

## REDRAWN SECURITY MAP OF EUROPE PUTS GERMANY CENTRE STAGE

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*The war in Ukraine is redrawing the security and economic map of Europe. As neutral Sweden and Finland seek membership of NATO, power will gravitate towards a new alliance of Northern, Eastern and the Baltic states. Will this weaken the Franco-German alliance which has been the bedrock of the European project for seventy years?*

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President Vladimir Putin has lost two gambles since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 2022: the first is that Ukraine would quickly crumble in the face of Russian might. He was rapidly disabused of that fact as fierce Ukrainian resistance put paid to his belief that a three-day war would see Russian troops welcomed in Kyiv. His second gamble was that Western unity would dissolve over time. Many in Europe feared that the West's united front would fracture as energy prices soared and public opinion soured. That has not happened despite Germany's initial reluctance to send weapons to the battlefield.

It became obvious, in the early months of the conflict, that there was a Western doctrine but no European policy towards Russia. As neutral Sweden and Finland seek membership of NATO, power will gravitate towards a new alliance of Northern, Eastern and the Baltic states. The initial refusal of French and German intelligence, contrary to their British and Polish counterparts, to believe US evidence of Russia's aggressive intentions in the run up to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, means that this new alliance of states has little trust in Europe's capacity to defend them. The war in Ukraine is redrawing the security map of Europe.

French president Emmanuel Macron's dream of a European defence "autonomous" of the American shield is in tatters. His warning, in an interview to *The Economist* on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2019 that "what we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO" has come back to haunt him. He went on to argue that Europe stood on "the edge of a precipice" and needed to think of itself as a geopolitical power; or, otherwise, we will "no longer be in control of our destiny". France today feels side-lined because it is often hostile to American power and semi-attached militarily to the NATO alliance the US dominates. The whole Leopard / Abrams tank package was a bilateral German-American negotiation.

Critics argue that the real problem with France is with power-sharing, humility and sense of realism which they see as the equivalent of Brexiter's perception of a parallel reality. They allege that Mr Macron has nothing to talk about with Mr Putin. France risks being further weakened by offering concessions to Russia. What seems beyond doubt is that France will be less influential in a more active and aggressive NATO increasingly reliant on US arms and leadership.

But what about Germany? Berlin has been, with France, in command of the EU since its inception as the Common Market. The status of both countries is unlikely to be unaffected by the redrawing of the European security map. Much has been made of Germany initial reluctance to send weapons into the war zone and more recently providing Leopard2 tanks to Ukraine. That decision is a new potential turning point in the transatlantic response to the Russian invasion. There is a difference between tanks built in Germany and driven by Ukrainian soldiers carrying Ukrainian flags in their own country, and German tanks driven by German soldiers invading another country as happened in 1941.

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As chancellor Olaf Scholz dramatically shifted his country's ground, it is worth remembering that present day Germany is still politically and psychologically the product of the Second World War and the way German society has strived to overcome its Nazi past. Burdened by its history, it appears reticent about projecting hard power. Washington understands that keeping Germany on board with NATO allies as they confront the biggest threat to Western security in decades is essential. The country today is one if not the most important ally of the US. German conviction that moving together on tanks reduced the risk of Russian retaliation had to be taken into account, all the more because, unlike France, the UK and the US, Germany has no nuclear weapons. Scholz has to face down a strong pacifist wing in his own SPD party where many are steeped in suspicion of the US and NATO and have a record dating back to the years of Ostpolitik in the 1970s of advocating that Moscow should be viewed as an essential partner – reliable Russian gas versus German exports. Fear of escalating conflict with a nuclear power is perfectly legitimate.

What is striking to this outsider is that Germany has learned from its own history to have sufficient humility to be self-critical and abandon ideas of national exceptionalism, unlike the US, the UK and France. Germany cannot simply aspire to the role of a bigger Switzerland. Seen in this light, its reluctance to spend more on defence is another word for shirking responsibility.

For the past half century, Germany was caught up in the conviction that the politics and behaviour of Russia could “change through trade” (*Wandel durch Handel*). Germany is having to drastically revise its export driven economy. Rising concern about its similar dependence of China is another challenge. It is important for the US to get closer to Germany not just for the Ukraine conflict but also for the next stage which will involve China, where Germany has more to lose than the US.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is redrawing the security and economic map of Europe. Will this weaken the Franco-German alliance which has been the bedrock of the European project for seventy years? What seems beyond doubt is that it shifts power to north eastern Europe, to the detriment of the Mediterranean where the EU has failed to devise any geopolitical framework that makes sense. The prospect of a larger and richer eastern Europe can only buttress Germany’s role on the old continent. More than ever, Germany is central to the future of Europe.