

European? Defense?

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Recently Angela Merkel committed herself to increasing German defense spending to two percent of GDP, from 1.2 percent now. While she left open when that goal would be reached, this would be a gigantic leap, and one that would be fundamentally at odds with German public opinion and Merkel's coalition partner, the SPD. Why then the promise? Some believe it is just empty words, Merkel-style, calculated to keep Donald Trump and the German military happy for the time being. But don't forget that the two percent commitment is older than Trump and was made on American pressure by all NATO members at their summit meetings in 2002 and, again, 2014.

Assuming Germany will go ahead and almost double its defense budget, why would it do so? As all major political decisions, this would likely serve several objectives at the same time that need not necessarily be compatible. For one thing, the idea seems to be for NATO to keep Russia in check while the United States get ready to do battle with China for supremacy in a new capitalist world order. China has recently become a lot more active in world politics, as any capitalist great power must. Its aim appears to be building a periphery of client states that give it secure access to raw materials and profitable export markets. The New Silk Road project, also known as the Belt and Road Initiative, is just one manifestation of a new Chinese expansionism, which is extending into areas that the United States considers their own, like the Eastern Mediterranean.

Keeping Russia engaged while it is being squeezed between China and the U.S. would make NATO's European members auxiliaries of the increasingly unpredictable American hegemon. But there is also another angle to this, which has to do with the fact that France spends the magic two percent on defense already. Much of this is, however, needed to main-

tain the Force de frappe, which doesn't help when it comes to defending French dominance in West Africa, or French influence, as much as there still is, in the Middle East. For France, increased defense spending of other European countries may help it build a distinctly French periphery on the southern side of the Mediterranean, against both American and Chinese ambitions, by way of its Europeanization, as part of Macron's project of a "sovereign France in a sovereign Europe". Promising to devote two percent of German GDP to defense may be a concession to French demands for a "refounding of Europe", one that would ultimately be cheaper than a separate budget for the Eurozone. Mind you that one of the French "reform" proposals is a European military structure independent from NATO, meaning from the U.S. If this came to pass, we might soon see ground troops from Germany, Poland and elsewhere intervening in Africa to fight "terrorism", in the name of European security.

As an alternative, Europe could try to mend fences with Russia, helping it get advanced technology it needs for economic development, in return for access to Russian, i.e., non-American oil and natural gas. Fighting terrorism could be left to the police, which would save a lot of money. The savings could be spent on helping poor countries protect themselves from the pressures of destructive, American-sponsored trade and financial regimes. Perhaps it might even be possible to build a "Eurasian" third pole in the emerging multipolar capitalism after the end of the "American century". By balancing both China and the U.S., this might secure a modicum of peace at least for the peoples of Europe, and perhaps even for others. Might this not be something worth considering when it comes to the question of a truly European security policy?