАТЕГІЧНИХ ПІДХОДІВ США ДО СИРІЇ ТА УКРАЇНИ

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**Анотація**

**Мета статті.** Стаття присвячена порівняльному аналізу стратегічних підходів Сполучених штатів Америки та Європейського Союзу до врегулювання конфліктів у Сирії та Україні. **Методологічною основою дослідження** стали принципи об'єктивності, історизму та системності із застосуванням загальнонаукових методів аналізу, синтезу, узагальнення, порівняння.

**Наукова новизна публікації.** У роботі розглянуто ключові параметри, що визначають характер зовнішньої політики обох акторів: рівень залучення, правовий статус партнерства, військову та економічну допомогу, енергетичний та геополітичний вимір, а також умовність підтримки. Особлива увага в дослідженні приділяється тому, як міжнародні гравці адаптують власні стратегії залежно від правового статусу держави, масштабів загроз та стратегічної ваги регіону для їхніх національних інтересів. Результати наведеного дослідження показують, що підхід США до України є системним і довгостроковим, поєднуючи військову, економічну, енергетичну та політичну підтримку, спрямовану на інтеграцію країни до євроатлантичного простору та зміцнення її державної стійкості. У випадку Сирії стратегія США носить тактичний і ситуативний характер, зосереджуючись на боротьбі з тероризмом, протидії впливу Росії та Ірану, а також на гуманітарних аспектах. ЄС, своєю чергою, демонструє схожу логіку диференціації: для України застосовується модель довгострокової політичної, економічної та інституційної підтримки, що включає макрофінансову допомогу, енергетичну інтеграцію та прив'язку допомоги до реформ. Водночас для Сирії підтримка ЄС обмежується гуманітарними програмами, дипломатичними ініціативами та контрольованим залученням у врегулювання кризи без прямої військової участі.

**Висновки.** Загальний висновок дослідження полягає в тому, що США та ЄС реалізують диференційований підхід, який поєднує комплексність і довгостроковість у випадку стратегічно важливих держав та ситуативність і локальність у відносинах із регіонами, що мають обмежене значення для їхньої безпеки. Практична значущість роботи полягає у можливості застосування результатів дослідження для прогнозування майбутніх сценаріїв міжнародної підтримки кризових регіонів, а також для оцінки гнучкості зовнішньополітичних стратегій США та ЄС в умовах зростаючої глобальної нестабільності.

**Ключові слова:** стратегічний підхід, США, Європейський Союз, Україна, Сирія

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**Formulation of the problem.** In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the international system is undergoing constant transformation due to the emergence of new challenges and threats to global and regional security. Among them, the protracted conflicts in Syria and the war in Ukraine occupy a special place, as they have become decisive factors in contemporary international politics. Both cases have served as a kind of ‘test’ for the United States and the European Union in terms of their ability to develop flexible yet consistent strategic approaches to crisis management. Despite their common features – the geopolitical dimension, confrontation with Russia, humanitarian disasters and the need to involve a wide range of international instruments – the nature of strategic support in the cases of Ukraine and Syria differs significantly. For Ukraine, the United States and the EU are applying a comprehensive and long-term model of support that includes military, economic, energy, and political-diplomatic components. In contrast, the approach to Syria is limited and situational, which can be explained by both the lack of a legitimate partnership and the different strategic importance of these countries for transatlantic security.

The relevance of the issue stems from the fact that scientific discourse is dominated by studies that analyse the foreign policy of the US and the EU towards Ukraine and Syria separately, without systematic comparison. At the same time, a comparative study of these two cases allows for a deeper understanding of the logic of differentiated adaptation of international strategies to specific regional conditions, identifies patterns in the priorities of global actors, and outlines the limits of their effectiveness.

**Analysis of recent achievements and publications.** Recent academic publications indicate a growing interest in comparing the strategic approaches of leading international actors in regions of crisis instability. In particular, Lepeu<sup>1</sup> analyses the evolution of EU sanctions policy in the context of the war in Ukraine and highlights the growing role of the European Commission as the architect of foreign policy decisions. Other authors explore how the war has significantly transformed the EU’s defence priorities, raising the issue of strategic autonomy and the creation of new security mechanisms<sup>2</sup>. In this context, it is also important to study informal groups and networks, which are increasingly playing a role in the development of the European security architecture<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, the Atlantic Council<sup>4</sup> emphasises the growing importance of energy policy in the Black Sea region and the need for closer transatlantic

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<sup>1</sup> Lepeu J. Ukraine, the de-targetization of EU sanctions, and the rise of the European Commission as architect of EU foreign policy. *International Politics*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00649-7>

<sup>2</sup> International Politics. Navigating the storm: The impact of the Russia–Ukraine war reshaped the European Union’s defence priorities and its pursuit of strategic autonomy. *International Politics*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2025.2517031>

<sup>3</sup> International Politics. Organizing European security through informal groups. *International Politics*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00657-7>

<sup>4</sup> Atlantic Council. Reinforcing the EU’s Black Sea energy strategy through transatlantic collaboration. *Atlantic Council*. 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/eu-black-sea-energy-strategy-collaboration/>

cooperation in the field of energy security. In addition, there is active public discussion of the Readiness 2030 strategic initiative, which envisages the mobilisation of significant financial and military–technological resources to strengthen the European Union’s defence capabilities by 2030. Taken together, these studies form a multidimensional context in which the need to compare the US and EU approaches to conflict resolution in Syria and Ukraine becomes clear.

**The purpose of this article** is to conduct a comparative analysis of the strategic approaches of the United States and the European Union to conflict resolution in Syria and Ukraine, with an emphasis on identifying the commonalities and differences in their policies. To this end, key parameters of external support are considered, including the level of political and military involvement, the legal status of partnerships, economic and humanitarian aid, energy and geopolitical dimensions, and the conditions for providing support. The results obtained make it possible to explain the logic of the differentiated adaptation of US and EU foreign policy to crisis regions and to identify the factors that influence the effectiveness of international strategies.

**Presentation of the main material.** Studying strategic approaches to conflict resolution in Syria and Ukraine is important for understanding contemporary international relations and security mechanisms. Both countries have found themselves at the centre of geopolitical confrontations, which has led to the active involvement of external actors and the formation of various models of influence. A comparative analysis allows us not only to identify common features in the approaches of world powers and international organisations, but also to outline the differences that are determined by the historical, political and socio–cultural characteristics of each region. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of international strategies and the possibilities for their adaptation to different conditions.

In our opinion, it would be most logical to divide this issue into two blocks<sup>5</sup>:

1. US strategic approaches to Syria and Ukraine (Table 1)
2. EU strategic approaches to Syria and Ukraine

An analysis of the table shows that the US strategic approach to Ukraine and Syria is based on the principle of differentiated adaptation of foreign policy to a specific context. The key factors determining the nature of support are<sup>6</sup>:

1. The strategic importance of the country for US national interests.

Ukraine is seen as a critical element of European security and deterrence against Russia, so assistance is systematic and long–term. It includes not only military means, but also economic injections, macro–financial stabilisation, support for reforms, energy diversification and integration into Euro–Atlantic structures.

Syria is important in terms of the fight against terrorism and regional stability, but it

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission. Readiness 2030: European strategic defense initiative. *European Commission / Wikipedia summary*. 2025. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Readiness\\_2030](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Readiness_2030)

<sup>6</sup> International Politics. Organizing European security through informal groups. *International Politics*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00657-7>

is not a critical element of US strategic security. Therefore, the approach to Syria is tactical and situational, focused on controlling local threats (ISIS, extremist groups) and deterring the influence of Russia and Iran.

2. International status and legal recognition.

Table 1  
**Comparative characteristics of US strategic approaches to Syria and Ukraine**  
[developed by the author]

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Ukraine</b>	<b>Syria</b>
Level of US involvement	Systemic, long-term support; strategic partnership	Limited intervention; focus on fighting ISIS
Legal status	Recognised state, partner of the United States; support for sovereignty and territorial integrity	Assad regime not recognised as a legitimate partner; support only for selected opposition groups
Military aid	Lethal weapons, training of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, defence programmes (Javelin, HIMARS, JMTG-U)	Support for Kurds and the 'moderate opposition', special operations against ISIS, no systematic rearmament programme
Economic/financial support	Billions of dollars in macro-financial assistance, reforms, USAID, loan guarantees	Mainly humanitarian aid; no large-scale economic recovery programmes
Energy dimension	Opposition to Nord Stream 2, support for energy reforms and energy independence	Energy factor less significant, mainly control over Kurdish oil fields
Geopolitical dimension	Main front of opposition to Russia in Europe; integration into the Euro-Atlantic space	Arena for the fight against terrorism, field of rivalry between the US, Russia and Iran
Political framework	Minsk agreements, Normandy format, Charter of Strategic Partnership (2021)	Geneva process, Astana track (where the US had limited influence)
Conditional support	Aid was tied to reforms, transparency, and the rule of law	Support was provided to 'moderate' groups that met US criteria

Ukraine is a recognised state and a partner of the US under international agreements (Association Agreement, Charter of Strategic Partnership), which allows for the provision of full-fledged systemic assistance, including lethal weapons and institutional support.

Syria is a state with a legitimate government that the US does not recognise as a full partner, so assistance is limited to support for ‘moderate’ groups and humanitarian initiatives, without direct military intervention or large-scale economic support.

### 3. Level of military and financial-economic assistance.

In Ukraine, assistance is comprehensive: lethal weapons, training of the Armed Forces, logistics, macro-financial stabilisation, reforms, which ensure not only short-term strengthening of defence capabilities, but also long-term stability of state institutions.

In Syria, military assistance is selective and limited, while financial and economic assistance is mainly humanitarian, without any strategic prospects for restoring statehood or structural reform.

### 4. Geopolitical and energy dimensions.

For Ukraine, the US actively uses political, diplomatic and economic instruments to contain Russia, integrate Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures and reduce its energy dependence.

For Syria, geopolitics manifests itself in local power balancing, while energy aspects are secondary – the main focus is on controlled territories and the regional influence of other states.

### 5. Conditional support and control over results.

In Ukraine, assistance is directly linked to reforms, transparency standards and the rule of law, demonstrating a systematic and strategic approach<sup>7</sup>.

In Syria, assistance is more flexible and situational, focused on compliance with humanitarian norms and control over the ‘moderation’ of opposition actors.

Conclusion: The US applies a differentiated approach that combines long-term strategic support and tactical situational intervention depending on the region, the international status of the partner, strategic importance and the local situation. Ukraine has been the subject of systematic, comprehensive and consistent support covering security, the economy, political reforms and energy independence. Syria, on the other hand, remains the subject of tactical intervention, with the main focus on counterterrorism, humanitarian support, and regional balancing, without large-scale systemic integration into structures important to US security.

Now let us turn our attention to the similarities and differences between the EU and the US on this issue (Table 2).

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<sup>7</sup> International Politics. Navigating the storm: The impact of the Russia-Ukraine war reshaped the European Union's defence priorities and its pursuit of strategic autonomy. *International Politics*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2025.2517031>

Table 2  
**Comparative analysis of the EU's strategic approaches to Syria and Ukraine**  
 [developed by the author]

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Ukraine</b>	<b>Syria</b>
Level of EU involvement	Systematic, long-term political, economic and humanitarian support; strategic partnership through the European Commission and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement	Limited intervention; mainly humanitarian aid and diplomatic influence, without direct military involvement
Legal status	Recognised state; partnership through association, political support for sovereignty and territorial integrity	The Assad regime was not recognised as a legitimate partner; support for selected humanitarian initiatives of the opposition and civilian population
Military assistance	Relatively limited, mostly non-conflictual (training, logistical assistance, partial armament through CSDP and EUBAM)	Virtually non-existent; the EU does not provide lethal weapons, limiting itself to humanitarian logistics and training civilians
Economic/financial support	Billions of euros through macro-financial assistance, reform programmes (energy efficiency, decentralisation, anti-corruption)	Mainly humanitarian aid (food, medicine, refugees), without large-scale investment in the country's economy
Energy dimension	Support for energy supply diversification, integration into the EU energy market, countering energy dependence on Russia	Virtually non-existent; energy issues are not a priority in EU policy towards Syria
Geopolitical dimension	Support for European security; deterrence of Russia, integration of Ukraine into the European political and economic space	Crisis management, control of humanitarian flows, diplomatic containment of Russia and Iran
Political framework	Association Agreement, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Agreement, Minsk agreements, support for the Normandy format	Diplomatic initiatives through the UN and the Geneva process; participation in peace talks as a humanitarian and political mediator
Conditional support	Linking financial and political assistance to reforms, the rule of law, and anti-corruption standards	Support limited to compliance with international humanitarian norms; assistance to the civilian population and 'moderate' actors

Table 2 shows that the European Union's approach to Ukraine and Syria differs significantly depending on the legal status, strategic importance and security priorities of each country. For Ukraine, the EU applies a systematic and long-term approach, combining political, economic and humanitarian support through an associated partnership and the implementation of strategic reform programmes. As a recognised state and partner of the EU, Ukraine receives comprehensive assistance aimed at strengthening its sovereignty, territorial integrity and integration into European political and economic structures. The military component of support is limited to participation in training, logistical assistance and partial armament within the framework of the CSDP and EUBAM, which makes it non-conflictual, while economic and financial support includes macro-financial stabilisation and reform programmes in the areas of energy efficiency, decentralisation and the fight against corruption. In addition, the EU actively promotes the diversification of energy supplies and Ukraine's integration into the EU energy market, and the provision of assistance is linked to compliance with the rule of law and the implementation of reforms.

In the case of Syria, EU support is much more limited and situational. Due to the lack of a legitimate partnership with the Assad regime, assistance is mainly directed at the civilian population and «moderate» opposition groups, without large-scale economic recovery or military integration. Military assistance is almost non-existent, and energy issues are practically not on the EU's agenda. The main focus is on humanitarian stabilisation and regional balance of power, with assistance limited to compliance with international humanitarian norms<sup>8</sup>.

Overall, the EU demonstrates a differentiated and adaptive approach to crisis regions: Ukraine receives systematic and strategically important support aimed at integration and reform, while Syria is the subject of limited humanitarian and diplomatic intervention focused on risk minimisation and local stabilisation.

An analysis of the comparative approaches of the US and the European Union to Ukraine and Syria shows that both international actors are implementing a differentiated, context-dependent approach, which is based on a comprehensive assessment of the strategic importance of the state, its international legal status, the level of security risks and the geopolitical environment. In the case of Ukraine, both the US and the EU provide systematic and long-term support that integrates political, economic, military and energy instruments. The US strategy covers the supply of lethal weapons, training and modernisation of the Armed Forces, macro-financial stabilisation, support for anti-corruption and institutional reforms, as well as diplomatic efforts to ensure sovereignty and territorial integrity. Similarly, the EU provides macro-financial support, implementation of reform programmes in the areas of energy efficiency and

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<sup>8</sup> International Politics. Navigating the storm: The impact of the Russia–Ukraine war reshaped the European Union's defence priorities and its pursuit of strategic autonomy. *International Politics*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2025.2517031>



decentralisation, technical assistance in anti-corruption and administrative initiatives, and political support for Ukraine's European integration. This comprehensive assistance is aimed at strengthening state resilience, enhancing defence capabilities, integrating into European and transatlantic structures, and ensuring macroeconomic stability, reflecting Ukraine's strategic priority for both actors.

In contrast, in the case of Syria, US and EU support is local and situational in nature, focusing on limited tasks of stabilisation and containment of regional threats. For the US, the key is to counter terrorist groups such as Islamic State and to contain the influence of Russia and Iran in Syria, which is achieved through limited arming of «moderate» opposition groups, special operations and logistical support. The EU focuses primarily on humanitarian stabilisation, support for the civilian population, the provision of food and medical aid, and mediation efforts within the framework of regional diplomatic initiatives, without significant economic or military integration.

Thus, a common feature of the strategic approaches of both actors is the use of a comprehensive set of tools, combining political, economic, military and diplomatic mechanisms when there is a strategic interest. The main difference is the degree of involvement and the nature of support: Ukraine receives systematic, long-term and comprehensive assistance covering all critically important areas of state development and security, while Syria is the subject of local, situational intervention limited to humanitarian and stabilisation functions. This approach demonstrates the flexibility of US and EU foreign policy and its ability to adapt to specific geopolitical, legal and security conditions, while maintaining strategic priorities and international commitments.

**Conclusions.** The study proves that the strategic approaches of the United States and the European Union to conflict resolution in Syria and Ukraine have both common features and significant differences, determined by the strategic importance of these states in the international system. What they have in common is the use of differentiated instruments that combine political, economic, military and humanitarian means of influence, but the intensity and focus of such support varies considerably.

For Ukraine, both international actors are taking a systematic and long-term approach aimed at strengthening state stability, integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, institutional reforms and countering Russian aggression. The US provides comprehensive military assistance, macro-financial support and energy security, while the EU focuses on the political and economic dimensions, macro-financial programmes and regulatory reforms. This approach makes Ukraine one of the key strategic partners of both actors. In the case of Syria, US and EU support is situational and limited. The US is focusing its efforts on combating terrorism and containing the influence of Russia and Iran, while the EU is limiting itself mainly to humanitarian and diplomatic measures, without large-scale military or economic integration. This indicates that Syria is viewed by both actors as a regional threat rather than a strategic partner.

Thus, a comparative analysis has shown that the effectiveness of international strategies is determined not only by the set of instruments, but also by the level of

strategic importance of a particular state for the US and the EU. The case of Ukraine confirms the willingness of global actors to provide comprehensive, long-term support when there are common security and political interests, while the case of Syria demonstrates the preference for tactical responses and humanitarian aid in conditions of limited international legitimacy. Further research may focus on studying the dynamics of strategic approaches in the context of new challenges to global security and forecasting models of international support for crisis regions.

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