

## **Navigating the new conflict landscape: Europe's defense autonomy and the shifting powers of a bipolar world**

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*"War is not merely a political act but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same by other means". - Carl von Clausewitz*

In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, we witness a profound conflict and global security transformation. Carl von Clausewitz's famous maxim, which sees War as an extension of politics by other means, has never been more relevant than now. This perspective offers us a critical lens to analyze contemporary challenges, from Europe's strategic crossroads to the intensification of rivalry between the United States and China, ushering in an era characterized by a new bipolar conflict and multiple transnational challenges.

Furthermore, what has been called "Putin's War" represents a direct challenge to the rules-based international order. The Kremlin's determination to maintain its dominance and influence over the former Soviet republics and the states that were once under its orbit reflects Russia's ambition to redefine the principles that have governed international relations since the end of the Second World War, putting global stability at risk. As seen in the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the military intervention in Syria since 2015 to support the Bashar al-Assad regime, and sophisticated cyber operations directed against critical infrastructure and electoral processes in Western countries.

Europe's security is at a critical point, facing fundamental questions about its ability to defend itself without US military backing. The recent death of Alexei Navalny, seen as an act of defiance by Russia to the West, and Ukraine's withdrawal from the city of Avdiivka have highlighted the urgency of addressing these issues in a context in which skepticism from specific sectors of the Party Republicans, influenced by Donald Trump, fuel doubts about the United States' commitment to European defense. These raises serious questions about the vulnerability of the eurozone.

Europe, therefore, finds itself at a decisive moment, debating between its military and nuclear dependence on the United States and the search for a path toward greater defensive autonomy. This challenge is military, strategic, and political, requiring a comprehensive review of the continental security architecture.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has pointed out that the European Union alone cannot defend Europe today. However, the proposal to establish a "European pillar" within

NATO is emerging as a multifaceted strategic solution: it would strengthen the alliance while the United States remains an active member, it would demonstrate European commitment to collective defense, and, crucially, it would prepare Europe for any future eventuality that may compromise the security provided by American participation.

Faced with these challenges, Europe is exploring options previously considered radical, such as the possibility of the EU obtaining its seat on the North Atlantic Council or even the integration of significant roles within NATO and the European Commission. Once seen as unlikely, these proposals are now seen as increasingly relevant in a changing world, underlining the inevitable debate over European autonomy in defense and security. Creating structures and strategies that give Europe greater defensive independence is a sensible precautionary measure and a step towards deeper continental integration and cohesion in terms of collective security.

Europe could use mechanisms such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defense Fund initiative to expand its defensive capacity. It is also crucial to address the political, economic, and interoperability challenges of integrating the continent's defense capabilities, thus ensuring that Europe's defense autonomy is built on solid and sustainable foundations.

The complexity of today's global challenges, including terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migrations, pandemics, climate change, and cyberattacks, demands a unified and coordinated response from the West. The role of social media in polarization and the spread of disinformation (post-truth) underscores the need for effective and responsible global governance. In this context, international cooperation is a strategic imperative and the only way to confront multifaceted threats to global security.

With the announcement of the bipolar era by Antony Blinken, the post-Cold War unipolar order has ended, giving way to a new era of bipolar competition between Washington and Beijing, such as in 5G technology, artificial intelligence, influence in international institutions, disputes territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and China's Belt and Road initiative.

This scenario highlights the formation of strategic alliances between global powers. It underlines the growing divide between authoritarian regimes and democracies, raising questions about the survival of democracy in a hostile global context.

In today's global landscape, the distinction between democracies, seen as bastions of peace, and autocracies, often considered instigators of conflict, reflects profound ideological differences and patterns of War and peace in the contemporary world. This perspective is strengthened by considering that most current wars and conflicts involve nations under

authoritarian regimes, highlighting the connection between the type of political regime and its inclination towards conflict.

We find ourselves at a historic point representing a unique opportunity to redefine international security and cooperation foundations. A detailed understanding of the political dynamics underlying conflicts and developing effective strategies for peace is essential to navigating the complexity of the 21st century.

Europe's drive for autonomy and the global campaign against transnational issues highlight the need for a fresh international cooperation and leadership model. This leadership method has led to significant cooperation projects that are templates for future joint tasks. Notably, the Paris Agreements, the COVAX program for equal vaccine delivery, and NATO-EU cyber security strategies have all focused on well-defined global missions, including combating climate change, reducing gas outflows, and ensuring cyberspace safety.

The world's ability to assume these responsibilities is crucial and will define the future of our global coexistence, paving the way toward a multipolar and multicivilizational world order that includes emerging economies in global decision-making.

The current era demands deep reflection on the structure of the new international order and the inclusion of more actors in the decision-making process. By the example they set and the firmness of their democratic principles, the world's democracies, led by the United States, can have the opportunity to lead toward a more equitable, stable, and peaceful future.