



QUINCY INSTITUTE  
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STATECRAFT

# The Future of European Security

*A report on the discussions of a working group convened by the  
Quincy Institute*

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# Executive Summary

In three online sessions in May, the Quincy Institute convened a working group of leading experts on European foreign and security policies to discuss the stance of European countries concerning the war in Ukraine, "de-risking" the relationship with China, and the chances of an autonomous European approach to these issues. The group also discussed the much longer-term possibility of a new security architecture in Eurasia including Russia and China. The meetings of the working group took place under Chatham House rules, whereby participants are not individually cited. The following report therefore reflects a consensus of the group, but not necessarily the views of each individual member.

Members of the working group were generally in agreement that as long as present circumstances continue, European countries are expected to take little independent action in the security domain, either individually or collectively. Genuine moves towards military self-sufficiency remain inhibited by resistance to pooling resources, and the fact that it is much cheaper simply to rely on the United States for defense. In addition, Washington has never brought really heavy pressure on the Europeans to provide for their own security, because the U.S. establishment and military-industrial complex see great advantages in keeping them in a position of dependence, even if this is extremely costly for U.S. taxpayers.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the European countries (which in this case really means France and Germany) are highly unlikely to adopt a determined autonomous initiative for a ceasefire in Ukraine. On the other hand, opinion was divided on how far European countries will be

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Shapiro and Jana Puglierin, "The art of vassalisation: How Russia's war on Ukraine has transformed Transatlantic relations," European Council on Foreign Relations, April 4 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-art-of-vassalisation-how-russias-war-on-ukraine-has-transformed-transatlantic-relations/>.

willing to follow the United States towards the economic and military containment of China, at least if this seems to involve them in serious losses and dangers.

It was also pointed out that present circumstances will not last forever, and may not even last for very long. Several possible occurrences could change European attitudes. These include developments on the battlefield in Ukraine; a shift in Sino-U.S. relations towards actual conflict; a new global economic crisis; or a drastic acceleration of the effects of climate change.

Given these potential developments, the group concluded that the United States should refrain from putting excessive pressure on Europe in areas where this could cause both severe economic damage and a backlash in European public opinion. This means, in the first instance, putting pressure on Germany to break off important economic links to China. In future, however, it could also mean U.S. refusal to support a ceasefire in Ukraine even if a majority of European states and populations desired one.

U.S. policymakers should remember that the war in Ukraine is taking place in Europe, not North America and that the United States has a vital interest in maintaining Europe's prosperity and democracy. The United States must not endanger them in the pursuit of its own narrow and short-term geopolitical goals.

Finally, the group agreed that international affairs experts must not allow themselves to become trapped by contemporary issues and assumptions, because they might prove (as has often been the case) to be relatively temporary and contingent. Precisely because the situation today is so dire, it is important both to examine the past to see how we got to where we are, and to think imaginatively and independently about ideas for a better international system for our descendants.

## Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused a reconsolidation of the transatlantic alliance behind American leadership. Previously inconceivable steps have taken place (especially on the part of Germany), including the supply of heavy weaponry to Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the potential remains for serious future divergences. Thus it should not be ignored how far European willingness to follow the U.S. lead has been enabled by the presence of a Democratic and Atlanticist administration in Washington, and European delight at the replacement of President Donald Trump. Future U.S. elections could therefore lead to a shift in sentiment in some leading European countries – though on the other hand, a continuation of the swing of European electorates to far right positions (as has already occurred in Italy and elsewhere) could reconsolidate the transatlantic relationship on a new basis. How far and in what ways this would change policies towards Russia and China is however at present a matter of pure speculation.

Three issues in particular risk creating tensions both between the United States and Europe and among Europeans, thereby weakening the Western alliance. U.S. policymakers need to think seriously about European concerns when formulating policy in these areas:

- **The goals of Western support for Ukraine:** Hardline elements in the United States, Britain, and Eastern Europe support the stated goal of the Ukrainian government to see Russia completely defeated and driven from all the territory it has taken since 2014, including Crimea.<sup>2</sup> They hope this will lead to the overthrow of the Putin regime and the permanent weakening or even

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<sup>2</sup> "Russia-Ukraine War: Zelensky rules out giving up any territory to Putin as part of peace deal," *The Guardian*, February 16 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/feb/16/russia-ukraine-war-live-critical-infrastructure-hit-in-russian-strikes-on-western-region-of-lviv>; "Ukraine rules out ceding any territory to Russia to gain peace," Reuters, July 13 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-rules-out-ceding-territory-russia-secure-peace-2022-07-13/>.

disintegration of the Russian Federation.<sup>3</sup> Certain European leaders, including President Macron of France, by contrast, have stressed the need for a negotiated peace, and have said that Russia should, in the long run, be given a place in European security.<sup>4</sup> At present, these differences are not active and public, but they will become so if a ceasefire in Ukraine becomes a real possibility, or if the Republican candidate wins the 2024 U.S. presidential election and decides to reduce U.S. support to Ukraine.

- **Expansion of the European Union:** Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has greatly increased support for Ukraine's early admission to the European Union. This dovetails with the desire of the United States and eastern Europe to gain early EU membership for Albania, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Moldova, and Georgia. There are, however, grave concerns in western Europe that these countries are very far from qualifying for EU membership, and that fast-tracking them would mean in effect tearing up the *acquis communautaire* as it now stands. Should Ukraine be given a free pass in this way it will form a stark contrast with the refusal to make any such concessions to Turkey in the accession process; this will undoubtedly raise hostile comments in Turkey and throughout the Muslim world.

These issues could lead to deep divisions in Europe; and if early expansion to these countries took place, their subsequent internal problems could radically

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<sup>3</sup> "The imperial Russia: Conquest, Genocide and Colonisation," European Conservatives and Reformists (European Parliament), Brussels January 31, 2023, [https://ecrgroup.eu/event/the\\_imperial\\_russia\\_conquer\\_genocide\\_colonisation](https://ecrgroup.eu/event/the_imperial_russia_conquer_genocide_colonisation); Oksana Zabusko, "The Problem with Russia is Russia," *New York Times*, February 20, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/20/opinion/russia-ukraine-war.html>; "Preparing For The Dissolution of the Russian Federation," Hudson Institute, February 14, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcO7-TImZHc&t=5s>; Peter Rutland, "Why pushing for the break up of Russia is absolute folly," *Responsible Statecraft*, March 24, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/03/24/why-pushing-for-the-break-up-of-russia-is-absolute-folly/>.

<sup>4</sup> Geert De Clercq, "Macron says new European security architecture should give guarantees for Russia," Reuters, December 3, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/macron-says-new-security-architecture-should-give-guarantees-russia-2022-12-03/>.

weaken the EU as an institution and community, thereby also damaging vital U.S. interests in a strong and cohesive Europe.

- **U.S. pressure to isolate and undermine China economically:** Rhetorically, NATO has followed the U.S. lead in labeling China a threat, and some European members have made minor and symbolic naval deployments in the Indian Ocean and Far East. However, France has pushed back strongly against the plan to establish a NATO office in Japan and role in East Asia, and U.S. demands that European countries join the United States in isolating China economically are meeting widespread resistance in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

There is, therefore, a risk of a European backlash against U.S. pressure in this area. A more restrained policy allowing room for Europe to continue to cooperate economically with China and mediate on some issues between Washington and Beijing would be strongly opposed by some elements in Washington, but might better serve U.S. interests.

## Europe and the war in Ukraine

Concerning the interests of European countries with reference to the war, the group made two initial points: that these interests differ considerably from country to country; and that there may be a difference between interests as perceived by present governments and the real long-term interests of the countries concerned. There is also an underlying divergence between how most Europeans and many members of the U.S. establishment see the war. For Europeans, it is a purely European conflict. For Washington, it is part of a wider competition with Russia and China to maintain U.S. global primacy.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Scott and Brendan Bordelon, "Countries push back against U.S. anti-China tech policy," *Politico*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/countries-push-back-against-uss-anti-china-tech-policy/>.

*There is an underlying divergence between how most Europeans and many members of the U.S. establishment see the war.*

Poland and the Baltic states, in particular, see their interest as maintaining the strongest possible U.S. security commitment to Europe; blocking any moves to European strategic and military autonomy; and binding western European countries (above all France and Germany) firmly into a permanent anti-Russian alliance. They are interested in the Mediterranean issues that concern France, Italy, and Spain only insofar as they are related to preventing refugees and migrants from entering their countries.

French presidents, including most lately President Macron, have long aspired to autonomy, but have backed away from any real action under pressure from Washington and domestic political opposition. Any French moves in this direction are also impossible without strong support from Germany.<sup>6</sup>

The German political classes and media are now implacably anti-Russian as a result of the invasion of Ukraine, and as a result extremely deferential to Washington (though this could change depending on the ideological character and policies of future U.S. administrations). As one participant remarked, “the tradition of postwar German pacifism vanished in a matter of weeks” – though the way had long been prepared by the departure from the political scene both of those who remembered World War II and those who had taken part in the protests against the Vietnam War in the 1960s.<sup>7</sup>

Instead, for the younger generation, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is likely to be the defining moment of their lives as far as international affairs are concerned. Moreover, President Macron is widely regarded in Germany as a lame duck who cannot be relied

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<sup>6</sup> Sylvie Kaufman, “Strategic autonomy is both in Macron’s European DNA and his most devise battle,” *Le Monde*, April 12, 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2023/04/12/strategic-autonomy-is-both-in-macron-s-europea-n-dna-and-his-most-divisive-battle\\_6022645\\_23.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2023/04/12/strategic-autonomy-is-both-in-macron-s-europea-n-dna-and-his-most-divisive-battle_6022645_23.html).

<sup>7</sup> Lily Lynch, “How NATO seduced the Euroepan Left,” *UnHerd*, May 16, 2023, <https://unherd.com/2023/05/how-nato-seduced-the-european-left/>.

upon – though the group also remarked that this might be a mistake, given that he still has four years of his presidency, and “in politics, four years is an eternity.”

No single European government is currently willing to call for a ceasefire, and any future independent European initiative for a ceasefire is highly unlikely if this goes against the wishes of Washington. But European states are likely to hedge, especially when it comes to demands for greatly increased weapons supplies. Such resistance is likely to increase if the promised Ukrainian offensive fails and a prolonged stalemate appears probable.

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Much attention was naturally paid to the question of whether existing levels of European aid to Ukraine can and will be sustained. The consensus was that the United States will remain responsible for the great majority of military aid, and that present levels of economic aid from Europe are sustainable for a considerable time to come, given the attitudes of most European populations and political elites to the war.

The group did remark that certain new developments could change this picture. One possibility in the short to medium term is a European energy crisis in the winter of 2023–24, given that European reserves are exhausted. This could also increase tension over prices the United States charges for its energy supplies. An energy crisis could also be precipitated by a military conflict over Iran’s nuclear program.

Another obvious development with the potential to cause change would be the victory of a Republican candidate in next year’s U.S. presidential elections, with a program of decreasing attention to Europe to concentrate on the threat from China. This could have multiple effects: reduction in U.S. help to Ukraine and demands that Europe should increase aid to compensate; possible pressure for a ceasefire in Ukraine; and a renewal



of the gulf in political culture between western Europe and the United States, which widened during the Trump administration but has closed again under Biden. This could lead to increased European resistance to U.S. demands concerning China, even as those demands became greater and more insistent. On the other hand, it could perhaps encourage France and Germany to seek an end to the Ukraine conflict, with the encouragement of the new U.S. administration.

In the somewhat longer term, as some participants noted, it is possible to envisage the shattering effects on existing European policies and attitudes should a war occur between the United States and China, leading to a global economic crisis. In the longer term, to judge by already observable patterns in western Africa and elsewhere, climate change may combine with population growth, poverty and ethno-religious conflict to bring about the collapse of major states, vastly increasing the numbers of migrants heading to Europe and eclipsing Russia in the eyes of Europeans (possibly including even nationalist Poles, to judge by their ferociously anti-immigrant attitudes) as the greatest threat to their nations.<sup>8</sup> Already, the flow of migrants into Europe has been a factor in producing political changes that would have seemed inconceivable a generation ago, with several European governments having introduced or considered immigration control measures that were once considered incompatible with liberal democracy.<sup>9</sup> The group also noted that although Brexit has turned out very badly for the United Kingdom, it is also a warning of how the EU can be threatened by the rise of populism.

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<sup>8</sup> Ope Adetayo, "The good, bad and the ugly: West Africa's big issues in 2022," *Al Jazeera*, December 22, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/22/the-good-bad-and-the-ugly-west-africas-big-issues-in-2022>.

<sup>9</sup> Jill Lawless and Ignatius Ssuunu, "UK aims to send migrants to Rwanda in months if courts agree," Associated Press, March 19, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/britain-asylumseekers-deportation-to-rwanda-braverman-bd731dfd42d2c8a81c0bbc4a1fde662b>; Marta Silvia Vigano, "Italy: New law curtails migrants' rights," *Deutsche Welle*, May 9, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/italy-new-law-curtails-migrants-rights/a-65552219>.

## European military spending and strategic autonomy

Where a serious European discussion about the basis for strategic autonomy is taking place is on the issue of increased military spending. Most participants, however, expressed considerable skepticism as to how many of the commitments made will actually be fulfilled. This is especially true given that European countries are experiencing economic stagnation as an aging population places increased demands on health and social welfare services, creating tensions with promises of new military spending

It was pointed out that although British, French and German military spending put together vastly exceeds that of Russia, its effectiveness is likely to remain severely hampered by a refusal to pool and coordinate military production, because every major country is determined to defend its own military industrial base. This domestic imperative has increased still further as other high-tech industries have declined.<sup>10</sup>

The wider decline of European industry also has knock-on effects for military production. Britain is among the most bellicose of NATO's European members, but its army and navy are both in a parlous state in terms of equipment and numbers. Germany has promised huge increases, but very little of the promised money has yet been allocated.<sup>11</sup>

In part this is because parts of German military equipment are virtually obsolete and in need of upgrade. Following 9/11, the German military was pressured by successive U.S.

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<sup>10</sup> Max Bergmann et al. "Transforming European Defense," CSIS, August 18, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transforming-european-defense>; "The Future of European Defence: Tackling the Productivity Challenge," McKinsey and Co., 2015, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/public%20and%20social%20sector/our%20insights/enlisting%20productivity%20to%20reinforce%20european%20defense/the%20future%20of%20european%20defence.pdf>; Laura Kayali, Lili Bayer and Joshua Posaner, "Europe's military build-up: More talk than action," *Politico*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-military-industry-defense-buildup-war/>.

<sup>11</sup> Hans von der Burchardt and Gabriel Rinaldi, "Germany backtracks on defense spending promises made after Ukraine invasion," *Politico*, December 5, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-backtracks-on-defense-spending-promise-warns-about-delays-ukraine-war/#:~:text=BERLIN%20%E2%80%94%20Germany%20on%20Monday%20walked,a%20more%20serious%20military%20force>.

administrations to invest in equipment for overseas interventions and counter-insurgency operations in support of the “global war on terror” and “humanitarian interventions,” at the expense of homeland defense.

## *The huge recent increases in U.S. military spending are an added disincentive to European countries to spend more on their own defense.*

It was also pointed out that while every U.S. administration and Congress have for many years complained about European military incapacity, in many ways this situation suits America very well: it ensures geopolitical dependency on the United States; and it leads many European countries to purchase American weaponry. The huge recent increases in U.S. military spending are an added disincentive to European countries to spend more on their own defense.

It was suggested that the issue of European spending on conventional armaments is in certain respects rather academic from the point of view of real security, because Russia is clearly unable to launch successful conventional attacks on NATO.<sup>12</sup> On the European side, high levels of military spending and bellicose rhetoric are not at all the same thing as an actual European willingness to fight in Ukraine (let alone against China).<sup>13</sup>

Attention was drawn to the extremely limited contributions of other European countries to the French-led but supposedly joint anti-terrorist campaign in the Sahel, where troops actually do have to fight, and the mostly pitiful European military role in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> For historical reasons, Germany does not even have a military general

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<sup>12</sup> “Comparison of the military capabilities of Russia and NATO as of 2023,” *Statista*, March 20, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293174/nato-russia-military-comparison/>; Anatol Lieven, “The real military balance between Russia and NATO,” *Responsible Statecraft*, July 14, 2022, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/07/14/the-real-military-balance-between-russia-and-nato/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Seven European countries urge their citizens not to fight in Ukraine,” *Euractiv*, March 29, 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/seven-eu-countries-urge-their-citizens-not-to-join-fight-in-ukraine/>.

<sup>14</sup> Mahaut de Fougieres, “French Military in the Sahel: An unwinnable (dis)engagement?” Institut Montaigne, June 23, 2021,

staff, which means that theoretically, operational decisions are made not in Berlin but by NATO in Brussels – though that does not mean Germany will obey orders from NATO if it means going to war with China, for example.

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This pattern of subservience to the United States has a history stretching back to World War II; it has intensified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the European response. For “if the Ukraine war has revealed a weak Russia, it has also revealed a weak Europe.” It is not just that the majority of Europe's armed forces have been revealed as extremely weak, but outside parts of Eastern Europe there is no real will to strengthen them. Thus Germany has promised huge increases in military spending but so far has only implemented a fraction of them. European elites are also highly skeptical of their ability to act in concert without U.S. leadership. Europe's failures in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s continue to cast a long shadow.

The European Union as a whole is in any case barred from any pursuit of strategic autonomy by the implacable opposition of Poland and the Baltic states. They are well aware that their hopes of a crippled or destroyed Russia can only be achieved with full U.S. support. France alone is too weak to pursue an autonomous strategy either towards China or to peace in Ukraine. These could only be achieved by France and

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<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/french-military-sahel-unwinnable-disengagement>; “Sweden to withdraw from French-led special forces mission Takuba in Mali,” Radio France 24, January 14, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220114-sweden-to-withdraw-from-french-led-special-forces-mission-takuba-in-mali>; Inigo Camilleri de Castaneda, “Task Force Takuba: European Special Forces in the Sahel,” *Grey Dynamics*, November 25, 2021, <https://www.greydynamics.com/task-force-takuba-special-forces-in-the-sahel/>.

Germany acting together, but the will to do this does not exist in the German political elites at present.

Defeat and partition in World War II followed by 76 years of geopolitical and military subordination to the United States have created very deep inhibitions in the German elites against taking potentially dangerous independent action in international affairs. The only partial exceptions, as in the *Ostpolitik* of Willy Brandt's government after 1969, and Helmut Kohl's drive for German reunification after 1989, have been in the context of relations among German states themselves. It was also argued that in the area of foreign and security policy, many purportedly independent German think tanks and research institutions are so thoroughly integrated (psychologically and in terms of funding and personnel) with transatlantic structures as to be "virtually branches of NATO." This could change, but to bring about such a change would take immense shocks to the German system.

## Further expansion of the European Union

The group agreed that, despite public promises by European leaders and the likelihood of considerable future pressure from Washington, expansion of the EU will be slow and difficult; in the case of some candidates, it could be impossible. Any major change, including the admission of new members, requires the agreement of all 27 members. The process of change is always very long and complicated, requires winning over opponents with concessions, and does not always work.

In the case of Ukraine, it was felt that continued fighting will be an insuperable obstacle to membership, if only because it will make it impossible to start on economic reconstruction. On the other hand, if a stable and enduring ceasefire can be reached (as in Cyprus), this could allow the start of the accession process.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Anatol Lieven, "Paths to a ceasefire in Ukraine: America must take the lead," Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, May 17, 2023, <https://quincyinst.org/report/paths-to-a-ceasefire-in-ukraine-america-must-take-the-lead/>.

However, the extreme difficulty of this process, and the potential shallowness of real support for Ukrainian membership within the EU, has been demonstrated by the reaction of Poland (ostensibly Ukraine's biggest supporter within the EU) to Ukrainian grain exports, after strong protests from Polish (and Hungarian) farmers that they were losing their domestic and EU markets. Despite a declaration from the EU Commission that this action was illegal, Poland banned Ukrainian grain imports, and only lifted the ban after the EU agreed that they could not be sold on domestic markets.<sup>16</sup> Admitting Ukraine would require profound reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy, which would inevitably meet bitter opposition from farmers in western Europe – especially in France. Hence in part President Macron's attempt to create a "European Political Community," making Ukraine part of a European space but without full access to EU markets and benefits.<sup>17</sup>

Ukrainian membership is also likely to face considerable opposition (if only covert) from Italy and Spain, which fear that it would radically reduce EU aid to their own impoverished regions, and also shift EU attention decisively from the Mediterranean, where increasing numbers of migrants and refugees threaten the internal political stability of these countries. It was remarked that until this year, the EU's lack of economic help to Tunisia over the past decade was striking, both because that country's decline is exacerbating the migrant crisis, and because for some years Tunisia was the only democratic success of the Arab Spring.

The difficulty of Ukraine's admission to full membership led to President Macron's initiative for a European Political Community, as a form of half-way house for Ukraine and other states. This has been met with intense suspicion in eastern European

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<sup>16</sup> Jon Henley, "Slovakia joins Poland and Hungary in halting Ukrainian grain imports," *The Guardian*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/17/slovakia-joins-poland-hungary-halting-ukraine-grain-imports>.

<sup>17</sup> "President Macron explains proposal for a European political community," <https://uk.ambafrance.org/President-Macron-explains-proposal-for-a-European-political-community>; Alexandra Brzozowski, Davide Basso and Eleonora Vasquez, "Macron teases alternative to EU enlargement," *Euractiv*, May 9, 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/macron-teases-alternative-to-eu-enlargement/>.

countries, where people fear being relegated to a form of EU outer circle. However, it was stated that under the surface, discussions on this possibility are also taking place in Poland, given the problems that full Ukrainian admission would create for Poland.

Further enlargement would decisively shift the balance of power within the EU eastwards, strengthening ethnic nationalism at the expense of the EU's foundational mission of overcoming nationalism. This would fundamentally change a key part of the original mission of the European Union, which has been precisely to combat ethnic nationalism. While countries are seeking admission, the EU has considerable ability – at least on paper – to shape their institutions and public political and social culture. But once they are members, this leverage disappears.

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Several eastern European EU members continue to experience serious problems with corruption, which is likely to be an even bigger problem in the case of Ukraine. Meanwhile, radical populist movements are also growing in the old “core” EU (though they usually moderate elements of their original chauvinism as they get closer to government). The future political face of the EU is therefore highly uncertain.

In terms of security policy, the group feels that the EU is not in a position to seek autonomy. As one participant noted, “Whenever I encountered the debate on the need for strategic autonomy in Brussels, there was always complete intellectual agreement, coupled with complete unwillingness to do anything practical to advance this.”

Washingtons has always acted openly or covertly to block such moves and to make sure that all European security plans and actions are channeled through the existing

NATO command architecture, controlled by the United States More recently, this has been reinforced by the determination of east European governments to oppose anything that might reduce U.S. military engagement in Europe. This U.S. opposition is motivated by a desire to maintain military hegemony in Europe, and by the desire of the U.S. military–industrial complex to prevent a European pooling of military resources so that countries remain dependent on U.S. weapons exports, technological expertise, and military staffwork. Despite repeated promises, European governments have made only very inadequate steps towards pooling weapons development and procurement. The latest sign of this difficulty has been the clash between France and Germany over Berlin’s decision to adopt and promote the Sky Shield system for European air defense. Sky Shield is chiefly dependent on U.S. and Israeli technology, to the exclusion of the Franco–Italian SAMP–T missile defense system.<sup>18</sup>

It was agreed that there is no possibility whatsoever of European strategic autonomy without close cooperation between France and Germany. However, there is a stark asymmetry between the two in terms of both military power and diplomatic influence. France has its own nuclear deterrent, while Germany depends on that of the United States. France would like Germany to help pay for France’s nuclear forces, but French public opinion is very hesitant about sharing actual control of them with Berlin. Following Brexit, France is now the only EU member country with a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. There have been repeated German suggestions that France might wish to share this with the EU, but these have fallen on deaf ears in Paris.

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<sup>18</sup> Lila Abboud, Henry Foy, and Laura Pitel, “France summons allies in challenge to German-led air defence plan,” *Financial Times*, June 19, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/6fdcc9e6-969b-4f07-aaed-d3702790b926>.



## *There is no possibility whatsoever of European strategic autonomy without close cooperation between France and Germany.*

This being so, the group agreed there was little chance of the EU being able to take responsibility for intervening on its own even in any future Balkans conflict. Strong U.S. military participation would be essential – and not necessarily forthcoming – to prevent a repetition of the disasters and humiliation of the early 1990s. Little hope was advanced that a solution could be found to the ethnic disputes in Bosnia and between Serbia and Kosovo. Moreover, European countries are themselves divided on the subject of Kosovo. Five EU members, led by Spain, refuse to recognize Kosovo’s independence, fearing this would set a wider precedent for ethnic separatism. With the exception of Montenegro, this is also likely to frustrate further EU expansion in the western Balkans.<sup>19</sup>

Nor does there seem any prospect of the EU (or NATO) taking responsibility for security in the southern Caucasus, even if this were desirable (which, in the view of most participants, it is not). Not only would this require the deployment of serious numbers of Western peacekeepers in the face of strong Russian and Iranian opposition, but U.S. hostility to Russia and Iran, together with the need for Azerbaijani energy supplies and the influence of Turkey, are in direct conflict with the strong influence of the Armenian diaspora on French policy.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anatol Lieven, “Ethnic conflict in Kosovo: Cutting the Gordian knot”, *Responsible Statecraft*, June 2, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/06/02/ethnic-conflict-in-kosovo-cutting-the-gordian-knot>.

<sup>20</sup> Anatol Lieven and Artin DerSimonian, “The threat of new wars in the Caucasus,” *Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft*, December 8, 2022, <https://quincyinst.org/report/the-threat-of-new-wars-in-the-caucasus-a-good-case-for-u-s-restraint/>.

## The EU, NATO and China: De-risking versus decoupling

The consensus of the group was that under both Democratic and Republican administrations, a U.S. strategy of limiting Chinese access to key technologies will continue and intensify, and that the Europeans will gradually fall into line with most of this approach, albeit often reluctantly and with long hesitations.<sup>21</sup> The Biden administration's industrial strategy and electoral strategy for 2024 are both integrally connected to a long-term strategy of winning global economic competition with China, and this is likely to continue under a Republican administration.

In the words of one participant, "The Biden administration has adopted the European language of "de-risking" rather than "de-coupling," but that is just to help get the Europeans on side. It doesn't mean that they will actually listen to them." The Biden administration's approach to putting pressure on the Europeans is more diplomatic and restrained than Trump's; as a result it is more effective, because it does not demand that the Europeans engage in what a British diplomat (during the Bush administration of 2000–04) described as "ostentatious demonstrations of submission" to Washington.

However, as the example of the orchestrated reaction to President Macron's remarks on the need for an autonomous EU policy towards China demonstrated, the Biden administration is just as determined that Europe should follow America's lead. The effectiveness of this approach was also shown by the way that the Netherlands bowed to U.S. pressure to end its supply of semiconductors to China, but in such a way that this surrender never appeared in public. Similarly, Germany has moved towards increasingly strict limits on Huawei.<sup>22</sup>

Opinion polls in many European countries show deep public resistance to being drawn into U.S. hostility to China. Among the political elites however – especially in Germany,

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<sup>21</sup> Sam Fleming and Andy Bounds, "Europe stumbles in effort to toughen its stance on China," *Financial Times*, June 20, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/39244495-bc34-461b-a0c8-9896832d50cd>.

<sup>22</sup> Rob Schmitz, "Germany may restrict Huawei, as Europe sours on China," NPR, March 8, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/08/1154315168/germany-china-huawei-restrictions>.

the most important player – there is a sentiment of complete dependence on the United States in general and the Biden administration in particular (though it was noted that “if the European elites all agree so strongly that this is in their interest, it might be a good reason for Americans to ask themselves if it is really in our interest.”)

## *Opinion polls in many European countries show deep public resistance to being drawn into U.S. hostility to China.*

So deep is this attachment that the German elites have not even begun to think seriously about preparing hedging strategies should Donald Trump win the 2024 U.S. presidential election. “They are just praying this doesn’t happen.” A Trump presidency could potentially transform U.S. policy towards Ukraine; it would also increase the hostility of European liberals to Washington.

Participants differed somewhat on the degree of economic damage to Europe that will be caused by reductions in trade with China. Some raised the German public’s fear of de-industrialization. Others said that serious pain will be confined to particular industries, notably automobiles and chemicals.<sup>23</sup> Although these (and the associated trades unions) are politically powerful, they represent a limited part of the German economy.

Moreover, their leaders are aware that Chinese economic strategy and development is likely in any case greatly to reduce German exports in these fields over the next generation. Germany will resist, but “Germany fought for almost six years against U.S.

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<sup>23</sup> Laura Pitel, “Mercedes Benz chief says cutting China ties would be ‘unthinkable,’” *Financial Times*, April 30, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/ddf0b2fc-635f-425e-8735-36abf6fdc796>; Gregor Sebastian, “The bumpy road ahead in China for Germany’s carmakers,” Mercator Institute for China Studies, October 27, 2022. <https://merics.org/en/report/bumpy-road-ahead-china-germanys-carmakers>; “Brandstaetter (Volkswagen): ‘We must not weaken in China,’” *Agenzia Nova*, January 16, 2023, <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/germania-brandstaetter-volkswagen-non-dobbiamo-indebolirci-in-cina/>.

demands to break with Huawei's 5-G, but eventually surrendered. This will happen in other areas too."

Could Europe be led to pursue an autonomous and more friendly policy towards China if Beijing plays an important part in seeking peace in Ukraine (and is allowed to do so by Washington)? Here the opinions of participants differed. Some felt that China does have a number of strong motives to end the war. Others felt that China is happy enough with the conflict in its present form, and also lacks any real experience of such mediation (détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia notwithstanding).

However, this could change if the war escalates radically. If China cannot itself bring about peace, it could play a useful role as an interlocutor with Moscow, if the United States becomes committed to the search for an early ceasefire. This could improve China's image in Europe – though doubtless Atlanticist forces would also accuse Beijing of having acted not for peace but only to help Russia.

## **Future security architecture in Eurasia**

The group agreed that it will be impossible even to hold any public discussion on this as long as the fighting in Ukraine continues and Putin remains in power. It is also extremely difficult to envisage the development of such a new architecture given the intense levels of distrust between Russia and the West and between the United States and China.

However, "history is a long business." We were reminded that the West European Coal and Steel Community of 1951 that laid the foundations of the European Union, and of which the key members were France and West Germany, came only six years after these countries were engaged in their third war in a century, and would have been unimaginable for previous generations of Frenchmen and Germans. Admittedly, this only followed appalling catastrophes, culminating in the defeat of both France and Germany in World War II, and the occupation, partition and extensive demilitarization of Germany. The group fears that if we fail to limit climate change, the future could hold

global catastrophes on the same scale, leading to equally radical transformations of the international order.

In the near term, it was stated, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, “All the arrows point toward increased confrontation and a much more militarized dividing line between the West and Russia. This will also mean more insecurity in Europe, and no long-term solution to any of Eurasia’s security dilemmas.”

However, it is still possible and necessary to think about radical alternatives to this grim picture. Moreover, the group recalled that in the past four decades alone we have seen a number of unpredicted developments that greatly changed international affairs: the collapse of Communism, the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union; the return of China as a superpower; 9/11 and the war on terror; the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

It is highly probable that we will see more such developments in the decades to come. Indeed, some are what Donald Rumsfeld might have called “known unknowns” — i.e., threats that we can see clearly, but the dimensions and results of which we cannot know in advance. In the short term, attention was drawn to the quite extraordinary degree to which Europeans are turning a blind eye to the possibility that Trump, or another Republican unsympathetic to Ukraine and to Europe, could win next year’s U.S. presidential election. Not only could this change U.S. policy toward the war in Ukraine, but it would increase European hostility to the United States.

In the longer term, predictable global threats include climate change and its impacts on fragile states and societies in the Global South and the potential for a radical deterioration in Sino–U.S. relations, with the possibility of disastrous war. Such developments could radically transform present European attitudes to security and the international order. Given this range of dangers, “we need to look at how to build an international architecture that is resilient to multiple potential problems.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gordon Adams, “After Ukraine: arming down for lasting Eurasian security,” *Responsible Statecraft*, May 24, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/05/24/after-ukraine-arming-down-for-lasting-urasian-security/>.

In the meantime, it is urgently necessary to find ways of managing confrontation with Russia and China in order to limit the chances of direct conflict. Participants agreed that we need to look to the example of Nixon and Kissinger in the 1970s, who combined continued armed rivalry with the Soviet Union with measures to reduce tension, build confidence and limit nuclear arms. This included something that will be difficult to recreate given the dissolution of the Iron Curtain and the entry of the West into what Russia regards as the sphere of its vital interests: namely an understanding of borders, and a mutual recognition of other countries' red lines – something that to date the Biden administration has explicitly rejected (except in the case of U.S. red lines).

In the words of one participant, “We need to bring order and predictability into what will be a confrontational relationship for a long time to come. And we need to acknowledge honestly that this will require addressing principles that are sometimes in tension with one another: territorial integrity and international law versus peace and international cooperation” – in the case of Ukraine, as in that of Serbia, strict regard for territorial integrity as opposed to peace based on territorial compromise.

### *Excluding and isolating a country of China's economic power and state tradition is impossible and a recipe for disaster.*

It was agreed that any reasonably stable international architecture will have to include China and perhaps, in the future, India. Excluding and isolating a country of China's economic power and state tradition is impossible and a recipe for disaster. Even in Europe, in the future, “if China wants to be involved, it will be.”

This led to the perception that “if a problem looks hard to solve, enlarge it.” China can play a critical role in the search for peace in Ukraine and this in turn could help lay the foundation for the reduction of tension and the resumption of cooperative relations between the United States and China. Moreover, if China is to play such a role in Ukraine, not only in bringing about peace but preventing future conflict and investing in

reconstruction, then this will imply — much as Washington will dislike this — recognizing a permanent Chinese stake in European security.

But then, as was pointed out, giving all major actors a stake in a security order is critical to that order's success. Over the past generation, NATO and the EU — without admitting this to their own publics — set out, in effect, to eliminate Russia's role in European security, and thus Russia's stake in maintaining European peace and stability. This eventually contributed greatly to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In any debate about future security architecture, it will be necessary to keep this disastrous lesson firmly in mind.

*In the longer term, a radical shift in perception regarding the chief dangers to their countries, and a sense that the alleged threats from Russia and China were secondary or even irrelevant by comparison, could change attitudes in Europe toward strategic autonomy.*

If the United States were to move toward actual war with China, even a limited one, this would also deeply alarm the Europeans, and perhaps produce an element of distancing. Without this or similarly drastic developments in the areas of climate change and migration, most participants felt that it is unlikely that even a general swing of European politics towards right-wing populist nationalism would greatly strengthen European moves to strategic autonomy and a new approach to world order.

In the longer term, a radical shift in perception regarding the chief dangers to their countries, and a sense that the alleged threats from Russia and China were secondary or even irrelevant by comparison, could change attitudes in Europe toward strategic autonomy. This shift could come about as the result of some combination of four factors, all of which are already clearly present but whose future dimensions are

unclear: climate change; mass migration to Europe from the Global South; socio-economic decline; and greatly increased ethno-religious conflict within Europe. An additional wild card could be a crisis involving the escape of Artificial Intelligence from human control.

Developments in some of these areas will likely take place over not decades but generations. However, while we cannot say for sure what radical changes the future will bring, we can be absolutely certain (pace Fukuyama) that they will come. No human configuration – whether geopolitical, ideological, cultural or economic – lasts forever. It is therefore the duty of independent thinkers with a sense of history and historical contingency to engage in serious thinking about alternative ways of ordering the world, so that policymakers and publics have new ideas on hand when new circumstances demand them. The working group's conversation was a serious effort in this direction.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The overall consensus of the working group concerning U.S. policy was that American policymakers should remember that the United States has two fundamental and permanent vital interests in Europe, which are not the same as the perceived present needs to resist Russia in Ukraine or to contain China in Asia.

The first vital interest (as it has been for more than a century) is to prevent any actual or potentially hostile great power from dominating the great economic metropolis of western and central Europe, and establishing a military presence on the eastern littoral of the Atlantic Ocean, facing the United States. For the foreseeable future, however, there is no danger of this. Russia is not only economically weak and getting weaker, but has demonstrated in Ukraine that its military is simply not capable of subjugating all of Ukraine, let alone Europe.

The second vital U.S. interest is to maintain the economic prosperity and democratic stability of western and central Europe. This region is a vital economic partner of the



United States, without which the entire U.S. global economic position would be weakened. Equally important, the survival of liberal democracy in Europe is vital to its continued survival in the world as a whole, and therefore to America's own global soft power.

The United States should not block any European initiatives for peace in Ukraine, but the present or a future U.S. administration should also resist the temptation to try to push responsibility for this onto the Europeans, so as to avoid domestic political criticism in America. Full U.S. participation and commitment will be essential to any peace agreement.

The United States should not press, as some U.S. policymakers are tempted to do, for accelerated EU expansion to include Ukraine, Georgia and more Balkans countries. This would risk paralyzing the EU as an effective economic bloc and crippling its essential role in maintaining the global prestige and attraction of liberal democratic governance.

### *The survival of the EU as an effective economic and political institution is a vital U.S. national interest.*

On that score, as noted above, U.S. policymakers should always keep in mind that the survival of the EU as an effective economic and political institution is a vital U.S. national interest, because it both maintains stability in a key part of the world and underpins the "soft power" of Western liberal democracy. This should not be sacrificed by Washington for short-term U.S. tactical advantage in competition with Russia and China.

The United States should not try to link the promise of EU expansion to the search for a "solution" to the conflicts and disputes in the western Balkans and the Caucasus. No such solutions are available at present. In the case of Bosnia and Kosovo, the EU might, however, play an essential role in managing disputes and preventing them from breaking out again into armed conflict.

The United States should proceed with caution and moderation in pressuring Europe to take a harder line against China. The shift from “decoupling” to “derisking” in U.S. language is positive, but needs to be maintained in practice. Washington needs to remember that European publics are much less anxious about China than about Russia. Measures that could be seen as seriously damaging European industry risk causing a public backlash, especially in Germany. As to European military deployments against China, these will in any case be purely symbolic. They risk angering the Chinese without materially strengthening the U.S.-led presence in Asia.

*The United States should proceed with caution and moderation in pressuring Europe to take a harder line against China.*

Analysts of international affairs should begin thinking seriously about the future shape of a consensual and stable security order in Eurasia. Even if such an order seems impossible not just at present but for a long time to come, it is extremely important that we should start to draw up ideas for it, so as to be ready when the international scene changes radically – as sooner or later, it inevitably will.

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## About the Quincy Institute

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