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# **A Critical Analysis of the Feasibility of President Emmanuel Macron's Vision of an Independent Europe**

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## A Critical Analysis of the Feasibility of President Emmanuel Macron's Vision of an Independent Europe

“There is an unprecedented crisis because of the (Russian-Ukrainian) war. The answer is a powerful Europe”<sup>1</sup>

– President Emmanuel Macron

Charles de Gaulle, former French President, “le general”, and the physical embodiment of French resistance, was adamant that France shall not be subordinate to any nation vis-à-vis pursuing an independent French foreign, economic and defence policy.<sup>2</sup> Being a fervent subscriber of Gaullism, it is no surprise that President Emmanuel Macron seeks to imitate de Gaulle and to be the champion of French independence, albeit as the leader of the EU. In the aftermath of “Brexit”, France is arguably the only contender that can assume the mantle as the leader of an independent Europe. Although Germany has a larger economy than France, it is haunted by the legacy of World War II, its military development curtailed, and as a non-nuclear state and a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, it is unable to provide “nuclear umbrella” to its allies.

Aside from Gaullism, Macron's ambition is motivated by his belief that: Europe has become an “American vassal” instead of an “American ally”, Europe is no longer in control of its own destiny and will be “caught in a conflict that it is not theirs”, Europe should become a third pole on par with the US and China in a multipolar world, and the US has proven itself to be a fickle ally.<sup>3, 4</sup> Four years of Donald Trump Presidency, four years of American unilateralism, exceptionalism and economic coercion has irreparably damaged the US' reputation. Designated by his critics as the “America alone” policy, Trump's “America first” policy has alienated American allies.<sup>5</sup> Whether it be Trump's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which undermined years of diplomatic effort by the international community and drew unanimous condemnation from friends and foes alike, to the US' extraterritorial jurisdiction which threatened to punish the US' European allies if they continued to engage in business activities with Iran, to American economic chauvinism, to Trump's withdrawal from North-Eastern Syria, leaving the US' Kurdish allies at the mercy of the Turks, which also prompted Macron to angrily declare, “we are currently experiencing the brain death of NATO”.<sup>6</sup> Despite Biden's pledge that he would “rehabilitate the US' reputation” and repair its relationship with its allies, his assumption of power did not reassure French concerns.<sup>7</sup> Not only was France excluded from AUKUS – a security pact comprising exclusively of Anglo-Saxon countries, namely the UK, the US and Australia, the US also

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<sup>1</sup> Javier Cercas, “*There Is an Unprecedented Crisis Because of the War. The Answer Is a Powerful Europe.*”.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Warner, *Gaullist Foreign Policy*.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Wintour, *Macron Stands by Divisive Remark About US Allies “Not Being Vassals”*.

<sup>4</sup> Jamil Anderlini & Clea Caulcutt, *Europe Must Resist Pressure to Become “America's Followers”*, Says Macron.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Nicholas & Tom McTague, *How “America First” Became America Alone*.

<sup>6</sup> The Economist, *Emmanuel Macron Warns Europe: NATO is Becoming Brain-Dead*.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph R. Biden, *Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World*.

stole France's 90 billion US Dollars submarine deal with Australia, after which an outraged Macron reiterated Europe's need to assert its independence from the US.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Difficulty of Europe Weaning from Its Dependency on American Weapons**

European ability to independently design and manufacture weapons has diminished over time. This is attested by the fact that while there are several indigenously designed and manufactured European fourth-generation fighter jets, ranging from the French Dassault Rafale and Mirage 2000, to the Swedish Saab JAS 39 Gripen, to the European multinational Eurofighter Typhoon, there are no indigenously designed and manufactured European fifth-generation fighter jets. Currently, European countries relies on the American Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II and its various variants. This does not mean that there has not been attempts by European countries to develop its own fifth-generation fighter jets. In 2017, Merkel and Macron announced Germany and France would collaborate to develop Europe's own indigenous fifth-generation fighter jet.<sup>9</sup> However, it is now 2023, 18 years after the first fifth-generation fighter jet Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor entered service, the Franco-German plan still have not yet materialised.

The importance of advanced fighter jets in establishing air superiority in modern warfare cannot be understated. Although purchasing advanced fighter jets from a European ally temporarily satiate European security needs, it can prove to be addicting and erode European sovereignty in the long run because firstly: without the knowledge of how to independently develop fifth-generation fighter jets, Europe will be late in the race to develop future generations of fighter jets, thus resulting in a perpetual cycle of European dependency on American fighter jets. Secondly, relying on other countries for supply of weapons interferes with Europe's ability to pursue its own independent foreign policy. For example, the US has attached end-user agreement to its sale of General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon to its ally Pakistan which strictly forbids Pakistan from using its F-16s to commit acts of aggression against India. The consequence of violating the American imposed end-user agreement is harsh. Pakistan will be denied from purchasing F-16s, spare parts and ammunition.<sup>10</sup> Thereby greatly reducing the effectiveness of Pakistani F-16s, rendering it to a single-use weapon with a limited stockpile of ammunition.

While there is currently no end-user agreement attached to the US' sale of F-35s to its European allies, this does not mean that this arrangement is permanent. Considering that historically, European and American foreign policy have not always aligned with each other (e.g., The Suez Crisis), should the US ever decide to attach similar end-user agreement to its sales, it will spell disaster for European sovereignty. Even if the US never attaches end-user agreement to its sales, there is still the constant threat of the US spontaneously declaring an arms embargo. No country knows the effect of a spontaneous arms embargo better than France, had the French not declared an arms embargo on the Argentinians due to British diplomatic pressure, had the Argentinians been able to purchase a couple more Exocet air-to-surface missiles, it might have changed the outcome of the Falklands War or Malvinas War as it would have been known today.

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<sup>8</sup> Rick Noack, *Macron Says Europeans Need to Stop Being Naive and Assert Independence from the United States*.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Hetherington & Leigh Thomas, *France and Germany to Develop New European Fighter Jet*.

<sup>10</sup> Matt Schroeder, *Pakistan to Receive 36 F-16 Fighter Jets*.

Europe is unable to develop its own indigenous fifth-generation fighter jet because developing advanced fighter jets has become increasingly sophisticated and expensive, to the extent that no single European country can afford the research and design (R&D) cost associated with development on their own. Historically, it has been impossible for European countries to work together on similar project because of the fragmentation of the European political scene. For example, due to disagreements with its British, German, Italian and Spanish partners over the design of the Eurofighter Typhoon, France left the project to develop its own fighter jets. Currently, there is no indication that this condition has improved. Being the economic backbone of the EU, the Franco-German plan to develop Europe's own indigenous fifth-generation fighter jet is on permanent hiatus not due to a lack of R&D funding, but due to France and Germany having different security concerns and national interests. Never able to agree on a single design (France requires the fighter jet to be able to be used on aircraft carriers while Germany does not), the Franco-German plan is doomed from the start.

European countries' reliance on American weapons has increased exponentially as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the rapidly deteriorating geopolitical environment in Europe. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, arms imports from European countries was 47% higher between 2018 and 2022 than it has been between 2013 and 2017, 65% higher in European NATO member states, and the US alone supplied 65% of European NATO states' total arms import between 2017 and 2022. For example, between 2018 and 2022, Poland alone purchased 32 fighter jets, 16 missile and air defence batteries, 394 battle tanks, and 92 combat helicopters from the US.<sup>11</sup> This trend is predicted to only increase in the future, thereby further complicating Europe's difficulty to extricate itself from its dependency on American weapons, and by extension Europe's ability to achieve independence.

### **Europe's Foreign Policy Schizophrenia**

Following the inclusion of multiple ex-Communist Bloc countries into the EU, European cohesion has decreased and it has become more difficult for the EU to formulate a coherent and comprehensive foreign policy as a single unified political entity. This is because: firstly, the EU legislation demands all its members to unanimously agree on matters pertaining to foreign policy. Secondly, Western and Eastern European countries have different security and geopolitical concerns. Hundreds of years of Russian occupation, geographical proximity to Russia, oftentimes large ethnic Russian minority has instilled a sense of fear in Poland and the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). In contrast, Western European countries such as France do not share the same Russophobia. While France and Russia had seen their fair share of enmity, whether it be the Napoleonic War or the Crimean War, due to the physical distance between France and Russia, occasions where France and Russia are directly pitched against each other are rare. To the contrary, it is more common for France and Russian to ally each other against an "offshore balancer" or a Central European alliance bloc that seeks to upset the balance of power in the "Concert of Europe". Much to the chagrin of Poland and the Baltic countries, as recently as 2010, France had plans to sell two Mistral class amphibious assault ships to Russia, which would have been a

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<sup>11</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman, Justine Gadon & Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers*, 2022.

significant addition to Russia's antiquated navy, until it was abruptly cancelled in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea.<sup>12</sup>

Today, France's empire no longer stretches from Spain to Poland, its dwindling sphere of influence is limited to France's immediate vicinity and the Francophone world. In the absence of any overlapping spheres of influence and conflict of interest between France and Russia, Poland and the Baltic countries prefer to outsource their national security to the US via the NATO than to a European army led by France, whom they perceive to lack the motivation to defend them should a conflict with Russia arise. Especially considering that France periodically flirts with Russia and Macron cannot imagine a European security architecture which excludes Russia. For example, Macron has said, "there is no security for Europeans if there is no security for Russia" and "we must not humiliate Russia".<sup>13, 14</sup> These statements emanating from the President of France sowed the seeds of distrust among Poland and the Baltic countries, proving to them that Macron is Chamberlain reincarnate and France is an unreliable partner, one who is willing to sacrifice their national interests, condemn them to being under the "Russian yoke" for perpetuity in order to appease Russia. Nowhere is this divide more evident than when Macron embarked on his journey to China to proclaim European "strategic autonomy" from the US, the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki was simultaneously visiting the US to reaffirm Poland's "alliance with a country that can guarantee security in Europe, especially security in Eastern Europe".<sup>15, 16</sup>

Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel's vision for Europe is not too dissimilar to Macron's, whereby Russia is included into the European security architecture. For the nearly two decades, Germany's foreign policy strategy towards Russia under Merkel has been reminiscent of Bismarckian realpolitik, emphasising dialogue, pragmatism and commercial ties with "the world's second largest nuclear power" instead of defence and deterrence.<sup>17</sup> For example, Merkel opposed the expansion of NATO, namely the inclusion of Georgia in 2008, out of fear that the move would be considered to be a provocation and an encroachment on the Russian sphere of influence by Russia. She vehemently supported the construction of Nord Stream I and II, which although provided Germany access to cheap Russian gas, bypassed the Eastern European countries, denying them of their transit fees, and made Germany dependent on Russian gas. By "courting the devil", Merkel was deeply unpopular in Eastern Europe, and it is unlikely that her successor Olaf Scholz would pursue a drastically different Russian policy in the long run. While his *Zeitenwende* Speech suggested a 180-degree U-turn in Germany's defence policy, it should be taken with a grain of salt, do not forget that in 2017, three years following the Russian annexation of Crimea, in response to the US sanctioning Nord Stream II, the then Finance Minister Scholz reprimanded the US for "intervening in German and European internal affairs".<sup>18</sup>

There is also a number of non-traditional security issues the Rumsfeldian "New Europe" and "Old Europe" do not see eye to eye on, which includes: terrorism, religious

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<sup>12</sup> France 24, *France Reimburses Russia for Cancelled Mistral Warship Deal*.

<sup>13</sup> Dan Sabbagh, *Russia Must Not Be Humiliated in Ukraine, Says Emmanuel Macron*.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Wintour, *Emmanuel Macron's Remarks on Russia Set Alarm Bells Ringing*.

<sup>15</sup> Jamil Anderlini & Clea Caulcutt, *Europe Must Resist Pressure to Become "America's Followers", Says Macron*.

<sup>16</sup> Associated Press, *Polish Leader Heads to US to Further Strengthen Defense Ties*.

<sup>17</sup> Constanze Stelzenmüller, *Merkel's Lack of Regrets Illustrates the Fallacies of Germany's Russia Policy*.

<sup>18</sup> Reuters, *Germany 'firmly Rejects' US Sanctions on Nord Stream 2 Firms*.

extremism, non-state actors, mass migration, climate change and global warming. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2016, the percentage of Europe's population that are Muslim is 4.9%, European countries with the percentage of Muslim population above 5% are: Bulgaria at 11.1%, France at 8.8%, Sweden at 8.1%, Belgium at 7.6%, the Netherlands at 7.1%, Austria at 6.9%, Germany at 6.1%, and Greece at 5.7%. These numbers are projected to only increase considerably in the future, even without the influx of new Muslim migrants. It is evident from these data that with the exception of Bulgaria and Greece, European countries with the highest percentage of Muslim population are all developed countries located in Western Europe. In comparison, the percentage of Muslim population in Eastern European countries are negligible. For example, with the exception of the aforementioned Greece and Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia, which has a percentage of Muslim population of 3.8% and 1.6% respectively. No other Eastern European countries' percentage population even approaches 1%.<sup>19</sup>

A high percentage of the population that are Muslim, in combination with the ease of the proliferation of extremist ideologies due to the advent of technology, the prevalence of discrimination, economic inequality, perceived lack of belonging, along with a number of other factors that are present in the societies of Western European countries, contributes to the high frequency of terrorist attacks occurring in these countries.<sup>20, 21</sup> Although terrorist attacks do occur in Eastern European countries, terrorist attacks motivated by Islamist ideology are rare, predominantly due to the negligible Muslim population. Even Greece, which has been plagued by terrorist attacks in the past decades, which has a significant Muslim population, the terrorist attacks were committed by Marxist guerrillas and anarchists and not by adherents of radical Islam. This discrepancy exists because Islam has existed in Greece for millennia and its adherents are better assimilated into Greek society compared to the Muslims residing in the societies of Western European countries.<sup>22</sup>

The EU launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) back in 2004, in an attempt to promote economic prosperity and political stability in countries located in Europe's immediate vicinity, which includes the majority Muslim Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Yet despite of the unanimous support from both the New and the Old Europe, the project was a failure. In 2015 the Syrian Refugee Crisis whereby an influx of migrants from majority Muslim countries migrated en mass to Europe, accompanied by an exponential increase in Islamist terrorist activities, and Islamist terrorist organisations such as Daesh reaching its territorial zenith. European failure can be attributed to many reasons, one of them being Eastern European countries' lack of motivation. Since Eastern European countries' military expenditure is restricted by its small or weak economies, don't suffer from Islamist terrorist attacks, has a neighbour which it perceives to be an existential threat, is overdependent on the US for security which caused them to develop myopia regarding US culpability in destabilising the region, Eastern European countries' contribution has been minimal and its effort unenthusiastic.

Moreover, instead of uniting to coordinate a response to the situation, the refugee crisis exacerbated the rift between Western and Eastern European countries. With Czechia,

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<sup>19</sup> Conrad Hackett et al., *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*.

<sup>20</sup> Santa Fe Institute, *Why People Become Terrorists*.

<sup>21</sup> Seung-Whan Choi, *Terrorist Campaigns and the Growth of the Muslim Population*.

<sup>22</sup> Dimitris Skleparis, *Explaining the Absence of Islamist Terrorist Attacks and Radicalisation in Greece*.

Romania, Hungary and Slovakia voicing their objection to France and Germany's plan to distribute the incoming migrants among all the EU member states.<sup>23</sup> To the Eastern European countries, since the majority of the migrants are merely passing through their countries on their way to the developed countries in Western Europe, the crisis is therefore none of their concern. In response, the then President of France Françoise Hollande angrily remarked, "those who do not share our values need to reconsider their place in the EU", and the then German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière threatened to cut off funding to Eastern European countries opposed to the plan.<sup>24, 25</sup>

Due to being at different stages of economic growth, the New and Old Europe view the dual threats of global warming and climate change differently. According to a poll conducted by Lloyd's Register Foundation in 2021, in Northern and Western Europe, 56% of participants believed climate change to be a serious threat, 32% believed it to be a somewhat serious threat, whereas in Eastern Europe, only 46% of participants believed climate change to be a threat, and 26% believed it to be a somewhat serious threat.<sup>26</sup> The public sentiment in Poland, Czechia and Hungary is that since the region's economy lags behind Western Europe, they should be allowed to develop uninhibited, especially considering that Western European countries did not care about climate change and global warming while they were developing during the Age of Industrialisation.<sup>27</sup> The decisions taken by policymakers in Eastern European countries reflect this, with Poland constantly vetoing any attempts by the EU to pass any legislation to reduce carbon emissions.<sup>28</sup> Aside from pursuing economic development and fairness, the region's abundance of coal, reliance on using its lax environmental laws and geographic proximity to attract industries from Western countries, contributes to Eastern and Western Europe viewing climate change and global warming through different lenses.

The ramification of European countries' different security concerns is that Europe is rarely able to reach a consensus and suffers from foreign policy schizophrenia. Worse yet is that some European countries that are dependent on the US for security are willing to sacrifice European unity and hijack the EU's foreign policy to please the US, with Lithuania being a prime example. Lithuania and China are thousands of kilometres away from one another, they have neither an extensive history of contact with each other or any conflict of interest, yet Lithuania was more than willing to antagonise China without provocation. For example: by leaving the 17+1 Economic Cooperation Forum between China and several Eastern and Central European countries, forbidding the Chinese telecommunication conglomerate to Huawei to participate in the construction of Lithuania's 5G telecommunication network, discrediting Huawei phones, and allowing Taiwan to change its de facto embassy's name in Lithuania from the Taipei Representative Office in Lithuania to the Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania. Although Lithuania cites China's alleged human rights violations, lack of democracy and liberty as motivations for its actions, Kai-Olaf Lang, a specialist for Baltic Affairs at the German Institute for International and

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Traynor, *Refugee Crisis: East and West Split as Leaders Resent Germany for Waiving Rules*.

<sup>24</sup> Umberto Bacchi, *Migrant Crisis: Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán Proposes EU Border Force to Patrol Greek Frontier*.

<sup>25</sup> Agence France-Presse, *Germany Supports Cutting EU Funds to Countries That Refuse Refugee Quotas*.

<sup>26</sup> Dave Keating, *Why Eastern Europe Resists EU Climate Action*.

<sup>27</sup> Julian Popov, *The Myths Keeping Eastern Europe in the Fossil Age*.

<sup>28</sup> Dave Keating, *Why Eastern Europe Resists EU Climate Action*.



Security Affairs adds, another reason is “to signal to the US that Lithuania is a loyal US ally and Lithuania and the US are on the same page when it comes to containing China” in the midst of the intense Sino-US geopolitical rivalry.<sup>29</sup>

Disregarding momentarily whether toying with semantics really contributed to alleviating Taiwan’s precarious diplomatic and military situations, or whether the Lithuanian government’s move was really democratic considering that the Lithuanian populace overwhelmingly opposes the Lithuanian government’s China policy.<sup>30</sup> The fact of the matter is, China withdrew its ambassador from Lithuania, downgraded its diplomatic relationship to charge d’affaires, and imposed a series of economic sanctions, which includes banning the import of goods from Lithuania, and goods containing components made in Lithuania in response. As a member of the EU, the diplomatic spat between China and Lithuania compelled the EU to respond to the incident. The EU’s Foreign Policy Chief, Josep Borrell said, “the EU is ready to stand up against all types of political pressure and coercive measures used against any member states”.<sup>31</sup> Although not the root cause of the breakdown of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), an unprecedented agreement between China and the EU of utmost importance, the diplomatic spat was one of the several straws that ultimately broke the camel’s back.

As each other’s largest trading partner, the current consensus from the EU and China is that notwithstanding their ideological differences, they should strive for mutually beneficial, win-win cooperation. Picking a side in the Sino-US competition is never on top of the list for Europe. This is evident from the fact that despite of the instances where senior European policymakers explicitly condemned China and proclaimed their allegiance to the US, such as when Charles Michel, the President of the European Council addressed the UN General Assembly on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020, the EU nonetheless hurriedly went forth to cement the CAI with China during the Trump-Biden “interregnum”, suggesting that rhetoric is rhetoric and business is business.<sup>32, 33</sup> However, if Europe is not able to resolve its internal division soon, European independence will remain a fantasy.

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Latschan, *Lithuania: Taking a Stand Against China*.

<sup>30</sup> Finbarr Bermingham, *Lithuanians Overwhelmingly Oppose Vilnius’ Policy on China, Poll Shows*.

<sup>31</sup> European Union External Action, *Joint Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis on China’s Measures against Lithuania*.

<sup>32</sup> Jimmy Quinn, *Europe Makes its Choice*.

<sup>33</sup> Jimmy Quinn, *Europe’s Disgraceful Betrayal*.

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