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When the Sleepwalkers Awake: A German Plea for a New European Security Architecture A German point of view

For three years, a war has been raging on Europe's borders between two geographically connected states – a conflict that originated in Russia's occupation of Crimea and Donbass almost 11 years ago. Since then, every political and military decision-maker in our part of Europe should have realized that there is a (great) power on our continent that is ready at any time to put '*war as a continuation of politics by other means*' (Clausewitz) into practice. The deterrent mechanism between the former blocs, which had been effective for almost 50 years and thus prevented war, has evidently given way to a '*laissez-faire*' on the part of the European states, which has allowed Russia to attack and partially occupy Ukraine with complete impunity, using a crude mix of historical and political justifications that violate international law. What should not have happened could not be seen and therefore could not be addressed appropriately. Our and NATO's '*laissez-faire*' was based on the formalistic argument that no NATO member country had been attacked and on the lack of strategic foresight disguised as '*hope*', the expression of which under international law was the 'Minsk Peace Agreement' of 2015. The hope, namely, that this attack could be localized and thus geographically restricted or 'frozen'.

The comparison with the Munich Agreement has been made often enough, but the consequences have never been drawn. Today, just as then, the aggressor makes no effort to limit its belligerence in line with the expectations of the 'West'. Today, just as then, the 'West' is doing far too little to build a plausible counterweight that is also effective. Since the new Trump administration took office and

more recently when U.S. Vice President J. D. Vance travelled to Europe this February, we have to fear that the comparison between today and the period immediately following the Munich Agreement of 1938 is true in another respect: at that time, the USA played no role on the European continent; today, it is openly announcing to Europe and NATO that it intends to leave them to deal with continental conflicts on their own.

Europe must therefore ensure that it is once again able to guarantee its own defence with its own resources, without American protection, and it must do so convincingly that any potential aggressor would have to fear the predictable consequences of an attack.

It is high time for an EU and NATO alliance that has relied on the unwavering commitment of U.S. support and has spent more energy justifying its own inaction than making effective contributions to common security. France, Sweden, Finland, Poland and the Baltic states have recognised this and are working at all levels to ramp up their own capabilities. However, it is to be feared – especially if there are no dramatic changes in the largest economy on our continent – that these efforts will remain piecemeal.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Europe's Prospects in the U.S. Disengagement Scenario

In the worst-case scenario of a progressive threat to our continent, or at least parts of it, and a

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US disengagement, Europe would be left defenceless without a very large, homogenous, and in practically all areas state-of-the-art, experienced and operational army. Without the U.S. Army, but with the armed forces of the United Kingdom, there are 28 armies ready for action. Although they all have common processes, they are distinct in terms of their organisation and equipment, and they are in no position to replace the range and depth of capabilities of the U.S. Army. Without the USA, Europe lacks too much of too many things in the military field, which is not surprising considering that the USA spends more than twice as much on the military as the EU and UK together. This applies to all capabilities for strategic reconnaissance, communication and strategic air transport, which are available only to a very limited extent within the EU.

Europe must therefore quickly embark on a common path in two respects: in the U.S. disengagement scenario, the threat of a nuclear strike by an aggressor equipped with nuclear weapons can hardly be countered by conventional means. So, there will be no way to avoid an open and unprejudiced dialogue with France and the UK (with the inclusion of Poland) regarding Europe's nuclear shield.

In the conventional sphere, Europe must:

- systematically analyze the organization(s), existing capabilities and gaps,
- focus on the urgently needed expansion of these capabilities,
- define the requirements for this,
- assign these in packages to individual states and
- provide the equipment with a unified procurement.

If individual member states choose to opt out of this process, so be it. No consideration should be given to them — time has become too precious.

This does not necessarily have to lead to a European army, although it is not clear what arguments could be put forward against it in the event of defence or an alliance. On the contrary. However, anyone who does not want to talk about a European army must admit that with the current state of a 'Europe of armies', we are ultimately only displaying a qualified, but nationally

contained, inability. No country in Europe – except for the nuclear powers France and the UK – can claim that its armed forces alone can defend its territory against a strong opponent that is determined to succeed. What is the point of clinging to the sovereignty of the individual armed forces when they are unable to adequately protect that sovereignty? Is sovereignty there to protect the armed forces or isn't it rather the other way around? If this is the case, the defence of Europe must finally be thought of holistically – the mutual assistance obligations under the NATO Treaty and the Treaty on European Union provide the legal framework for this – and not only implemented. The aim must be to combine forces instead of diffusing them or, to put it in a nutshell, to be effective together instead of being ineffective alone. The rejection of a 'European army' as a parallel organisation to NATO under unified (American) leadership is understandable, but without a US army (and, arguably, a Turkish army), unified leadership is essential to ensure European security.

When Napoleon set up the Grande Armée in 1812, he demanded specific capabilities from the individual allied princes and then combined them into operational units. The first steps are already being taken in Europe (Franco-German Brigade, German-Polish Corps, Air Transport Command, etc.), but the units are not always subordinate to just one purpose, but remain rooted in a dual or even multiple assignment. We no longer just have to establish interoperability but rather invest heavily in complementarity. The individual contributions of the European countries must not only be able to operate with each other, but also close gaps, both in terms of breadth (capability portfolio) and depth (quantity and sustainability) through highly specialised resources.

Anyone analysing the course of operations in the war in Ukraine will see that we are not prepared for the kind of back-and-forth between positional warfare of the type seen in the First World War, attempted breakthroughs and high-intensity cyber and drone warfare.

Wherever it is not possible to replace personnel or to regularly relieve them – a situation from which the Ukrainian army is currently suffering particularly –

investment must be made in the physical and mental stamina of active soldiers and in building up reserves through intensive and even more regular exercises, considering the lessons learned from the war in Ukraine.

Furthermore, any mission becomes an irresponsible undertaking if the right offensive and defensive capabilities are not available for a cyber and drone war, which poses an immense threat to deployed soldiers in the field.

And if, despite the arms industry's best efforts, the supply of ammunition is just about sufficient to meet Ukraine's needs, but not to provide a relevant stockpile for European armed forces, and in particular the Bundeswehr, then the bells should not only be ringing with alarm, but should also signaling the need for appropriate action.

At the December 2010 Council meeting, the EU adopted the concept of 'pooling and sharing', which was intended to promote the joint procurement and multinational operation of major equipment (tanker, transport aircraft, ...). This was seen more as an appeal to Member States willing to cooperate and as a mandate to the European Defence Agency than as a common instrument binding and demanding all Member States. This led to pilot projects that took a long time to implement and whose problems discouraged others from emulating them.

NATO, for its part, has tried something similar with 'smart defence', but has not made significant progress in 'assigning' previously regularly defined capability gaps. In a sense, the Trump administration is right: if the presence of a 'big brother' prevents the 'little brothers and sisters' from making an effort, the 'big brother' – if it does not want to remain in this protective role forever – has to withdraw to bring about or at least provoke a change in awareness regarding its own responsibility. In this respect, we are now being forced to 'grow up' and take our security into our own hands. In doing so, it must be clear that if we 'accommodate' the Trump administration in this respect, we must at the same time make it clear that we are also taking our destiny into our own hands

in terms of foreign policy and that we will not allow ourselves to be meddled with.

GERMANY AND A "COALITION OF THE WILLING"

Europe is already in a "hybrid state of confrontation" with Russia—a situation that in many ways threatens our lives, our infrastructure, and even our environment through interference in elections, cable sabotage, "unfriendly" overflights, and more.

It is therefore imperative for Germany to take a leading role in and for Europe – together with France and certainly also the UK, Poland, Italy and Spain, as well as the Nordic and Baltic states – for the not-too-distant day of a possible confrontation. On the one hand, this means entering a dialogue with the USA to cushion the effects of a disengagement scenario, if not to prevent it. This also means entering talks with France and the UK (with Poland included) about our own nuclear shield for our continent for deterrence purposes, without any sense of entitlement or moralising, but with the willingness to take on joint responsibility, be it financially or militarily (nuclear sharing!). This means, finally, taking the lead in a coordinated approach to equipment and procurement with our own contributions and setting a good example, and offering these openly to all partners as an alternative to transatlantic goods that are difficult to supply in an emergency.

Anyone who announces or threatens export restrictions and tariffs for everything and anything cannot safely be regarded as the main supplier of essential defence equipment. In this respect, there is no way around strengthening and utilising European industrial defence capacities. There is hardly anything in the defence sector that is not already being or can be produced in Europe. The goal must be to introduce standardised weapon systems at European level as quickly as possible, with delivery and maintenance – without black boxes! – being carried out uniformly across the continent. In doing so, we must finally stop succumbing to the temptation to demand and expect from industry today what can be developed tomorrow at the earliest and produced the day after tomorrow.

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Ultimately, this only leads to each country supplying itself somehow or, even worse, trying to keep older models in the halls and depots with life-prolonging measures, and new defence equipment is basically only 'announced' for the next (or the following) decade. It is precisely this circumstance that results in the disparate equipment of the 28 armies in Europe, with dramatic consequences in an emergency. It is impossible, for example, to set up and maintain a logistics chain for four different types of tank fighting side by side in the field. The tanks will only be in action as long as they do not need spare parts, and this can be measured in days. A multinational armoured division will very quickly see its combat strength melt away, potentially even without enemy action.

EUROPE AND A "COALITION OF THE WILLING"

The EU should support this process in many ways: on the one hand, by initiating and coordinating the bundling of procurement orders after assessing demand. It does not matter how great the demand is at a particular point in time if it is certain that there will be further demand for the goods to be procured at a later point in time. What is possible in civil aviation – the mix of firm and optional orders – must be mandatory in the defence sector. This allows the defence industry to plan for the longer term and to obtain planning security for continental demand, which automatically leads to the expansion of production capacities called for by the European states.

In doing so, the EU should use procurement and competition law in a way that is commensurate with the urgency and scale of the task, so as to enable European champions. These do not necessarily have to result in mergers of defence companies; project-related joint ventures are also sufficient. Most importantly, however, the EU – and above all Germany – should promote the idea of making no delay in considering production sites and their distribution. The urgency of the situation does not allow for a repeat of the A400 M project. Rather, it must be clear to every European state that the important thing now is to quickly acquire the necessary equipment and to not focus on creating industrial jobs. Where these already

exist, they must be used and utilised to capacity. In return, appropriate maintenance capacities will be required at all deployment locations at a later date, which will lead to the creation of a sufficient number of decentralised industrial jobs. If the rule of thumb for flying equipment, namely that the purchase price of each item is to be paid once on acquisition and twice in use, also applies to other complex defence equipment, then it is only a matter of time before corresponding industrial jobs have been created in every country.

The EU should establish a specific political governance (Permanent Council) of the members of the 'coalition' with real 'power of attorney' for its contribution. All members of the 'coalition' must commit to participating and clarify the domestic caveat in advance on their own responsibility, as is the legal practice in the UK with the preliminary referrals to the House of Commons. This 'political governance' should also – for economic reasons, too – take the joint decision on export decisions, and thus replace the restrictive German arms export regime – which makes it unattractive for defence cooperation. Finally, the joint 'political governance' should be the 'coalition's' organ of communication, to make it clear that the 'coalition' is presenting a united front and is using its combined strength to counter any threats.

If we don't want to sleepwalk into the next world war, the time for procrastination must come to an end.

Europe is threatened by a conventional confrontation as a result of a war with Ukraine that Russia may win by the end of this decade at the latest. This will initially affect Russia's neighbouring countries, which would in turn oblige us to provide assistance if they are NATO or EU members. It may well be taken into account that Russia is likely to come out of a victorious war in Ukraine 'exhausted' in many respects (financially, economically, with irreplaceable human losses). This should not and must not deter us from hearing the bell tolling now and taking all necessary action. In Germany, this has many domestic political consequences, in addition to taking on a leadership role in foreign, European and defence policy that has not been seen for years, strengthening the Franco-

German relationship, which has been languishing for just as long, and expanding it in the Weimar Triangle with Poland: On the one hand, the necessary financial resources must be made available and, at the same time, the associated parliamentary reservations for the event of defence and for all the necessary preparatory and organisational measures for this purpose must be lifted. If these necessary funds cannot be reallocated in the current financial planning, they must be provided additionally.

Politically, it makes no sense to play defence off against pensions. If our country cannot defend itself, pensions, like many other things, will no longer be secure. As the largest economy on the continent with the largest population, we cannot afford to invest less in nominal and relative terms in our defence than France and the UK. If the funds are available in sufficient measure, the procurement processes must be adapted in line with the urgency and magnitude of the task. This requires all those involved in these processes to adopt an attitude that focuses more on the goods now needed for the approaching emergency than on striving for better equipment in the utopia of lasting peace. Incidentally, the latter also applies to defence equipment from the United States, unless it can be delivered at short notice, because delivery commitments are regularly subject to protracted and unpredictable parliamentary proceedings. And finally, everything that is now

available on the market but is still missing – such as ammunition, replacements for material handed over to Ukraine, or drone defence for our critical civilian and military infrastructure – must be procured immediately. If a drone, controlled by anyone at all, can shut down our aviation hubs for hours, then it is an unacceptable situation for our economy as well. The same applies if critical military and civilian infrastructure can be flown over with complete impunity. Today they are being scouted out and tomorrow they will be threatened.

It is regrettable that it took the Trump administration to make such a clean break. The proposals outlined are far-reaching, but they are the consequence of a decade of geostrategic immobility. If we do not want to sleepwalk into the next world war, the time for procrastination must come to an end. From now on, Germany must lead by example. Only in this way will it live up to its role and responsibility for our country and for peace in Europe.

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