

Is Europe Becoming America's New Middle East?

Last week, French President Macron shocked many in the US by appearing to side with China against the US during meetings with President Xi. Macron has been the most outspoken, but he is only one of many world leaders to visit China recently. CNN reported on the 14th of April that: "Since late last month the Chinese leader has hosted heads of state and government chiefs from Spain, Singapore, Malaysia, France and the European Union – an unusual pace of diplomatic activity that comes as countries look to Beijing as the global economy sputters in the wake of the pandemic and war in Ukraine.

On Friday, that list grew to include Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who is expected to sign a host of bilateral deals with Xi – and, like several of the leaders before him, arrives with hopes of making progress toward ending Russia's war in Ukraine.

But for Xi, this revolving door of visiting leaders – making the trip even as China has refused to condemn the Russian invasion – is also an opportunity to assert his vision for a global order not dictated by American rules – and push back against perceived threats."

The switch that could change the old world order has been pressed. The 20th century world order based on US hegemony backed up by lesser powers and satellite states across the world has been challenged. Macron did not do this, but he simply asked the obvious question. During an interview in the Chinese southern city of Guangzhou, Macron said: "The question we need to answer, as Europeans, is the following: is it in our interest to accelerate (a crisis) on Taiwan? No, the worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers on this topic and take our cue from the U.S. agenda and a Chinese overreaction."

His remarks follow the pitiful failure of Europe to avert the war in Ukraine, which not only was predictable; it was spurred on by US leadership of NATO pushing eastwards towards Russia's border, in disregard of the broken promises made by the US as Russia was transitioning toward a post-Soviet world. Under US leadership, Europe acquiesced in the eastward expansion of NATO, and just as now with China, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine was about to begin, Macron and other European leaders met Putin one after another to calm tensions but they failed miserably. Putin rebuffed their efforts as they are not the decision makers. At his Security Council Meeting on the 21st of February 2022, just before invading Ukraine, Putin remarked: "I spoke twice to the President of France yesterday; actually, we spoke until 2 am this morning, so you could say we talked today. He insists that the US position has undergone some changes. But regrettably, he was unable to answer the question of what those changes are." He also said about other countries: "we have been told that some NATO countries are against Ukraine becoming a member. However, despite their objections, in 2008, they signed a memorandum in Bucharest that opened the doors for Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO. I have not received an answer to my question as to why they did that. But if they took one step under pressure from the United States, who can guarantee that they will not take another step under pressure? There is no guarantee." The Secretary of the Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, also highlighted the enslavement of European politics to the US: "we are holding talks with NATO, the OSCE, the European Union, and the leaders of European countries. Talks must be held, but talks must be held with the United States. Everyone else will do as the United States says, including NATO, the OSCE, the European Union, and so on."

Now, one year has passed and European countries have sacrificed their economies in support of the US design of 'weakening Russia' through the war in Ukraine, and Macron has

spoken boldly in China about the danger of France and Europe being, "caught up in crises that are not ours...We, Europeans, must wake up. Our priority is not others' agendas in all regions of the world".

Macron's comments displeased the US. Senator Rubio's response was typical: "If Macron speaks for all of Europe, and their position now is they're not going to pick sides between the U.S. and China over Taiwan, maybe then we should not be taking sides either." Rubio was complaining about the U.S. aid in Ukraine as "spending a lot of taxpayer money on a European war," which is ironic as the US took the lead in setting up the conditions for that war in order to tame Europe as easily as it instigated and waged wars for its purposes throughout the Middle East over past decades.

The US threatened to stop Russian gas from reaching Europe via the Nord Stream pipelines, "one way or another," as Biden phrased it, and then the pipelines were blown up; and the US responded with joy. Europe was strangely silent! After Macron's warning in China, most European politicians were also silent, and many criticized him. Macron reiterated his remarks later in the Netherlands, where he said: "being an ally does not mean being a vassal... doesn't mean that we don't have the right to think for ourselves." The German response was ambiguous. German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock, followed Macron to China where she said that "France's China policies reflected EU China policies one-to-one," but she did not mention the need for EU autonomy from the US. She focused on the Taiwan Strait where, she said, "a destabilisation would have consequences for all countries, the global economy and Germany, too." It seems that the EU only wants business as usual and lacks the unity of resolve to pursue a foreign policy independent of the US. It is as if she is just begging China to calm down and not face up to the big bully, as doing so will only make things worse. European political discourse is coming to resemble that of Middle Eastern leaders over the past decades. Some bold speeches from time to time, but acquiescence to US demands, silence and servility to the US.

Macron's bold comments will change nothing today, but the divergence of China and Russia from the US is serving as the catalyst for a worldwide resistance to US hegemony that will either break China and Russia, or cause the world to slip away from US dominance. Today, the dollar is supreme as the world's reserve currency, but the US abuse of its financial dominance has alienated and frightened countries all over the world in addition to Russia and China. It was the stability and safety of US dollar bonds that tied the treasuries of countries large and small to the dollar, but now with the unprecedented freezing of Russia's dollar assets, along with the higher interest rates making dollar bonds a liability that even crashed two US banks, the dollar does not look so safe anymore. Worse than that, Russia seems to be surviving economically and aligning with China to create a viable alternative to dollar hegemony that while small today, could be the beginning of bigger things. Perhaps a proverbial 'Pandora's box' has been opened. The international order is out of balance and the future looks chaotic and much is possible. Western European politicians that have become as captivated to the US as many Arab rulers, and Eastern European politicians with their individual concerns will ensure that Europe's role in these changes will be no more than trying to minimize the losses to their economies by playing careful balancing acts, not only between the US and China, but also between themselves.

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