



The EU at War: After Two Years

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Abstract

The paper explores the role of the European Union (EU) in the war in Ukraine, from the run-up of the war to its impact on the EU's future structure and functions, within Europe and globally. It begins with an account of the condition of the EU before the war, which it describes as overextended and stagnant with respect to the EU's proclaimed *finalité*, the "ever closer union of the peoples of Europe." Next, it recounts the use of the EU in early American attempts to include Ukraine in the East European enlargement of NATO, with EU membership as a reward for Ukrainian Westernization. To the EU leadership, this presented an opportunity to revive older, by then largely failed attempts at supranational unification and centralization, by offering to the United States to serve as its transatlantic base for its Ukrainian strategy. Following this, the paper explores the consequences for the EU and its stronger member states of the impending American withdrawal from the Ukrainian war theater, as the US turns to its conflict with China. The final section discusses the conditions under which Europe, the European states, and the EU can hope for some kind of strategic and political autonomy in the emerging new New World Order.

Keywords European Union · NATO · War · Ukraine · Europeanization · United States · New World Order · Bipolarism · Multipolarism

The EU Before the War: Stuck

By the time the war over Ukraine broke out, the European Union (EU) was a disorderly assortment of the remnants of various incomplete attempts at what had been called "European integration" — a vast supranational would-be state that had become practically ungovernable due to overextension and the extreme internal heterogeneity that had come with it. Rather than a supranational superstate ending the separate existence of the European nation-states, the EU had become a battlefield, or negotiating arena, for its member states pursuing their individual interests, both directly and indirectly: directly by negotiating deals with each other, indirectly

by trying to control each other via the EU's supranational institutions. Among the integration projects that had got stuck during the lifetime of the EU and its two predecessor organizations — the European Economic Community (EEC; 1957–1972) and the European Community (European Commission; 1972–1993) — we may list the so-called Social Dimension of the 1970s and 1980s, which fell victim to the turn towards a neoliberal supply-side economic policy during the long Delors presidency (1985–1994); the Internal Market of 1992, which remained unfinished; the European Monetary Union of 1999, which includes only some of the EU's member states and has remained without a banking union, a fiscal union and, above all, a political union; the economic convergence of member states' growth models, or varieties of capitalism; the political and social convergence of new member countries on the liberal "rule-of-law" constitutional model of Western Europe; etc. etc.

Already before 2022, hopes for an integrated Europe superseding Europe's historical nation-states — the EU's much-vaunted *finalité* of an *ever closer union of the peoples of Europe* — had almost disappeared, reflecting not least the growth of the Union, mostly for geopolitical purposes, from six to 27 members (even 28, until one of its three biggest member states, the United Kingdom, seceded), including

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countries as different as Denmark and Romania, or Portugal and Poland. Tensions between member states such as Germany, France, Italy, and Poland had risen on a growing number of issues — like the objectives, the size, and the distribution of the so-called European “cohesion” funds, the role of the European Central Bank in member state finance, the Monetary Union’s fiscal stability regime, or the “rule of law” in some of the new member states. Add to this the various crises of the 2000s, like the financial and fiscal crisis of 2008; the subsequent onset of “secular stagnation” of the capitalist economy (Larry Summers in 2016); the wave of unsolicited immigration in 2015 and 2016; the inability of the EU to devise a centralized, Europe-wide collective response to the COVID pandemic of 2020–2022; and the ineffectiveness of the debt-financed post-COVID 750 billion euro Next Generation European Union (NGEU) “reconstruction fund,” aimed at remedying the crisis in particular of the Italian economy. Together they laid bare the EU’s lack of technocratic problem-solving and political governing capacity, which made its member states and governments even more conscious of their national interests and the differences between them.

In the fall of 2021, when the war in Ukraine was beginning to appear on the horizon, member governments had settled into a habit of using their union for domestic political purposes — presenting the EU to their national publics either as a promised future land of “European solutions” to problems they were technically unable or politically unwilling to address, or as culprit if it became apparent that no such solutions were forthcoming. Also, depending on political convenience, the EU was used to produce international mandates for unpopular national policies, for example neo-liberal economic reforms, and as a bulwark against anti-neoliberal reforms. The EU offered also rich opportunities for symbolic politics and mutual support between national executives, under a tacit agreement that none of them should have to return home from their summit meetings having nothing to show to their voters.

Generally, the EU had by the early 2020s turned into a place for joint short-term, but for that reason also short-lived, responses to long-term problems, like the fiscal crisis of Western European states under the pressure of self-imposed, or capital market-imposed, fiscal austerity. Often it was necessary to circumvent the EU’s de facto constitution, the Treaties, which are written in such a way as to make amendments practically impossible, other than — indirectly — by rulings of the European Court of Justice which only the Court itself can revise. National governments learned to devise ever more sub-legal, para-legal, and illegal temporary fixes for arising problems, an example being under-the-table state financing by the European Central Bank, or the financing of the COVID “recovery fund” by borrowing even though the Treaties do not allow the EU to take on debt.

By the early 2020s, it was obvious that this could not continue forever, the EU living from hand to mouth politically, consuming its dwindling supply of legitimacy without being able to replenish it. One symptom was fast-rising electoral support for so-called right-wing populist political parties and movements in several member states that are sharply critical of the EU.

The EU in the Run-Up to the War

The European Union was from the beginning involved in the Ukrainian conflict, although never as an active player. Under George W. Bush (2001–2009) at the latest, including Ukraine in NATO, against Russian objections, had become an American strategic objective. Ukrainian membership in the European Union was considered in this context an integral part of the absorption of Eastern and Central Europe into the West, on the model of the EU’s Eastern enlargement in 2004 when Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia were admitted. France and Germany, the leading Continental EU member countries, agreed to Ukrainian membership in principle but insisted on the EU’s rather demanding conditions of admission, which would postpone accession by several years. For the meantime, negotiations were started in 2007 on an association agreement. A year later, at the Budapest NATO summit, Germany and France, led by Merkel and Sarkozy, vetoed a proposal by Bush for instant admission of Ukraine to NATO. Negotiations on the EU association agreement were concluded in early 2012. The draft agreement provided for extensive political cooperation, free trade, wide-ranging legal harmonization, financial and technical aid, and generally collaboration on a wide range of areas, from education to technology and health care; in sum, it amounted to something like de facto membership without membership rights. In parallel, the United States, under the Obama administration (2009–2017) and its special representative for Ukraine, Vice President Biden, became deeply involved in Ukrainian domestic politics, among other things by placing numerous American advisers in a variety of Ukrainian political and economic institutions, including the army.

In response, Russia began to put pressure on the Ukrainian government to resist integration in the EU, considered a first step to integration in NATO. In November 2013, President Viktor Yanukovich refused in the last minute to sign the EU association agreement. This led to civil unrest culminating in the Maidan uprising of February 2014. In response Yanukovich left his office and fled the country. (Already at the end of January that year, the intercepted telephone conversation took place between Victoria Nuland, in charge of Europe and Eurasia in the US State Department, and the US ambassador in Ukraine. In it, the two discussed whom

to appoint to the next Ukrainian government. Asked about the position of the EU, Nuland famously answered, “F... the EU.”) Shortly thereafter, Russia occupied and later annexed the Crimean Peninsula, followed by pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine taking up arms against the Ukrainian state, with Russian support. In June of the same year, the oligarch Petro Poroshenko was elected President of Ukraine in a special election.

No significant role seems to have been played at this stage by West European countries, and certainly not by the EU. Later in 2014, President Poroshenko signed the Ukraine–EU association agreement, followed by efforts by France and Germany for a ceasefire and a negotiated Ukrainian–Russian settlement. Negotiations were arranged under the auspices of the OSCE in the so-called Normandy format, involving Ukraine, Russia, and the two separatist Russian-speaking Ukrainian provinces, joined by France and Germany but not the United States or the United Kingdom. The talks, which took place in the capital of Belarus, Minsk, issued in two agreements, Minsk I (September 2014) and Minsk II (February 2015). They provided for a monitored ceasefire, troop withdrawals on both sides, decentralization of the Ukrainian state, local elections in the pro-Russian regions, and full control over the state border by the Ukrainian government. Both agreements remained largely ineffective.

Hopes for a peace settlement might have returned with the election of Poroshenko’s successor, Volodymyr Zelensky. In April 2019, Zelensky had defeated Poroshenko at the end of his regular term by a 3:1 margin. Zelensky’s election platform included plans for decentralization of power from the central government to local authorities, as well as a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Donbas region, through implementation of the Minsk agreements and further negotiations with Russia. Simultaneously, as the fighting in Eastern Ukraine continued on and off, the United States went on equipping the Ukrainian army, to secure interoperability (the ability of military equipment or groups to operate in conjunction with each other) with the NATO command structure. Interoperability was officially declared by NATO in June 2020, during Trump’s last year in office. Less than two years later, in late February 2022, one year into Biden’s presidency and about half a year after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, came the Russian attack on Ukraine.

The outbreak of the war had been preceded by intense diplomatic efforts by Russia seeking negotiations with the United States on security guarantees in view of the advancing political, economic, and military integration of Ukraine in NATO and the EU. In particular, Russia demanded an end to NATO expansion, a withdrawal of NATO forces from Eastern European countries, a renunciation of intermediate-range missiles stationed in NATO countries that could threaten Russian territory, and measures for mutual

transparency. No such negotiations came to pass, however, as the United States insisted on its “open door” policy with respect to the NATO alliance. In the critical months during the fall and winter of 2021/2022, there was, as far as is known, no consultation by the United States of European governments or, for that matter, the EU.

Negotiations continued for a short while after the war had begun, now between Ukraine and Russia in Istanbul, moderated by the Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett. Little is known about their course and outcome. Indications are, however, that a tentative peace agreement was reached that provided for Ukrainian neutrality, security guarantees for Ukraine, and territorial concessions to Russia regarding Crimea and the Donbas region. While Russia seems to have agreed to a draft agreement, the Ukrainian side withdrew from the negotiations, apparently after the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, had assured them during a visit to Istanbul that with Western support, Ukraine would win the war before the end of the year. Again, what matters here is that the EU and its members seem to have been confined to the sidelines.

The EU at War I: A NATO Auxiliary

With the start of the war, the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen acted as an extended European arm of NATO and the United States, putting its resources at their service while working to unite its member states behind the Western war effort. Lacking jurisdiction under the European Treaties on military and defense matters, the Commission sought to identify gaps in the capacities of EU member states and NATO that it could offer to fill, hoping thereby to enhance, or restore, its governing capabilities as an international institution. Among its first steps was to work out, in close cooperation with the United States, a wide range of European sanctions on Russia and countries supporting it, with the aim of decisively weakening Russian economic and, as a result, military power. In effect, this moved the EU into the position of an economic policy subdepartment of NATO, assisting it on its special area of expertise. Sanctions included asset freezes and travel bans, banking and central banking restrictions like exclusion from the SWIFT system, export controls and import bans, and embargoes on Russian energy.

Both the EU and the United States expected that their sanctions would soon make it impossible for Russia to continue its campaign. In fact, it appears that it was with this prospect that the United States and the United Kingdom managed to convince the Ukrainian government during the Istanbul talks that it could go for more than a territorial compromise, indeed for a full-scale victory over Russia in a matter of a few months. Soon after the outbreak of the war,

von der Leyen had publicly stated that the aim of the sanctions was to “systematically degrade Russia’s industrial and economic base.” Two years later, she insisted that, “layer by layer, [the] sanctions are peeling off Russian industrial society.” By that time, the Russian economy was growing, including Russian oil exports, while large parts of Western Europe had moved into a recession.

Another way in which the EU was and is supporting the Western war effort is by helping sustain the morale of the Ukrainian people. For this, von der Leyen untiringly kept declaring the firm determination of the EU and its member states not to let up short of a full military victory of Ukraine over Russia, whatever it would take, using rhetoric often more militant than that of the United States. In the same vein, von der Leyen continued to hold out the prospect of full EU membership for Ukraine, in line with the association agreement of 2014. This was regardless of the fact that several countries on the West Balkans that had worked hard to fulfill the conditions of admission had already for years been kept on a waiting list, due to unresolved problems posed by further Eastern enlargement for the EU budget and EU governance, like majority voting on the Council. Promises of accelerated accession came with long-term commitments to economic support for the recovery of Ukraine after and indeed already during the war. In her 14 September 2022 State of the Union Address, von der Leyen announced that the rebuilding of Ukraine would begin immediately, noting that it would require “a comprehensive Marshall Plan” for which the EU would “present a new Ukraine reconstruction platform.” Almost two years later, she repeated her promise, stating that, “We will completely rebuild Ukraine once the war is won. The European Union stands firmly by Ukraine, financially, economically, militarily, and most of all, morally, until [Ukraine] is finally free.”¹

More than two years after the war began, there has been no discussion on the problems that admission into EU membership of a country like Ukraine, with its needs for long-term financial support, first military then economic, would cause for the EU’s internal politics and finances. A foretaste of what is coming, even short of formal accession, was provided by the militant protests of Polish farmers against Ukrainian agricultural produce allowed to be transported through Poland for sale to countries outside the EU. It took considerable effort on the part of the Commission to negotiate some sort of compromise, probably assisted by some sort of economic or political side payment to Poland.

From the beginning of the war, the European Commission considered it its mission to keep EU member states in line with NATO policy and strategy. Here Germany was the critical case, being the biggest conventional power in Western Europe and close to the Ukrainian battlefield, with a lingering legacy of postwar pacifism. For von der Leyen, the self-appointed task was to push Germany across the successive “red lines” defined by the Scholz government for German involvement in the war, helped by the United States and the other EU members happy to send “the Germans to the front.” The politics she was facing in this respect was as complicated as exciting. While von der Leyen is the German member on the European Commission — each country has one and only one — as President, she cannot, unlike the other members, be expected by her home country to represent its national interests on the Commission. Moreover, von der Leyen was appointed to the Commission not by the present German government but by its predecessor under Angela Merkel. While in normal circumstances Scholz would have replaced her with a political confidant of his coalition, von der Leyen, having to everyone’s surprise been made Commission President by, effectively, Emmanuel Macron, seems unreplaceable as Commissioner as long as the Council is willing to reappoint her as President (and the EU Parliament is willing to confirm her). By taking it upon herself and the Commission to get Germany to do the other members’ bidding, von der Leyen’s chances of reappointment have obviously increased, as shown by the fact that the European Council nominated her only shortly after the 2024 EU elections. Moreover, making Scholz’s life difficult over Ukraine must have seemed right for von der Leyen who, after all, is a member of the largest German opposition party, the CDU, whose leadership seems, in the Merkel tradition, set for a coalition in 2025 with the now anti-pacifist Greens.²

In its effort at supranational European state-building, the European Commission under von der Leyen deploys American pressure for European support in Ukraine as a lever to wrest from its member states additional powers and competences, a strategy supported by large sections of the European Parliament. This concerns international security as well as fiscal policy. As the immense costs of support for Ukraine become discernible, the EU, Commission, and Parliament hope to persuade Germany in particular to allow the Union to take on debt on a regular basis, based on the precedent of the 750 billion COVID Recovery Fund, as a way of circumventing national debt brakes of whatever sort. To document its determination, the Commission has diverted 3.6 billion

¹ Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-president-von-der-leyen-joint-press-conference-ukrainian-president-zelenskyy-2024-02-25_en.

² Manuscript completed before the vote of the EU-Parliament on the confirmation of the 2024–2029 Commission, as well as before the French elections of June 30 and July 7. It is reasonable to assume that neither election will affect the fundamental directions of EU and French policy to the extent discussed in this paper.

euros from the 12 billion euro seven-year endowment of its European Peace Facility (an off-budget funding mechanism established for the EU to help prevent conflicts, preserve peace, and strengthen international security and stability) to military support for Ukraine, both lethal and non-lethal.

For the European Commission and the political entrepreneurship of its President, the war in Ukraine offered a unique opportunity for institutional development, or if you wish self-aggrandizement, with the EU bringing to bear American demands for transatlantic solidarity on its member states, especially a sometimes more reluctant one like Germany. In the process, far-reaching and extremely costly commitments were made on behalf of the Union, meaning ultimately its larger and richer member states. Meeting them would require fundamental structural change that would turn the EU into an entirely different organization. Whether such change will ever be possible must seem doubtful; if it fails, the EU will gradually fall by the wayside as a functioning international organization, continuing its slow decay of the years after the financial crisis. Up to now, helped by the war, EU officials and their supporters at national level have got by, closing ranks behind a coordinated display of optimism while together marching into an unknown future, feeling their way forward one step at a time, and taking the European state system with them.

The EU at War II: “Europeanization”

As was to be expected, after two years of war, with no end in sight, the American interest in Ukraine began to decline, and a search started for new ways to avert a defeat of the Ukrainian state at the hands of Russia. As the Russian army was about to break through the Ukrainian lines of defense, Biden got the Congress to pass another aid package, likely the last, to the tune of 61 bn dollars, a good part of it to be awarded as a loan rather than a grant. There being no possibility of Ukraine repaying any loan even in a distant future, it was understood that ultimately it would be “the Europeans” who would have pay for the national security of Ukraine, defined with their agreement by the United States and the EU as their own national security. The event made it clear that future aid packages would have to come from Europe directly, in whatever form, including delivery on von der Leyen’s promise that once the war would be won, Ukraine would be completely rebuilt at European expense, as part of the country’s promised accession to EU membership. The United States, in any case, was out of the game as far as the continued funding of the war was concerned, not just under Trump if he returned to the Presidency but also under a second Biden administration, as both would be devoted above all to the victory of Israel over the Palestinians and, in a slightly longer run, an American victory over China.

What will the impending Europeanization of the Ukrainian war look like? The war obviously cannot be won by Ukraine on behalf of “the West.” Nor is it likely to be won by Russia marching into Kiev and forcing the Ukrainian government to sign a capitulation on Russian terms. The most probable future is a long-drawn war of position, or attrition, along approximately the current front lines. This would require continued military as well as economic support for Ukraine from Western Europe stepping in for the United States, shifting from the latter to the former the responsibility for keeping Ukraine fighting.

In many respects, this would be an acceptable outcome for both Russia and the United States. If nothing got in the way, it would allow Russia, if not to defeat and conquer Ukraine, then with time to destroy its viability as a functioning nation-state. Strategically, bleeding Ukraine to death — a death by a thousand cuts, dragged out over a decade or more — might seem preferable over another round of Minsk-like talks with Germany and France, having heard from Merkel and Hollande that the first two rounds were just to buy time for Ukraine to get properly armed. For Putin, tuning down his imperial-nationalist war rhetoric for negotiations that might be just another trap could appear risky, given that there would always be the possibility of an Anglo-American veto in the last minute, like in Istanbul.

For the United States, a long-drawn war of attrition in the center of Europe, along the western border of Russia, would conveniently tie down the Europeans. While making them spend big on — hopefully American — arms, they would remain dependent in an emergency on American support at American discretion. Most importantly, a continuing war, even on a low scale, would effectively stand in the way of a rapprochement between Russia and Germany, one that might include a resumption of the supply of Russian energy through the Baltic Sea, after a repair of the Nordstream pipelines.

The loser, clearly, of a protracted war of attrition would be Ukraine — just as in the battles over the Donbas after 2014. It seems questionable how long Ukrainian society would be willing to support a government seeking nothing less than a victory over Russia, for which purpose it is sending one generation of men after the other to the front to replace the dead and the wounded. Already now (May 2024) there are 256,000 Ukrainian men of military age — between 18 and sixty years — as refugees in Germany. Although barred under Ukrainian law from leaving their country, they account for about one-fifth of the 1.18 million Ukrainian refugees in Germany, significantly more than in the early months of the war. Seven hundred thousand Ukrainian refugees are receiving *Bürgergeld* (Citizen Allowance), a particularly generous kind of social assistance. In part as a result of this, gainful employment among Ukrainian refugees in Germany is notoriously low compared to other refugees and countries. Still,

the longer they will remain in Germany, the more likely they will be absorbed by the swept-empty German labor market, which will make them unlikely to return to their home country. Also, already before the war, Ukraine was one of the poorest countries in Europe, as well as one of the most corrupt countries on earth. Its wealth, extremely unequally distributed, was in the hands of a tiny caste of oligarchs, some of them more Russian than Ukrainian, which used to share the state and govern the country between them. They, too, may leave as the war drags on, following their money to where it is likely to already be — London, New York, Berlin — for it to escape being confiscated.

Europeanization of the war is not the same as EU-ization, in the sense of the war being conducted by the President of the European Commission commanding a European army and, eventually, holding peace talks with the President of Russia. As envisaged by the United States, Europeanization will de facto amount to Germanization, with Germany leading, more or less informally, a West European alliance in support of Ukraine. To what extent the European Union as such will be involved will be a matter of expediency as well as of understandings between Germany and other EU members. Very likely the latter will be happy to let Germany take the lead, as the biggest conventional military power in Western Europe and, after intense prodding not least by the EU, Ukraine's biggest financial and military supporter after the United States. No formal decision for this would be needed, and wouldn't be possible anyway as it would require a revision of the Treaties allowing the EU to take on a military role.

With the Ukrainian war continuing, countries like France and Poland will ask for European “courage,” meaning European ground troops regardless of the risk of a nuclear confrontation. This, however, will have to be German courage and German troops — unless there can be “European” troops, meaning battalions of volunteers from all over Europe, paid through the EU to fight under the Ukrainian high command. Apart from this, the EU will administer the social policy side of the war: feed the new member states; re-educate their societies; finance some fraction of the arms supplied to Ukraine; pay for the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities in the safer sections of the country; take up collective, or semi-collective, debt in circumvention of the Treaties; somehow assist the Ukrainian government in making the draft evaders return; and serve their country on the battlefield — all under the more or less enthusiastic leadership of Germany, remote-controlled by the United States with the help of its transatlantic second-in-command, the United Kingdom.

Speculating about the viability of this arrangement, the question would seem to come down to how long Germany will be ready, or can be made, to take orders from the United States. Sustaining a war of attrition is expensive; without

American money and with France and others limiting themselves to calling from the sidelines for more courage, it may also be short-lived. Germany is still a democracy, with voters who may eventually revolt. In coming years, the German state will have to pay for much higher defense spending, including a Bundeswehr brigade of 5000 soldiers to be stationed permanently, with families, in Lithuania, at estimated set-up costs of 11 billion euros and a yearly expense of one billion. But it will also have to pay for urgently needed repairs of the physical infrastructure (the railways, bridges, the Autobahn), the educational system, in particular primary and secondary education, and the *Energiewende*. In part, this may be facilitated by using the EU for invisible debt-making; this won't work forever, though, and in the end a large share of the EU debt will end up in Germany anyway. There might, as a result, be a strong incentive for Germany, in its new European leadership role, to try to make some sort of peace with Russia, bypassing Ukraine and, more importantly, refusing to heed the wishes of NATO, the United States, Poland, and the Baltics. Whether this will materialize will depend, among many other things, on whether France will go along, as it did when Schröder and Chirac refused to join the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when Merkel and Sarkozy blocked the accession of Ukraine to NATO in 2008, and when Merkel and Hollande tried, by negotiating the Minsk agreements (which, as indicated, they today deny), to stave off a United States takeover of the Ukrainian problem.

Europe and the EU in the New World Order 2.0

There seem to be three scenarios for the future of the EU, linked to the future of the Ukrainian war, linked in turn to alternative versions of the emerging New World Order 2.0, successor to the three decades of the unipolar neoliberal New World Order 1.0 declared by the United States in the 1990s after the end of the Soviet Union.

The *first* scenario fits into a new bipolar world, divided this time between the United States on the one hand and China, taking the place of the Soviet Union, on the other. In many ways, it seems that this would be the preferred outcome for the United States: it would involve a possibility, remote or not, of another global transformation, back from bi- to unipolarity, resulting from the United States defeating China in an Asian war. That war might be started, in line with Thucydides' theory of the defeat of Athens by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), by the United States as long as China would still be weak enough to be defeated militarily. With this ambition, the United States would want to keep the Ukrainian war going, perhaps on a low flame, or “frozen” and ready to be re-heated if need be. A new bipolarism would cement the subordinate status of the EU in

relation to NATO, preventing the EU from acquiring something like strategic autonomy, or even sovereignty. European NATO troops might even be called to join the United States in the South China Sea, provided the Europeans manage to keep the Ukrainian war from ending with a full-scale defeat of Ukraine. The EU in particular would economically integrate Eastern European countries into NATO, helping build a tight block of allies along Russia's western border. It also would organize the "friend-shoring" necessary for economic autarky from the other pole of the bipolar world, China, and indeed for an economic war with it. This, and similar efforts, would have to be led by Germany, overseen by the United States with the help, perhaps, of the United Kingdom. To the extent that there would be something like "European integration," it would be for the purpose of war, either cold as before or hot as never before, aimed at transforming East-West bipolarity back to American-ruled unipolarity.

The *second* scenario of a recomposed global order following the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East envisages a tripolar rather than a bipolar world: the two autonomous power centers of — for the time being — American-favored bipolarity complemented by a third one, a United Europe. A tripolar New World Order is the dominant French preference, with an integrated Europe in the old French sense: a "Europe of fatherlands" for France and an "ever closer union" with France for the others. A French-led Europe would be integrated, meaning centralized, not just with respect to its national, or in this case: supranational, security but also culturally and economically, somehow repeating the "peasants to Frenchmen" trajectory of the French nation in the nineteenth century: ending with one and only one sovereignty, ideally equidistant to the world's two other poles.

For Europe to become a third party of its own in a tripolar world, it would somehow have to end the war in Ukraine, either by decisively winning it, if need be, by sending in ground troops, or by agreeing with Russia on some pan-Eurasian regime of peaceful coexistence. Both would be difficult enough, the latter also because it would have to overcome firm opposition and active obstruction from the United States. Specifically, France would have to extract Germany from its transatlantic commitments and get it to commit instead to a French-led sort of Europeanism. It is unlikely that this can be done, given Germany's deep embeddedness in the American global economy and military, with almost 40,000 American soldiers stationed on German soil, as many as in Okinawa, and at least one major military command center from which American military operations in the Middle East are controlled — factors that stand in the way of any third-pole European project, including one led by Germany rather than France. A French European project, with centralized "strategic autonomy" located in Brussels understood as a suburb of Paris, would also be opposed by most East European countries, which seem to prefer their

national security being taken care of by Germany under US supervision (*"mourir pour Dantzig?"*). Forging supranational unity on a continent, or half-continent, like Western Europe requires resources, military, economic, and cultural, that are not available to a middle power like France, nor can they be assembled by uniting the capacities of France and Germany under joint command. It is therefore safe to assume that a third-pole Europe will remain a French political fantasy.

There is, theoretically at least, a *third* scenario, unlikely at first glance to become reality but apparently the only realistic alternative to continued subordination of Western Europe, organized in and by the EU, to the United States and NATO. The New World Order this presupposes is one of multi- rather than bipolarity, with multiple power centers — the United States of course, China and Russia (united as a result of the Ukraine war), Brazil, India, the Gulf countries, allowing for a "variable geometry" of relations with and between more or less independent sovereign states. Obviously, such an order would have to be established against United States resistance. It would imply the end of the dollar as a global currency, as well as an end to an American "national security" strategy reliant on 750 military bases all over the world. This might require more costly American defeats in foreign wars, or further growing domestic pressures in the United States itself for the urgently needed repairs of its social fabric, or both — in any case a new kind of protectionism-cum-isolationism for the purpose of rescuing American society from its ongoing decay.

As to Europe, a turn to a multipolar future requires the insight that a European superstate, sentimentally appealing as it may be as long as nothing is known about its properties, will forever remain no more than a castle in the air. Once this is understood, Europeans will have to think about other ways of getting their interests represented in the world — unless they are willing to content themselves with leaving their representation to the United States. Given Europe's deeply rooted national diversity, if the only alternative to a Europe that is no more than a transatlantic extension of the United States is a unitary, centralized, hierarchically governed supranational European state — a French state, that is — then in practice there is no such alternative. In the longer term, however, this would require that the strong national identifications characteristic of Western Europe — if not of their neoliberal political elites, then of their citizens — will have to be effectively subdued so that a stable imperial order can emerge, which could under given differences in size and power only be a German imperial order. That this can happen may be doubted, and prospects for a Carl Schmittian regional hegemony, providing for internal stability and external power projection, would appear less than auspicious. The conclusion would seem that if "Europe," in one way or other, wants to have a voice in an emerging

multipolar world — if this is what is coming — it must learn to organize itself, not as an empire or a superstate, but as a cooperative association of independent nation-states — a field for “coalitions of the willing” — acting on their interests sometimes on their own and sometimes in alliance with others: a Europe mirroring a multipolar global order, embedding itself in a global alignment of non-aligned countries, opposed by the United States until it is ready to join it.

How will the three alternative New World Orders 2.0 and their associated European futures be sorted out? Unfortunately from a European perspective, this will be decided almost entirely by the United States. It is for its political and military elites and its domestic politics to choose between a long bloody struggle in a bipolar world for a return to unipolarity, on the one hand, and, on the other, a new role for the United States as one global citizen among others. As to Europe, Germany in particular will have to choose between transatlantic *Nibelungentreue* and membership as a midsized European power in a world striving to become *blockfrei* — a world of non-alignment. Here the problem, or better: one of many problems, is that today’s Germany, unlike France, has no tradition of strategic thinking about its national interests. This may result in German policy seeking to fudge the issue, to muddle through by trying to serve two masters at the same time, the United States and France: displaying transatlantic loyalty to satisfy the former and pan-European enthusiasm to appease the latter, while looking out for arising multipolar

opportunities, especially for its export industries. Whatever this may lead to, it is unlikely to result in a stable European order.

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