

# The German Times

A GLOBAL NEWSPAPER FROM BERLIN

March 2020

ISSN 1864-3973



ARTWORK: GT/JOHANNA TRAPP

## IN THIS ISSUE

**A special section marking three-quarters of a century of peace, including German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's historic speech at Yad Vashem.**

Pages 11-15

### World series

Graham Allison and Joseph Nye have different takes on how the West should confront China. Ian Bremmer and Robert Malley explain the West's tensions with Iran and Russia.

Pages 6-9

### Trade deadline

Donald Trump predicted he would win so many trade deals, his followers might get bored. Alexander Hagelüken explains why the president might have to pardon himself for his prognosis.

Page 17

### Put that in your pipe and smoke it

Nord Stream 2 was almost ready to deliver gas from Russia to Germany. André Wolf on why the US – and some European countries – are trying to block the project altogether.

Page 18

### Tree huggers versus Neo-Calvinists

How to save the planet from climate change doom? Julia Boek tells us what's wrong with the heated debates in Germany.

Page 19

### Missionary positions

Evangelical churches are opening franchises in Germany. Nana Brink enters the first ring of hell to report from inside a Saddleback Church mega event in Berlin.

Page 20

### Comedy Zentral

For a few days every year, Germans try to be funny. In the latest entry in our series on *Zee Germans*, J.J. Hagedorn examines what goes down during *Karneval* season.

Page 23

READ ONLINE

www.german-times.com

## Nation unbuilding

Europe and the US have failed in Syria

BY KRISTIN HELBERG

After almost nine years of civil war, the crisis in and around Syria has not been resolved. Nonetheless, it is clear who the winners and losers in the conflict are. Among the winners are the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran and even Turkey, to a certain extent. These countries have always known what they wanted, have proven ready to do anything to get what they want, and have been able to adapt their strategies to the dynamics of the war. Among the losers are the United States and Europe, who championed the desires of Syrians citizens for a life of freedom and dignity but did so in a half-hearted manner and without any tangible plan.

As this gap between its words and deeds grew, the West gambled away its credibility. With its system of international agreements, moral principles and democratically legitimized institutions, the West proved capable neither of helping the Syrians nor of ending the war. The reality we must now face in the case of the Syrian conflict is that liberal democracy has failed, and autocracy has triumphed. This outcome is destined to have far-reaching consequences – for Syrians, the Middle East, Europe and the world.

Syrian president Bashar al-Assad remains in power and is set to regain control of the entire country in the coming months. In Idlib, he will do so by force of arms, and in the northeast, he will do so by means of a gradual takeover of Kurdish self-government. In other words, the current state of affairs in Syria is as it always was, only worse.

Assad's reign hinges on loyalty to the regime, which he secures through a system of clientelism and enforces by means of fear. This results in his two strongest pillars of support coming from wealthy businessmen and a far-reaching intelligence apparatus. Simply put, those who support the regime are rewarded, and those who reject it are punished.

The country's secret services are more powerful than ever. Local militias are involved in a variety of illicit activities, which include bribery, blackmail, theft and threatening or kidnapping citizens. In the years before the war, Syrians were subject to the despotism of the state alone; today, they are at the mercy of non-state and foreign actors as well.

Syria's pseudo-socialist, neo-capitalist economic system has engendered a symbiosis of entrepreneurs and regime representatives. More specifically, the liberalization driven by Assad paired with the war economy of the past few years has created a merger of wealth and political-power structures. Crony capitalists loyal to the regime benefit from the privatization of public property, from smuggling and from monopolies in the service sector. In other words, power and money are bound to each other in modern Syria. This fact should be borne in mind when it comes to handing out humanitarian aid and supporting reconstruction efforts there.

While entire regions of Syria remain in ruin, the Syrian pound continues to lose value and UN figures show more than 80 percent of Syrians living in poverty, the Assad regime continues to focus exclusively on its followers and supporters in an effort to further secure its power. In the case of

## The current state of affairs in Syria is as it always was, only worse

Aleppo, UN funds are not directed toward the most devastated residential areas in the east of the city, which used to be administered by opposition forces; instead, the money is flowing to areas populated by those loyal to the regime. In the south of Damascus, in an area marked by the ruins of bombed-out middle-class and working-class neighborhoods, the city administration is building luxury resorts rather than social housing. Former residents are being expropriated and/or compensated at ridiculously low costs by the government.

This kind of activity is immune to outside influence because the behavior itself guarantees the survival of Syria's rulers. After decades of being under the regime's thumb, society, state institutions and the private sector form a close-knit network of interdependencies. Any real concessions – such as depriving the secret services of power and ushering in freedom of expression, freedom of the press and an independent judiciary – would result in a system failure that would threaten the survival of the rulers in Damascus. By its very nature, the Syrian regime itself is incapable of instituting effective reforms.

This is an important insight for foreign actors seeking an effective approach to negotiations with Damascus. Since 2012, the US and Europe have tried to achieve a “credible political transition” in Syria that includes a transfer of power, a transitional

continued on page 4

## Party crashing

Angela Merkel's CDU is in disarray

BY PETER H. KOEPF

Immediately following this year's Munich Security Conference, Stefan Kornelius, a commentator for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, reflected a growing concern felt by observers of Germany and many conference attendees regarding the political situation in Germany: “Is the anchor of Europe, the lighthouse of freedom, the savior of the West on the verge of becoming a new Trumpistan?”

Some spoke of what they saw as Weimar-era conditions on the horizon, that is, a further fragmentation of the party system similar to what occurred in Germany between 1919 and 1933. Following World War I, the country found itself in a situation that led to a string of new coalitions, followed by the rapid collapse of each new government alliance and, ultimately, to the fatal hope that an authoritarian, nationalist government formed by the Nazi party would be able to re-establish a sense of order.

Are these fears justified today? It would certainly appear that the last remaining *Volkspartei*, or big-tent party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), is now heading for an implosion similar to that of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the past several years. The most recent evidence of this came last month in Thuringia, when CDU deputies joined with the right wingers from the Alternative for Germany (AfD) to elect a 5-man faction from the liberal FDP party to the office of Minister President of that state. It was a regional political fiasco with far-reaching consequences for the whole country.

It has become clear that a small but potentially growing segment of the CDU has found common ground with the AfD, not only in the states of the former East Germany, and is now willing to engage in talks with their counterparts in the AfD as to where cooperation might be possible. In line with the AfD's parliamentary group leader in the Bundestag, Alexander Gauland, this small group of CDU representatives is of the opinion that it is “completely nonsensical and unrealistic not to want to work with the AfD in the long run.”

In Thuringia, politicians such as the state's recently resigned CDU chairman Mike Mohring have openly considered the option of cooperating with the left-wing party, Die Linke. But the current

CDU party leadership at the federal level remains steadfast, insisting that both options are out of the question. In other words, the party is sorely lacking a compass.

In the wake of this embarrassment, the CDU's poll numbers have gone from bad to catastrophic. The federal party leader had to resign and the party seems to be breaking up into a Christian-liberal faction and a so-called conservative wing – the latter comprising those who, just like the AfD, reject Merkel's liberal politics, particularly with regard to the environment, refugees and gender policies.

Today, the number of voices insisting that Angela Merkel should be held responsible for this misery is on the rise. Calls for the chancellor to resign and for elections to choose a new candidate to take over the CDU party chairmanship and the chancellor candidacy in the next election are getting louder and louder.

How did it come to this?

Back in 2015, the AfD and its supporters were already chanting “Merkel must go!” At that time, the economy was stable, Merkel had stoically steered Germany through the financial crisis and

the CDU was polling at more than 40 percent. “Then came the refugee crisis, and with it, the beginning of the decline of the CDU,” noted Nikolas Busse in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*. Merkel's successor, he argued, “would certainly not be able to avoid distancing themselves from Merkel on the issue of migration policy.”

But this approach is too one-dimensional. The reasons why an apparently growing segment of the population no longer trusts Germany's more established parties are much more diverse.

Surveys have shown that roughly half of the citizens living in eastern German states are only “in part” satisfied with democracy; the rest indicate that they are much more dissatisfied than satisfied. And the cause of this goes far beyond the refugee policy.

Why does an increasing number of Germans refuse to trust the country's tried and tested political battleships? Their answers to this question are many, varied and have little to do with foreign policy.

First and foremost, citizens in the eastern states, that is, in the former GDR, sense that they were hoodwinked by the

continued on page 7

# MUNICH MINUTES



## MUNICH MIC

John Kerry was the guest of honor at the presentation of *The Security Times* on the eve of the 2020 Munich Security Conference. The former US secretary of state under Barack Obama did not waste the opportunity to speak to the politicians, foreign policy experts and journalists gathered on the top floor of the Bayerischer Hof Hotel, overlooking the city's famous Church of Our Lady.

Kerry gave a passionate impromptu speech on the dangers of climate change: "People are dying because of the consequences of the world's unwillingness to confront the challenges of climate change properly."

Kerry stressed the symbolic and practical significance of the Paris Climate Agreement, in which 195 signatory countries came together and – with a big assist from Obama, who Kerry claims personally sought out Chinese President Xi Jinping in the halls of the

Donald Trump had decided to withdraw from the agreement, calling the country's current policy "a disgrace."

The former senator and 2004 presidential candidate spoke of the origin story of climate denialism in his country, citing Harvard scholar Naomi Oreskes' study *Merchants of Doubt* on the history of industrial lobbyist groups funding scientists who never intended to lay out actual evidence. The lobbies' instructions to the scientists were that "we don't have to win the debate, we only have to create doubt." That doubt, Kerry said, has gotten "in the way of what we have to do."

The reasons for inaction also include "greed, money, power, perceived self-interest, indifference and, in the case of the current president, I hate to say it, actual ignorance of the facts."

Kerry warned of a looming migration crisis that will far exceed what happened in Europe in 2015, which caused



Chairman of the Munich Security Conference Wolfgang Ischinger (left) and guest of honor John Kerry (middle) with *The Security Times* publisher Detlef Prinz

UN-organized conference in 2015 – eventually signed the accord. The agreement did indeed guarantee that the world would limit the rise of global temperatures since the advent of industrialization to 2 degrees Celsius. The importance of Paris, Kerry observed, was that "we are sending a message to the global market place that 188 countries are moving in the same direction."

The following year saw the investment of \$358 billion in renewable energy: "For the first time in human history, more money went into that source of energy than into fossil fuels."

Kerry lamented the fact that the US under President

seismic shifts in the political landscape of the continent.

In terms of a future outlook, Kerry said, a turnaround is still in the cards: "We have the capacity in the next eight to ten years. If we get our act together, we can do it."

What the G20 nations, which are responsible for 85 percent of all global emissions, need to do is treat the problem "like a war," he argued. Now is the time to seriously invest in future zero-emission technology. Referring to the Fridays for Future movement, Kerry said "these kids are terrific, but they are not sitting in any boardrooms where the decisions are made. They are telling us to be the adults."

Two issues dominated the discussions at the Munich Security Conference this February: "Westlessness" – the title of this year's Munich Security Report – and China's foreign policy.

Angela Merkel did not make it to Munich, but her name was on everyone's lips. French President Emmanuel Macron was perturbed by the German government's hesitance to embrace his proposal for joint weapons systems and a militarily more potent EU: "I'm not frustrated, I'm impatient."

More than 500 security experts, including 35 heads of state or government and around 100 ministers from all over the world, discussed the West's abdication of its global responsibilities, the erosion of multilateralism and the "bilateralization" now championed by the US. In a rare moment of harmony, US officials Mike

Pompeo and Nancy Pelosi countered accusations by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier that the US had given up on the idea of an "international community."

The American speakers also expressed concern over China's assertiveness and ambitions. The potential participation of Huawei in the global expansion of the 5G wireless network is jeopardizing NATO, they argued. Mike Pompeo even invoked the notion of a Trojan Horse.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called these criticisms nothing but a "smear campaign and lies" and injected Russia into the debate, announcing that Beijing will develop closer ties to Moscow.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg promised that Article 5 still holds – if a NATO member is attacked, the Alliance is obligated to act.



**Frank-Walter Steinmeier**  
President of Germany

*"Under its current administration, our closest ally, the United States of America, rejects the very concept of an international community. Every country, it believes, should look after itself and put its own interests before all others. As if everyone thinking of himself meant that everyone is being considered. 'Great again' – even at the expense of neighbors and partners."*



**Nancy Pelosi**  
Speaker of the US House of Representatives

*"The world can ill-afford an arms race. Nonproliferation has always been a pillar of American national security. We must preserve our nonproliferation framework, working together as NATO allies."*



**Emmanuel Macron**  
President of France

*"Common security in Europe has two pillars; one of these pillars is NATO and the other is a Europe of defense."*



**Ursula von der Leyen**  
President of the European Commission

*"In a time of growing geopolitical tensions, we need the UN more than ever."* (during the ceremony presenting the Ewald von Kleist Award to António Guterres on Feb. 15)



Conference champion: German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier kicks off the Super Bowl of security conferences on Feb. 14, 2020.



**Wang Yi**  
Foreign Minister of China

*"Given its national conditions, China will not copy the Western model. Given its cultural traditions, China will not seek hegemony, even when it grows in strength. What we have chosen is peaceful development of our own country and mutually beneficial cooperation with the world."*



**Heiko Maas**  
Foreign Minister of Germany

*"We have to do more... And we have indeed already begun. But the debate cannot be focused on a single question. The strength of our alliance cannot be measured in euros or dollars."*



**Mike Pompeo**  
US Secretary of State

*"I am happy to report that the death of the trans-Atlantic alliance is grossly over-exaggerated. The West is winning. We are collectively winning. We're doing it together."*



**Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer**  
German Minister of Defense

*"The West is more than just geography. The West is an idea, the idea of a free society, of human rights, the rule of law and the separation of powers."*



SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/KOSTISOV

# From missionary to monastery

How Europe should counter the rise of illiberal democracies

BY IVAN KRASTEV

On Dec. 10, 1948, shattered by the horrors of World War II, the international community adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Of the United Nations' 58 member states, 48 voted in favor of the declaration, eight abstained (the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies plus Saudi Arabia) and two did not vote. The world was far less liberal in 1948 than it is today, and the concept of human rights wasn't popular with the global public. Nevertheless, it would hardly raise an eyebrow were one to speculate that if the 1948 Universal Declaration came up for a vote in the UN tomorrow, the chances of it being approved would be very slim.

In 1948, the liberal order was a normative horizon; today it is a contested hegemony. The assumptions on which the liberal order rests are being challenged intellectually and politically by states within and outside the West.

Illiberal states like China and Russia contest the West's domination, but do so by violating the rules of the liberal order rather than by offering a well-articulated normative alternative. What is more, when it is in their interests, illiberal states position themselves as defenders of international institutions and global goods instead of offering alternatives to them. The support of China and Russia for the Paris Climate Agreement, for the World Trade Organization and for the Global Compact for Migration in the face of US opposition are cases in point.

At the same time, liberal norms are being challenged within Western societies by rising populist parties and especially by the Trump administration, which has defined America's commitment to the liberal order as the country's major vulnerability in the modern world. Once the liberal hegemon, the US has decided to preserve its

power by overthrowing the liberal norms on which its hegemony was founded.

Through the increasing passion and frequency of their attacks on the West for unbearable hypocrisy, illiberal political leaders in Russia and elsewhere have been sending a clear signal to their populations about the revolutionary change they represent.

What are the sources of this all-powerful hypersensitivity about hypocrisy? Is the problem power asymmetries that make relatively less powerful states and societies particularly sensitive to the big boys breaking the rules? Is it the tendency of the US and the EU, more so than any other global powers, to regularly invoke universal principles to justify their conduct of foreign policy?

Finding answers to these "hypocrisy questions" is critical, because the accusation of hypocrisy is the most effective strategy for delegitimizing the current liberal order – bearing in mind that there is no other set of normative ideas able to challenge it at the moment.

The hypocrisy of Western leaders – lecturing the world about high-minded values while actually being motivated by selfish geopolitical interests – has become one of Russia's gnawing obsessions. The so-called "liberal international order," in Moscow's view, was nothing nobler than a projection of America's will to dominate the world. Western universalism was just a false front for Western particularism. America, in particular, disguised the enlargement of its sphere of influence as an expansion of the frontiers of freedom. What the West celebrated as popular democratic revolutions were simply West-sponsored coups d'état.

In her remarkable book *Ordinary Vices*, the American philosopher Judith Shklar insists that we should not be so harshly critical

of *hypokrisis*, for it is a necessary element in any liberal society, in any society that talks values. In her view, it is also an unattractive but unavoidable feature of international relations. At the same time, criticizing hypocrisy is also tricky, because in politics it is almost impossible to criticize hypocrisy without falling into the trap of playing the part one is also criticizing. While anti-hypocrisy rhetoric has its legitimate arguments, it is one of our major findings that the weaponization of anti-hypocrisy rhetoric is partially responsible for the current miserable state of international affairs.

By focusing on the West's hypocrisy, Russia has fatally eroded the trust between Russia and the West. In the Kremlin's view,

recently heard similar fixations on Western hypocrisy coming from Turkey, China and Brazil.

By relying on the exposure of an enemy's hypocrisy to justify one's own aggressive acts, one can attack the existing world order without offering any positive alternative. But this is not a formula for a sober foreign policy based on proper understanding of the actions and motivations of the other side. Instead, it increases the risks of dangerous accidents.

What should be the policy of any state actor that wants to preserve the normative power of the liberal values in a world in which illiberal great powers have weaponized "Western hypocrisy"? How should the EU act and talk

even after Trump leaves office, the US will not embrace its former role as the leader of the liberal world and the guarantor of the liberal system. And even more importantly, the US would face many constraints in playing this role.

As indicated in a recent survey commissioned by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the US is perceived as a security threat rather than as an ally by a sizable segment of European societies. It is also questionable how liberal the post-populist governments in the different parts of the world will be. The failure of populism does not automatically mean victory for liberalism.

The only way for the EU to survive as a liberal actor in an increasingly illiberal environment is by transforming itself from a missionary who wants to shape the world in his own image into a monastery focused on protecting the very exceptional nature of its political project.

When the EU raises human rights issues in its conversations with China, it should make its expectations clear: it is not trying to change China's attitudes, but instead preserve the EU's own exceptional nature. In this sense, China's behavior in the first post-communist decades could be an interesting model to follow. China accommodated itself to many of the global trends that shaped the post-Cold War world, but it defended the role of Marxist language and the Communist Party as the way to preserve its state identity. In the post-communist decades, China acted with the full awareness that some of the assumptions in which it had believed had turned out to be wrong, but at the same time it made Chinese communism the defining characteristic of its exceptionalism. The EU should do the same regarding liberalism.

In other words, if until now the EU was very much colored by the idea of the universality of its values and institutions, in the future it should sharply stress its exceptionalism. If before it was proud of the undefined nature of its borders, now it will have to fix its borders. The distinctive nature of a monastery is that while it hopes to influence the world beyond its door, it is aware that it lives in a different normative space than the outside world. It is insulated from the world, and there is a clear border between being inside the monastery and being outside of it. To focus on the exceptional nature of the EU is the only strategy that would sustain the internal cohesion of the union while at the same time acting as an alternative to growing illiberal trends. Brussels' new climate agenda is also an opportunity for the EU to reinvent its soft power and to stress its belief in multilateralism.

The EU should define itself as a monastery within the world of sin, a monastery that is economically and even militarily powerful enough to preserve its autonomous role and way of life, but one that tries to transform others only through the example of its very existence. And it should refrain from succumbing to desperation, for every monastery is a missionary in waiting.

**IVAN KRASTEV** is a fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna and the Richard von Weizsäcker fellow at the Robert Bosch Foundation in Berlin. He is a founding board member of the European Council on Foreign Relations, a member of the board of trustees of the International Crisis Group and a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*. His piece is based on the research project on hypocrisy that Krastev initiated and led at the Robert Bosch Academy.

Once the liberal hegemon, the US has decided to preserve its power by overthrowing the liberal norms on which its hegemony was founded

BY SYLVIA SCHREIBER

One image can speak volumes. The participants at the Libya summit in Berlin take their places on the podium for a group photo. Positioning themselves at the front are representatives of the proxy powers behind the Libyan civil war: Russia, Turkey and Egypt. Alongside them are the neutral conciliators, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres with summit host Chancellor Angela Merkel. The German chancellor sent out the original invitation as an honest broker for Europe, which has a vital interest in peace in neighboring Africa as well as in migration issues.

Merkel is not the only European head of government in the front row. Next to Merkel stands French President Emmanuel Macron, beaming at the photographers, and on the far right is the jovial Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, whose country has just left the European Union. All the while, the official representatives of the EU find themselves far from front and center. In the photo, it is not easy to make out EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, while High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell is also relegated to the second row – the courtesy seats for the also-rans.

The triumvirate of the EU’s “big three” assembled in the front row has a name of its own: the E3 format, in the style of the G7. The world’s seven major industrial nations act in formation, and so, too, does the E3. Future foreign and security leadership will be the task of the largest European states, with France and the UK as notable military and nuclear powers and Germany as the strongest economic nation and political constant on the continent.

A few days earlier in a speech at the London School of Economics, German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer made clear that this current picture is more than a mere snapshot: “The E3 format is an important future link between the mindsets of the EU and NATO. It is more than just another format,” she explained. “It is based on the fundamental conviction that working together makes us stronger. Each one of us is a strong, free and sovereign nation. We will remain free and sovereign, but we will only become stronger if we find more points of contact.” The E3 stands for a European security partnership that enables “people with different national backgrounds to work together towards a common

goal. Like our soldiers do in training and on operations.”

Is this the format by which a new European power geometry will come into focus? Could this be a format that exists in addition to the EU and as a force beyond NATO? German European policymakers are skeptical: “The E3 will not be able to replace the common EU foreign and security policy, as this represents all of the all member states,” said Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, vice-chairman of the Free Democratic Party (FDP)

the EU is an economic giant yet a political and military dwarf.

With no further steps toward political integration, the European community of states will struggle to free itself from this paradoxical situation. On the contrary, although the EU has enjoyed increasing global recognition as a trading power in recent years, it has also lost political influence. The rules-based EU system, which is tasked with substituting political power legitimization with treaties and negotiations, comes up against

this flaw. In Syria, Iran, Iraq as well as in the conflict in Libya, the EU has remained absent, leaving the field to new geopolitical players such as Russia and Turkey. “Here, Europe is a nothing, it is pointless,” railed Joost Hiltermann, the program director for the Middle East and North Africa at the Brussels think-tank International Crisis Group, an NGO affiliated with Human Rights Watch. The EU has “neither the foreign policy backbone nor the will.”

In an interview with the German

declared that the third major priority of her “geopolitical” Commission would be to carry greater weight in the world for the EU. “Credible military capacities” are needed, she said, as is “hard power,” adding that they should also be coupled with “diplomacy, conflict prevention, reconciliation and reconstruction.”

For French President Emmanuel Macron, however, this colorful Brussels wish list does not go nearly far enough. Macron, who launched what his advisors call his

first nuclear power station under French oversight, but also participation in Franco-German armaments projects such as joint tank construction.

These ideas had previously been rejected by Germany. In contrast to Berlin, Paris thinks in geopolitical categories; French foreign policy defines long-term interests and spheres of interest on the basis of geography and history.

Brexit will undoubtedly shift the foreign policy clout of the EU in favor of French influence. At the Libya Conference in Berlin, Macron cheerfully positioned himself under the E3 umbrella. Should the trio prove its potential as heavyweights in Europe, it will likely push the pallid EU foreign policy even further into the background. Unerring advocates of the French method of “variable geometry,” in which changing political pairings are welcomed for their respective purposes, will barely intrude on Macron’s visions.

In Warsaw, the French extended yet another invitation for bilateral cooperation, in this case a new configuration of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), a military cooperation of strong European states under French leadership. Since the commencement of the EI2 in summer 2018, the military general staff of nine EU countries plus the UK has adopted this formula as it works on a “strategic culture” and “military doctrine.” The cooperation is aimed at a rapid military crisis response.

Creating a more robust Europe is the goal of the many initiatives that have emerged. But as long as these individual measures remain unbundled, the continent will remain unmanageable. The old US dream of a single telephone number for all of Europe could hardly be farther from reality.

Alexander Lambsdorff has some advice on whom to call: “Not a Berlin number in any case,” joked the liberal politician. Germany’s grand coalition was “worn out on the one hand, chaotic on the other,” he noted, whereas a formative policy role and fresh ideas are clearly emanating from Paris at the moment. “Nevertheless, I would also advise US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to make a call to the EU High Representative in Brussels.” According to Lambsdorff, this is the only place where one can find out what Europe is thinking “as a whole.” After all, Europe and the EU are far more than just the big E3.

SYLVIA SCHREIBER

is an EU correspondent who has written for *Der Spiegel*, *Handelsblatt* and *Les Européens* in Brussels.



A picture paints a thousand words: The EU’s Michel, Borell and von der Leyen were relegated to the back row.

# Geometry class

The heads of government of major European nations are setting the tone in foreign policy, while EU High Representative Josep Borrell stands idly by

in the Bundestag and former member of European Parliament. “The joint policy of the Union takes priority. The UK will participate on a case-by-case basis.”

The E3 group, which the Europeans used to successfully negotiate the first nuclear agreements with Iran in 2003 and 2004, may succeed in keeping the British on board the European ship following Brexit. While simultaneously anchored to NATO, the format allows the big three to demonstrate military, diplomatic and economic muscle; the proof that Europe has more to offer than an EU comprised of brokers and negotiators. “While others arm themselves, the EU believes in treaties and agreements,” said one Brussels diplomat with regard to the decades-old dilemma that

its limits when there are fundamental differences of opinion.

The euro and migration crisis between 2008 and 2016 revealed fault lines and frailties within the community. Between north and south, the question of social cohesion remains unresolved. In attitudes towards migration and borders, there is a deep and as yet unbridgeable fissure between east and west.

In any case, the Union has precious little foreign policy credibility; the principle of unanimity and veto, which quickly leads to paralyzing logjams caused by individual states, adds to an overall picture of disharmony.

The newly created position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has done little to alleviate

weekly *Die Zeit*, former President of the European Commission and former Prime Minister of Italy Romano Prodi took the EU to task on the question of Libya: “If you turn yourself into a sheep, the wolf will have you for dinner.” Today, he argued, the task is to “develop a vision for Europe’s role.”

However, such a vision already exists. During Prodi’s time in office in Brussels, the decision was made to establish a European Defense Union, including a European Army. That was back in 2003. As of 2020, neither the defense union nor the European army has yet been implemented.

But there are prospects. In addition to the “Green Deal” for the climate and the digitalization of the European economy, Commission President von der Leyen

“disruptive strategy” last fall with the jolting description of NATO’s “brain-death,” is now embracing his role as Europe’s “enfant terrible.” He has drawn even more attention by calling for a renewed partnership with Russian President Vladimir Putin, thereby immediately alienating the Baltic EU states and NATO members, who see their solid borders with Russia as a guarantee of their existence.

Macron’s most recent coup is the initiation of a “strategic dialog with EU members on nuclear deterrence” under the French nuclear shield. He had already campaigned for a new partnership with Poland in the past, in military terms as well. For his neighbors in the east, he proposed not only the construction of the

continued from page 1  
Nation unbuilding

government, a new constitution and democratic elections under UN supervision – none of which have come to pass.

The mantra repeated by heads of state and foreign ministers in the West – that is, their insistence that resolving the conflict requires a political rather than military solution – has become an embarrassing phrase. It exposes the West’s lack of strategic vision and sheer inability to act.

This mantra disregards one of the most basic rules of diplomacy: that a negotiated solution is only possible when all parties to the conflict no longer see the point in continued fighting. The situation in Syria would have to reach a stage where none of the stakeholders see any benefit to military escalation; only then would we see genuine willingness to compromise, thereby providing the diplomatic leeway needed to negotiate an agreement.

The conflict in Syria never reached such a point. For Assad, it’s always been worthwhile to fight for survival, and his regime had everything it needed to win the war in military terms: weapons of mass destruction and the readiness to use them against its own citizens; a supporting world power –

in this case Russia – that wanted to keep its last ally in the Middle East in power and was therefore willing to use its air force to destroy or expel all opponents of the regime; a regional power – in this case Iran – experienced in asymmetrical warfare and capable of organizing Shi’ite militias on the ground; a war-weary world power – in this case the US – that was cautious and in retreat; divided Europeans with no plan at all; a blocked UN Security Council; and, finally, the ignorance of the world community.

In contrast to the US and Europe, the Russian president has a functioning plan in Syria. It comprises three stages: rescue, recapture and rehabilitate. Today, we are moving through the transition to phase three, the aim of which is to make the Syrian regime an accepted member of the international community once again.

The logic behind this strategy seems plausible: Assad has won and remains in power, so it makes sense to acknowledge this reality, to work constructively toward rebuilding the war-torn country, to improve conditions for its poor and to allow Syrian refugees to return.

The only problem is that anyone who wants to actually help the people of Syria would be wise

not to support the Syrian regime. Indeed, every dollar and euro sent to Damascus with good intentions will only serve to further consolidate the very regime structures that led to the uprising nine years ago.

What unsuspecting politicians, journalists and bloggers perceive as stability in Syria is actually nothing more than what we would call *Friedhofsruhe* in German, namely that deathly calm felt in cemeteries. Assad needs the money to reward his cronies, to pacify the militias, to draw supporters closer to him through better living conditions and to maintain the secret service apparatus. He has no interest in the return of Syrian refugees from abroad; indeed, he deliberately drove most of them out of the country in the first place as a way of ridding himself of his enemies.

At the moment, Assad is delighted. After all, the UN has been working for years with government-related organizations, companies and individuals who continue to distribute aid money in a manner that suits his wishes. Some of these partners are even on US and European lists of sanctioned organizations; this is a true scandal, given that Washington and Berlin are the largest bilateral

donors of humanitarian aid to Syria.

While Europeans and Americans continue to provide humanitarian aid to Syrians, thereby relieving Assad of that burden and freeing him up to pursue his Idlib campaign, Russia, Iran and Turkey are working to safeguard their long-term presence and commitment in Syria. The autocratic leaders of each of these countries simply don’t see foreign policy as a diplomatic negotiation of compromises; instead, they see it as the pursuit of a strategy of pure self-interest.

Of course, these leaders have no problem with Assad’s authoritarianism, and this means that the Syrian regime can do whatever it wants on the domestic front. Not even the Kremlin can influence Assad’s secret services. As a result, there can be no security guarantees from the Russian side for any Syrians wishing to return to their home country.

The efforts made by the three interventionist powers in the Syrian civil war have paid off. Although Ankara moved away from its original goal of regime change in Damascus, it is still able to use some of the Syrian insurgents as Islamist mercenaries to assert its own interests east of

the Euphrates against the Kurds and now also in Libya. With its offensive in northeastern Syria in October 2019, Turkey drove the Democratic Union Party (PYD) into the arms of Assad and Putin, thereby preventing the creation of an autonomous Kurdish state in the medium term.

A rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus is possible; their secret service chiefs met in Moscow in January. Russia maintains three military bases in Syria and will therefore remain a presence in the East Mediterranean for decades. In addition, Russian companies succeeded in signing largely one-sided contracts for the extraction of oil, gas and phosphorus there.

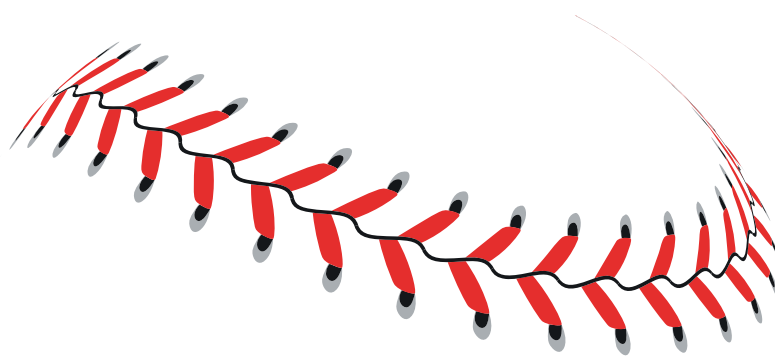
Moscow is eager to strengthen state structures and contain militias in Syria – in contrast to Tehran, which is working to create a state within the state in order to secure its own military, political, economic and social influence. The recently murdered General Qassim Soleimani was in the process of setting up Syrian paramilitary groups modeled after the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and fighting for Assad under local leadership. Iran’s goal there is to repeat in Syria what it achieved

with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq. This would complete the Shi’ite “axis of resistance” extending from Tehran via Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut all the way to the Mediterranean and to the borders of Israel. However, this would be quite difficult in Syria, which has a Shi’ite population of only 2 percent.

The US and Europe have lost the conflict in Syria. In the short term, they should stand firm against the Syrian regime and against Russia’s attempts at “peacemaking.” They should put pressure on the UN to ensure that any humanitarian aid is given to the neediest people and not to Assad’s network of cronies. In the long term, Europeans can place their hopes on the desire of the Syrian people for change, supporting their quest for freedom, justice and reconciliation wherever they can.

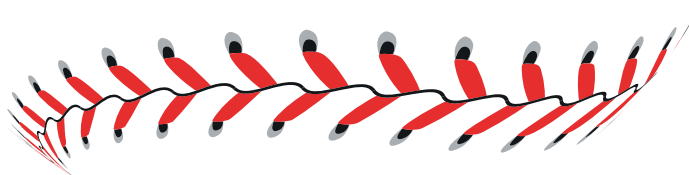
KRISTIN HELBERG

is a journalist and an expert on the conflict in Syria. She works for ARD, ORF and other broadcasters. Her book *Der Syrien-Krieg: Lösung eines Weltkonflikts* (The war in Syria: Solving a world conflict) was published by Herder in 2018.



# PLAYING HARDBALL

Brexit may actually help EU members better understand their joint interests



BY ALMUT MÖLLER

**A**mong the tectonic shifts in international relations that both analysts and policymakers have been trying to make sense of over the past years, there is one that deserves particular attention. The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union – Brexit – that took effect on Jan. 31, 2020, marks a turning point for Europe.

In the future, historians may look back at 2020 as the year in which European integration – the main process behind which Europeans had rallied their economic and political aspirations for more than half a century – became a contested idea. With the departure of its third largest member state, the union of 27 was suddenly faced with a serious competitor in its immediate neighborhood. London, in embracing the monumental task of creating wealth and prosperity for its citizens outside of the Union, had no choice but to adopt a resolute approach.

This approach included not only the rejection of the “level playing field” that the EU insisted on in subsequent negotiations over its future relationship with the UK. London also substantively invested in its networks across EU countries, thereby doing its part to impede cohesion within the EU. At a time when the direction and depth of European integration had already become contested within and between EU countries, the

UK found partners in spirit across Europe – a state of affairs that further alienated Brussels policymakers from the UK. As a consequence, the Channel widened and it became almost impossible to bridge the growing gaps between Britain and continental Europe.

Of course, we're not quite there yet. And it's true that we may not get anywhere near such a scenario. But there's a risk that the paths of the UK and the EU<sup>27</sup> will diverge much faster and much more markedly in the coming months than many of us would like to see. It is worth remembering that the spirit of cooperation, however imperfect, that guided relations among fellow members of the EU is unlikely to carry the day in the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the Continent.

The EU and its members must quickly learn to see the UK as a competitor, and perhaps even an adversary at times. This does not mean that these new circumstances prohibit mutually beneficial cooperation. In fact, it might even lead to the EU and its members gaining a better understanding of their joint interests; this, in turn, could lead to a strengthening of unity among the EU<sup>27</sup> and also help craft a new relationship with the UK.

Still, even though the EU's cooperative approach and quest for compromise is part of its DNA, it is going to have to learn to play

hardball while not falling out with London as a consequence. There is a risk of this happening, however, and one should not underestimate the sense of displeasure among Brussels policymakers at the UK's decision to jeopardize the unity and future of the EU by means of its departure.

Certain subsequent actions from London in the months ahead could trigger a deep sense of resentment. It is thus important to acknowledge that the logic of cooperation between the EU and the UK changed significantly in January 2020.

The negotiated overall framework will determine what relations will look like in the coming years. London is determined to have an agreement on the future relationship with the EU27 in place by the end of the year. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has insisted that there will be no extension of the transition period beyond Dec. 31, 2020. During a visit to London in January 2020,

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen countered by insisting that it was a very ambitious plan to negotiate a comprehensive agreement in such a short time. In other words, she considered the plan to be almost impossible to achieve. Even when taking into account the fact that tactics are at play now and that the mandates for the negotiations are being hammered out, both positions are credible. The question is how much wiggle room the UK and the EU have to come up with a sound framework of cooperation by the end of the year. Brussels is rife with skepticism on the matter.

One key question for the EU is whether the unity of its 27 member states – which held so impressively, and perhaps surprisingly, during the years of the UK's slow departure from the Union – will prevail. There is reason to think that in this new phase of the relationship, it will be more challenging for EU negotiators

headed by Michel Barnier to preserve the unity of the EU.

Germany has a vital interest in keeping the UK engaged as a partner, and that interest seems to be mutual. Most importantly, on the many questions of European security in all its dimensions, it is nigh impossible to conceive of European strength without the contribution of the UK. At the same time, Berlin knows that the further London drifts away from continental Europe, the more Germany must invest in its own contributions.

In this context, the difficult relationship between Berlin and Paris provides reason for concern. The problem is not the likelihood that Paris will take a more hard-nosed approach in dealing with London in the coming months, insisting that “Brexit means Brexit,” while Berlin assumes a moderating role. This division of roles between Germany and France has become routine, and could lead to a good outcome in bringing other EU members into a compromise.

The problem stems from the fact that ever since French President Emmanuel Macron took office, the degree to which there has been disagreement between Berlin and Paris over the direction, substance and *modus operandi* of the EU makes it particularly difficult to conceive of the Franco-German tandem delivering a win on the post-Brexit relationship with the UK. Berlin may lean just a bit

too much in London's direction, and Paris may insist just a bit too much on seizing the opportunity of Brexit to rebuild the European Union "à la française."

This battle of ideas between Germany and France is nothing new. When the Franco-German *Élysée Treaty* was put to a vote in the Bundestag in Bonn in January 1963, West German MPs, much to the chagrin of Paris, insisted that a preamble be added to the treaty that emphasized the relevance of the trans-Atlantic relationship and the wish for the UK to become a member of the European Community.

Now that the UK has left the EU and Europe is struggling to define the future of its relationship with the US, we are yet again in a formative moment of European history. While the coming months of EU-UK negotiations will center on mountainous piles of detail, they will ultimately boil down to one simple question: Will the UK and the EU still be able to collectively pull their weight in key areas of joint interest? This rather broad view may help us see the forest for the trees in the months to come. ■

ALMUT MÖLLER

is a Hamburg State Secretary and Plenipotentiary to the German government, the European Union and for Foreign Affairs. The ideas expressed in this article are hers alone.

# SCHINKELPLATZ

**Your historic opportunity with a view  
of the Berlin City Palace.**

Apply for one of ten city residences in the cultural heart of Berlin – live right next to Museum Island.

**www.berlin-schinkelplatz.de**  
**+49 030 364 102 118**

FRANKONIA

# The mild West

The US and Europe hold a hand that’s too good to fold

BY JOSEPH S. NYE JR.

With the end of the Cold War, many believed the West had prevailed. In his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama wrote that humanity had reached “the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” A few years later, Samuel Huntington issued a gloomier prognosis in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* that “the rise of China and the increasing assertiveness of this ‘biggest player in the history of man’ will place tremendous stress on international stability in the early 21st century.”

Western civilization did not exist in full flower until 1500, and before 1800, Asia was home to more than half the world’s population and world economy. By 1900, however, while Asia still represented more than half the world’s population it constituted only 20 percent of the world economy. The industrial revolution in Europe and North America and domination of the seas had made Europe the center of the global balance of power until it tore itself apart in World War I.

After the United States tipped the outcome of the war, it was clear that the country featured not only the world’s largest economy but was also crucial to the global balance of power. However, the US failed to act in its new role, and instead continued to behave as a free rider in the provision of global public goods, a role that Britain could no longer afford.

Lacking a global government, the world depends on the largest country to provide order and global public goods; in the nineteenth century, the Pax Britannica contributed security, economic stability and protection of global commons such as freedom of the seas. Instead, the US “returned to normalcy” and there was no liberal Western order in the 1930s. The result was a disastrous decade of global economic depression, genocide and eventually World War II.

Leaders like Franklin Roosevelt saw the mistakes of US isolationism and created the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944 and the United Nations in 1945. A turning point was Harry Truman’s postwar decisions that led to permanent alliances and a continual military presence abroad. The US invested heavily in the Marshall Plan in 1948, created NATO in 1949, led a UN coalition that fought in Korea in 1950, and in 1960, signed a new security treaty with Japan.

These actions were part of a realist strategy designed to contain Soviet power, but containment was interpreted in various ways. Americans had bitter debates over intervention in developing countries like Vietnam and, more recently, Iraq.

But while interventions were highly contentious, the liberal institutional order enjoyed broad support until the 2016 election when Donald Trump became the first candidate of a major party to attack it. His populist appeal rested on the economic dislocations of globalization that were accentuated by the Great Recession in 2008 along with cultural changes related to race, the role of women and gender identity that had polarized the American electorate.

Trump successfully linked white resentment over the increasing visibility and influence of racial and ethnic minorities to foreign policy by blaming economic problems on bad trade deals and on immigrants competing for jobs. In January 2017, Martin Wolf wrote in *The Financial Times*: “We are at the end of both an economic period – that of Western-led globalization – and a geopolitical one, the post-cold war ‘unipolar moment’ of a US-led global order.”

What comes next? Realists argue that world order rests on the global balance of power and that a rising China is not interested in a liberal or Western order. Some go further and predict a “Thucydides Trap” in which war between a rising power and an established power tears the world apart, much as Europe suffered in 1914.

## China is less interested in kicking over the card table than in tilting the table to pocket more winnings

But these gloomy projections rest on exaggerations of China’s power and Western weakness. China’s economy is about two-thirds that of the US, and an even smaller fraction if Europe, Japan, Australia and other Western allies are included.

China is a country of great strength but also important weaknesses. The US has some long-term power advantages that will persist. One is geography. The US is surrounded by oceans and neighbors that are likely to remain friendly. China has borders with 14 countries and has territorial disputes with India, Japan and Vietnam that set limits on its soft power.

Energy is another American advantage. A decade ago, the US seemed hopelessly dependent on imported energy. Now the shale revolution has transformed it from an energy importer to exporter. At the same time, China is becoming more dependent on energy imports, while much of the oil it imports is transported through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, where the US and its allies maintain a significant naval presence.

The US also has demographic strengths. Seven of the world’s 15 largest economies will face a shrinking workforce over the next decade and a half, but the

US workforce is likely to increase by 5 percent while China’s will decline by 9 percent. China will soon lose its superlative population rank to India, while its working-age population already peaked in 2015. Many Chinese say they worry about “growing old before growing rich.”

The US has been at the forefront in the development of key technologies (bio, nano, information) that are central to this century’s economic growth, and Western research universities dominate higher education. In a 2017 ranking by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, none of the top 20 global universities were Chinese.

China is investing heavily in research and development. The country also now competes well in some fields – including artificial intelligence – and its technological progress is no longer based solely on imitation. However, a successful Western response will depend upon steps taken at home.

In short, the US and the West hold high cards in this poker

game, but we must resist hysteria if we are to play our hand skillfully. Discarding our high cards of alliances and international institutions would be a serious mistake. If the US maintains its alliance with Japan, China cannot push the US beyond the first island chain, because Japan is a major part of that chain.

Another possible mistake would be to try to cut off all immigration. When asked why he did not think China would pass the US in total power any time soon, former Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew cited the US ability to draw diverse and creative talents from around the world and recombine them in a way that was not possible for China’s ethnic Han nationalism. If Trump’s populism leads the US to discard its high cards of external alliances and domestic openness, Lee could be proved wrong.

As China’s power grows, some worry we are destined for war, but few consider an altogether different kind of disruption. Rather than acting like a revolutionary power in the international order, China may decide to be a free rider like the US in the 1930s. China may act too weakly rather than too strongly and refuse to contribute to an international order it did not create.

On the other hand, China knows it profited from the post-1945 Western international order. China is one of the five countries with veto power in the UN Security Council. China is now the second-largest funder of UN peacekeeping forces and participated in UN programs related to Ebola and climate change.

China has benefited greatly from economic institutions, but it has started its own Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and its Belt and Road Initiative of international infrastructure projects that some see as an economic offensive. China has not prac-

ticed full reciprocity as a market economy, and its rejection of a 2016 Hague tribunal ruling regarding the South China Sea raised many concerns. Thus far, China has tried not to overthrow but rather increase its influence over the Western world order from which it benefits, but this could change as Chinese power grows.

The Trump administration labeled China a revisionist power, but so far – unlike Hitler’s Germany or Stalin’s USSR – it reflects that of a moderate revisionist. China is not interested in kicking over the card table but in tilting the table to pocket more winnings.

As Chinese power grows, the West’s “liberal international order” will have to change. China has little interest in liberalism or Western domination. We will need to think in terms of an “open and rules-based” world order to manage economic and ecological interdependencies like climate change.

Ideological differences will persist over values like human rights, but this should not prevent negotiations and institutions from managing interdependencies. Even as he worried about conflicts of civilizations two decades ago, Huntington proposed a “commonalities rule: peoples in all civilizations should search for an attempt to expand the values, institutions and practices they have in common with peoples of other civilizations.”

More recently, in 2017, Bill Emmott wrote in *The Fate of the West*: “Yes, the barbarians are at the West’s gates. Certainly, China’s pressure to dominate its neighborhood and be treated as an equal partner to the US is hard to deal with.” But in his view, “the response begins with allies, friendships and legitimacy: ... the greatest assets the West has.”

And as I argue in *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*, the future of the West is put at risk more by the rise of nativist populism at home than by the rise of China abroad. The answer will depend on our choices.

JOSEPH S. NYE JR. is a professor at Harvard University and author of *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump* (Oxford University Press, 2020).



DIGITAL SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

# UNIQUE LIKE YOUR COMPANY

We develop innovative strategies and digital software solutions for your business. Based on the individual requirements of your company, we accelerate your digital transformation through in-depth analysis and a mutual process of concept design and creation while offering reliable support and maintenance for your unique solution. **Your success is our mission.**

[www.aleksundshantu.com/unique](http://www.aleksundshantu.com/unique)

ALEKSUND SHANTU

BY GRAHAM T. ALLISON JR.

Could China and the US be stumbling down the path Germany and the United Kingdom took at the beginning of the last century? The possibility will strike many readers as inconceivable. But we should remember that when we say something is “inconceivable,” this is a claim not about what is possible in the world, but rather about what our limited minds can imagine.

My answer to the question of whether we are sleepwalking toward war is “yes.” The following is a summary of my argument in four tweets: First, the risks of war in the decade ahead are eerily similar to those faced by Germany and the UK a century ago. Second, the primary driver in what became World War I and what could become World War III was clearly identified by Thucydides 2,500 years ago in his analysis of the great war between Athens and Sparta. Third, preventing war in this case will require strategic imagination far beyond anything seen in Washington or Beijing to date. And fourth, the potentially most helpful but missing actor in this picture is Europe.

At the beginning of the 20th century, few could imagine what the future held. In January 1914, the world’s richest man, Andrew Carnegie, sent New Year’s greetings to leaders around the world, announcing a new era of permanent peace. “International Peace” would, he proclaimed, “prevail through the Great Powers agreeing to settle their disputes by International Law, the pen thus proving mightier than the sword.” One of the most influential books of the decade, *The Great Illusion*, published in 1910, sold over two million copies. In it, Norman Angell explained that war was a cruel “illusion,” as the cost of war would exceed any benefits the victor could hope to achieve.

How then could the assassination of an archduke in Sarajevo spark a conflagration so all-encompassing that it required historians to create an entirely new category of conflict called “world war”? The short answer is: the Thucydides Trap. When a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, alarm bells should sound: extreme danger ahead. Thucydides explained this dangerous dynamic in the case of Athens’ rise to rival Sparta in classical Greece. In the centuries since then, this storyline has been repeated over and over. The last 500 years saw 16 cases in which a rising power threatened to displace a major ruling power. Twice ended in war.

As Thucydides explained, the objective reality of a rising power’s impact on a ruling power is bad enough. But in the real world, these objective facts are perceived subjectively – magnifying misperceptions and multiplying miscalculations. When one competitor “knows” what the other’s “real motive” is, every action is interpreted in ways that confirm that bias.

Under such conditions, the competitors become hostage to third-party provocations and even accidents. An event as bizarre and otherwise inconsequential as the assassination of an archduke forces one or the other principal protagonist to respond. Doing so triggers a vicious spiral of actions and reactions that drag both toward an outcome neither wanted.

If Thucydides were watching today, he would say that China and the US are right on script, competing to show which can best exemplify the role of the rising and ruling power, acceler-



# The Thucydides Trap

Beyond trade: the confrontation between the US and China

ating toward what could be the grandest collision of all time.

One plausible candidate for the spark to war is Taiwan. As Taiwanese watch carefully what has been happening in Hong Kong, they have grown less and less interested in living in China’s party-driven autocracy. The idea of one nation under two systems as a mantle for sustaining its autonomy is now dead. If, in riding the surge created by the overwhelming vote against the mainland earlier this year, the Taiwanese government were to make a sharp move toward greater independence, most China watchers agree Beijing would have to respond violently. No government in Beijing could survive the “loss” of Taiwan. If the Chinese response included a 21st-century version of the missile tests they conducted in 1996 that threatened to choke Taiwan’s lifeline of ships delivering oil, food and other essential supplies, how would the US respond?

Most observers have failed to grasp the significance of the tectonic shift in the *relative* power of the US and China in the three decades since the end of the Cold War. Never before in history has a rising power ascended so far, so fast and in so many different dimensions. To paraphrase former Czech President Václav Havel, things have happened so fast that we have not yet had time to be astonished.

The US share of global GDP has fallen from almost one-half in 1950, to one-quarter at the end of the Cold War in 1991, to one-seventh today. (Although GDP is not everything, it does form the substructure of power in relations among nations.) In 1991, China barely appeared on any international league table. But in the past generation, its GDP has soared: from 20 percent of the US level in 1991 to 120 percent today (as measured by purchasing power

parity, the metric both the CIA and the International Monetary Fund use to compare national economies). Although China faces many internal challenges, there are more reasons to expect this basic economic trend to continue than to bet that it will stop soon. With four times as many citizens as the United States, if Chinese workers become as productive as Portuguese workers today (that is, half as productive as Americans), China’s GDP will double that of the US.

The impact of this tectonic shift is felt in every dimension of every relationship – not just between

as the predominant power in East Asia in his lifetime. Unless the US redefines itself to settle for something less than being “Number 1,” Americans will increasingly find China’s rise discombobulating and push back. This is not just another case of what Washington now calls “great-power competition,” but a classic Thucydidean rivalry in which each sees the other as a threat to its identity.

European hopes that this is just a passing Trumpian detour are an illusion. Across the American political spectrum, attitudes toward China have hardened. A nation that Presidents Obama,

## China will most likely continue challenging America’s accustomed position at the top of every pecking order

the US and China, but between each of them and other nations. In Asia, the economic balance of power has tilted especially dramatically in China’s favor. As the world’s largest exporter and second-largest importer, China is the top trading partner of every other major Asian country, including US allies. And as an aggressive practitioner of economic statecraft, Beijing does not hesitate to use the leverage this provides, squeezing countries such as the Philippines and South Korea when they resist Chinese demands. A similar story is emerging in Europe.

China will most likely continue challenging America’s accustomed position at the top of every pecking order. If Xi succeeds, China will displace the US

Bush and Clinton called its “strategic partner” is now seen by all as a “strategic adversary.” Instructively, Democratic candidates for president are scrambling to find a way to get to the right of Trump on China.

Does this mean that war – real bloody war – is inevitable? No, most certainly not. Four of the sixteen cases in the Thucydides Trap case file ended without war. Nonetheless, if American and Chinese leaders settle for statecraft as usual, we should expect history as usual. The goal in recognizing how devastating that war would be, and understanding how such rivalries have so often ended in catastrophe, is to motivate strategists and statesmen to rise above history.

Since the publication of *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* three years ago, I’ve been searching for what I call “avenues of escape.” I am now most actively exploring a possibility that would combine President John F. Kennedy’s insight about a “world safe for diversity” and a Chinese concept of “rivalry partners.”

After having survived the Cuban Missile Crisis, and just five months before he was assassinated, Kennedy proposed a major revision of America’s strategy in the Cold War. To avoid future confrontations that risked nuclear annihilation, the US and the Soviet Union would have to accept serious constraints on their competition, and even compromise. They would have to find a way to live and let live in a world of diverse political systems despite diametrically opposed values and ideologies. In a bit of rhetorical jiu-jitsu, Kennedy stood Woodrow Wilson’s long-standing call for a “world safe for democracy” on its head and insisted that the priority in the Cold War going forward would have to be to build a “world safe for diversity.” In that future, the two rivals could compete vigorously – yet peacefully – to demonstrate whose values and system of governance could best meet the needs of its citizens.

A millennium earlier, the Song emperor, having found his troops unable to defeat a northern Mongolian tribe, the Liao, negotiated the Treaty of Chanyuan that established a “rivalry partnership.” The two parties agreed to compete ruthlessly in some arenas and cooperate intensely in others. In an unusual version of Chinese tributary relations, the treaty required the Song to pay tribute to the Liao, who in turn agreed to invest that payment in economic, scientific and technical development in Song China.

Could American and Chinese statesmen construct a new strate-

gic rationale for a “rivalry partnership” in which they would simultaneously compete and cooperate? The two nations will inevitably be fierce rivals in economic production and trade, advanced technology, military capabilities, forming alliances and alignments and demonstrating how governments can best meet the needs of their citizens. But at the same time, there are other arenas in which neither can ensure its most vital national interest of survival without serious cooperation from the other. These include not only avoiding war, especially nuclear war, but also tackling climate change to sustain a biosphere in which human beings can live, preventing the spread of the means and motives for megaterrorism, containing pandemics and managing global financial crises to avoid great depressions – and their political consequences. Thus, while intense rivalry is inescapable, if the brute fact is that neither can kill the other without simultaneously committing suicide, intense competition becomes a strategic necessity.

And as this great drama is unfolding, where is Europe? Missing in action. Collectively, the European nations have the heft and sense to play a significant, constructive role. But the prospect that Europe will punch anywhere near its weight seems dimmer today than at this time last year. As Wolfgang Münchau of the *Financial Times* wrote recently, Europe increasingly seems resigned to becoming a “playground of conflicting interests.”

The 5G race provides a telling example. While the performance by the US in this race has been pathetic – it has no major supplier of 5G systems – Europe has two entries: Nokia and Ericsson. While they technically pose, or at least could pose, a serious challenge to Huawei and Samsung, the US is focused on putting sticks in the spokes of Huawei wheels and European regulators appear more concerned with maintaining what they regard as appropriate competition between Nokia and Ericsson than with finding ways to assist them in the global race. All the while, China’s champion, Huawei, is plowing ahead.

If an evil genius intended to jolt Europeans from their slumber in order to motivate a serious effort to get its act together, it is hard to imagine how he could improve on what could be referred to as the “Trump treatment.” Nonetheless, Europeans seem resigned to accepting observer status as rule takers, not rule makers. In that future, Europe will find itself further squeezed between the two giants: to its east, a “systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance,” as the European Commission recently described China, and to its west, what some Europeans are coming to regard as an abusive spouse.

In last year’s issue of *The Security Times*, Theo Sommer noted: “The geopolitical rivalry between the US and the People’s Republic of China is not going to end. It will be the dominant element of international politics in the 21st century.” The question this year is whether Europe must remain, in Sommer’s words, “a helpless and clueless bystander.” As we watch the US and China stumble toward a dangerous collision, anyone who cares about international peace and security must fervently hope not. ■

**GRAHAM T. ALLISON JR.** is a professor at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. In 2017, he published *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?*

# FROM COLD WAR

Russia is benefiting from its new confrontation with the West, but murkier times may lie ahead

BY IAN BREMMER

In the nearly three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's relationship with the West has undergone a dramatic transformation – from establishing economic ties the 1990s to being partners in the wake of 9/11 to once again being adversaries in the post-Bush era. There's plenty of blame to go around, not least the absence of even considering true reconstruction of the former Soviet states after collapse. But many of these shifts have to do with the political trajectory of one Vladimir Putin, who has gone from relative unknown to the longest-serving leader of Russia since Joseph Stalin. And with Putin's announcement earlier this year of forthcoming constitutional changes, he has signaled that he has no intention of relinquishing power when his term ends in 2024, even if he does give up the presidency.

With all that in mind, here are five key trends likely to shape the “hot peace” between Russia and the West in the coming years.

1. Russia will continue to seek tactical wins it can score internationally, enabled by a US pullback from global leadership and inevitable foreign policy missteps taken by the West more generally.

Putin has been quick to take advantage of the US pullback from areas where it once played a dominant role. It has also taken advantage of those cases in which Western powers have not fully committed themselves (e.g., Syria and Libya). This also includes Ukraine, though there the cost to Russia has been higher in lives lost, budget outlays and in terms of sanctions (more on this below).

More generally, Putin has sought opportunities to improve Russia's position in key regions, at limited financial or military costs. In so doing, he has succeeded in raising Russia's profile in the Middle East as a diplomatic broker, and as an intermediary of the war in

Syria. Similar moves are being made in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and with Russian support for Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. These have increased Russia's clout on the international stage – not to the level of the United States or China, but to a notable degree nonetheless. This feat is made more impressive by the fact that while the US and China are the two largest economies in the world, Russia ranks 11th, behind countries like Brazil and Canada. Russia will continue looking for such low-risk, high-reward opportunities for intervention. Putin is also primed to take advantage of the continued souring of US-EU relations during the Trump era. Which brings us to...

2. Europe increasingly desires a return to some sense of normalcy. That will be difficult given just how much division there currently is within the EU, Germany's weakening leadership of the EU and, of course, Trump. All of which plays into Russia's hands.

Since 2014, Europe has been rigorously debating the proper response to Russian actions in Ukraine and other malign activities in Europe (election interference, targeted or attempted killings of émigrés). There are many states (Hungary, Italy and, most recently, France) that want to forge closer ties with Moscow, while Poland, the Baltic States and the UK have been far more hostile toward a rapprochement. Germany has shown signs of both arguments – German Chancellor Angela Merkel was instrumental in maintaining sanctions against Russia after its land grab in Ukraine, but Germany has also been the lead advocate for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Ultimately, European unity will stick to sanctions, largely because they are tied so closely to the specific goal of ending the war in Eastern Ukraine. Thawing tensions between the EU and Russia will necessarily be a slow process, even if the current momentum is aimed at normalizing relations with Moscow.

3. Trump really does want to work with Putin, though the US Congress will continue to stymie such efforts on most counts.

Trump's presidency has not produced the direct benefits Russian leaders had obviously hoped for, though Moscow has still managed to capitalize on Trump's foreign policy – cementing its role as intermediary in Syria being the most obvious example. Also noteworthy is the fact that US-China tensions have pushed Moscow and Beijing closer together. Deep-rooted antipathy toward the Russian government remains bipartisan in Congress, and US lawmakers have built up ways to constrain Trump's ability to unilaterally change US policy toward Russia, as demonstrated by the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions legislation. Trump can talk about improving the relationship all he wants, but it is hard for him to actually translate that into policy. Take NATO as another example. Both Putin and Trump have reservations about the organization – albeit for much different reasons – but Congress has already made attempts through legislation to limit what Trump can do to undermine the security alliance even further.

Both Trump and Putin have learned the hard way that having strong leader-to-leader relations is far from enough when at least one of those leaders hails from a robust and still-functioning democracy.

4. Russia is struggling with growing challenges at home, but Putin's foreign policy victories are not helping.

Polling in 2019 has shown that the Russian public wants Putin to focus more on domestic issues, including an economy that is producing growth of only 1 to 2 percent a year. In general, there is limited domestic support for foreign adventures. Signs from the Kremlin suggest it has become more cautious regarding foreign engagements, both in terms of committing formal troops and getting involved in tit-for-tats that

do further damage to the investment climate as the US ads more sanctions.

Still, there are limits to the impact of domestic pressures on Russian foreign policy. First, growth is sluggish, but there is macroeconomic stability – the budget has been running surpluses, currency reserves have been replenished in recent years and stand at over \$550 billion, inflation has been under control, and the currency has been fairly stable. In other words, the government does not face an economic emergency, and it is in a better position than in the past to deal with an external shock. Longer term, there are legitimate concerns about stagnant growth, low foreign direct investment and demographic challenges. But the short-term state of affairs is stable enough that Putin feels he can avoid undertaking any major reforms.

Second, public opinion is not the key driver of foreign policy decisions. Putin has prioritized geopolitics over economics, at least when it comes to what he identifies as core interests, and he is not going to change course in response to polls. There are also some foreign policy priorities that will remain important enough for Putin to risk Western punishment, such as maintaining Russian influence in Ukraine and Belarus.

Going forward, the key question will be how Putin transitions his power post-2024. He is establishing a system in which he can remain highly influential even after he (presumably) leaves the presidency that year. How and indeed if he disperses power remains unanswered by the recent changes. But foreign policy and security questions may be among the very last things he is willing to surrender.

5. Russia must increasingly worry about being dominated by China – a reminder that while Putin is playing the short-term game capably, he's not playing the long-term game nearly as well.

The Russian government does not have an answer for how to

fully address the China relationship over the long term. Russia's hopes for China are especially high at the moment – with Western economic links frayed, China is of growing importance as an export market for energy and as an investor in a range of Russian sectors, particularly oil and gas. But the power dynamic is even starker since the days when Putin first steered Russia toward a revisionist foreign policy. The imbalance will grow even stronger as China continues its geopolitical ascent. Russia's approach at present is to accommodate China's growing influence in Central Asia and even in countries like Ukraine and Belarus. China, for its part, is happy to avoid stepping on Russia's toes, even as it becomes more influential in what Russia views as its historic sphere of influence. Over time, that Chinese presence will create tensions with Moscow, and there's only so much Russia will be able to do about that.

In short, Russia will remain an opportunist on the international stage despite the risks of blowback from citizens at home and the West more generally. But a European continent looking to stabilize itself and its greater surroundings will offer Moscow an opportunity to improve relations with a significant part of the West, even as relations between the US and Russia remain chilly. And while the current standoff between the US and China has pushed Moscow and Beijing closer together, Russia should be concerned about the long-term trajectory of that relationship – if Russia isn't careful, its biggest challenger in this era of “hot peace” will be coming from the East rather than the West in just a few short years.

## IAN BREMMER

is president and founder of Eurasia Group and GZERO Media. In 2018, he published *Us vs. Them: The Failure of Globalism*.

# TO HOT PEACE

## LEGAL NOTICE

continued from page 1  
Party crashing

### Publisher

Detlef W. Prinz

### Executive Editor

Theo Sommer

### Editor-in-Chief

Peter H. Koepf

### Senior Editor

Lutz Lichtenberger

### English Language Editor

Jonathan Lutes

### Art Director

Poul M. Kern

### Layout

Johanna Trapp  
Gordon Martin

### Publishing House

Times Media GmbH  
Tempelhofer Ufer 23-24  
10963 Berlin  
Tel.: +49 30 21505-400

Printed in Berlin by  
Dogan Media GmbH  
An der Brücke 20-22  
64546 Mörfelden-Walldorf

The German Times is a registered trademark of Times Media GmbH.

www.times-media.de

Press deadline  
March 11, 2020

Cold War winners in the West and continue to feel patronized to this day.

Second, the working population has a sense that the burdens and jointly produced earnings in their economies are no longer being fairly divided in a globalized society that they see as beholden solely to the laws of business and competition.

Third, every fourth worker is at risk of poverty and a quarter of pensioners are barely making ends meet.

Fourth, a significant number of Germans have the impression that their worries and fears are brushed aside and that the realms of media and politics are dominated by issues they consider to be of secondary importance.

Fifth, they have the feeling that when they disagree with prevailing narratives, they are labeled right-wing extremists and relegated to the corner of the classroom like a scolded pupil.

Sixth, when using terms such as “homeland” or “patriotism,” they are also suspected of being right-wing nationalists.

Seventh, they see their elected representatives as more interested in fighting over status and positions than focusing on content. These leaders project a preoccupation with securing their own privileges and digging moats around their own posts, preferring to hide behind rhetoric rather than to speak plainly.

Eighth, they are frustrated when promising and committed young professionals who dare to raise their voice to speak their minds and defend their ideals are degraded by the establishment.

People who harbor such feelings are turning their backs on the established parties. But is all of this really true? And if so, how can the established parties win back all of these disappointed and disaffected voters?

The two historical big-tent popular parties, the SPD and the CDU, have become soulless vessels. The CDU has misplaced its traditional beliefs and forgotten its conservative, bourgeois raison d'être. The Christian conservatives have surrendered

to the Zeitgeist, abandoned old principles and set out in search of the so-called center. As a result, the very thing that controversial and far-sighted politicians from the last century, such as Franz Joseph Strauss, had warned of has come to pass: a party in Germany has emerged to fill the gap left open on the right. And this phenomenon is only partly a consequence of the refugee crisis.

On the other side of the center, the past several years have made it clear that the SPD no longer knows where it stands and to whom it owes allegiance. The people it should be speaking to are those voters who actually keep Germany's social democracy functioning with their hard work: the manual and clerical workers and their families, the people who pay their rent but can hardly make a living despite working full-time. Instead, the SPD has been serving merely to help fill the pockets of those individuals the party used to disparage as “capitalists.” Their attempts to imitate

the Greens on climate policy and gender issues have simply not gained purchase. Today's voters have turned to the original source of those issues, the Greens, who are already harboring hopes of having a voice in the next coalition government, in 2021 at the latest, and perhaps even the top spot in the country.

The SPD is moored at 15 percent in the polls. If the CDU wishes to avoid this fate, it will have to make a directional decision: Who will lead the party and who will vie to be chancellor?

The focus is on three candidates. Friedrich Merz, a man with close ties to the business world, has challenged Merkel on several occasions in the past 20 years. He is said to have a significant fan base and could win back voters from the AfD with his right-wing conservatism. Also in the running is the down-to-earth Armin Laschet, the current minister president of North Rhine-Westphalia and someone considered to be both a moderate and a moderator. In the past,

Laschet has dared to entertain the idea of the Greens as potential coalition partners and has always endorsed Merkel's refugee policy. And finally, Norbert Röttgen has entered the race. The boyish-looking 55-year old hails from the liberal wing of the party and was once one of Merkel's first lieutenants. He then fell out of favor and remade himself as a foreign policy expert. Just like Laschet, Röttgen is expected to welcome working together with the Greens.

Still, at the 2020 Munich Security Conference, even Laschet dared attack the chancellor for her hesitant stance regarding Macron's plan for a common European security policy, noting that “in the era of Helmut Kohl, the major European initiatives came from Germany.”

Weimar or Trumpistan? The CDU faces a crucial test.

## PETER H. KOEPF

is editor-in-chief of  
*The German Times*.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during a press conference in Tehran in February, with the current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (r) and his predecessor Ruhollah Khomeini (l) looking over the president's shoulder.

BY ROBERT MALLEY

The United States and Iran have been on a predictable collision course since the Trump administration withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018. The drivers of this heightened tension are two fundamentally clashing and self-reinforcing approaches: Washington is convinced that a policy of “maximum pressure” will prompt Iran to succumb to its demands – and should such pressure fail, the US response should apply even greater pressure. Conversely, Tehran believes that the most effective reaction to pressure is counter-pressure – a policy of calibrated escalations on the nuclear and regional fronts to demonstrate it will not fold under duress, but instead raise the stakes.

The dangers of this standoff were fully evident in late December 2019 and early January 2020, when the two sides came to the brink of war after the US killed Major General Qassim Soleimani, head of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ elite Quds Force. A more costly confrontation was avoided this time, but the underlying dynamics that led to the precipice remain unchanged.

The burden is now on European and other third-party mediators to seek a tactical détente between the two rivals that reduces regional tensions and averts a renewed crisis over Iran’s nuclear program.

Since pulling out of the nuclear agreement, the Trump administration has articulated a sweeping set of demands for what should take its place. The list is long, ambitious and wholly unrealistic. It includes, inter alia, an end to all uranium enrichment, ballistic missile proliferation and Iranian support for its various local allies and partners across the region. Unilateral US sanctions have served as the primary tool for securing these concessions and succeeded in subjecting the Islamic Republic to considerable financial strain,

in particular by precipitating a substantial drop in Iran’s vital oil exports.

But the sanctions have otherwise failed. They have so far produced neither the greater regional stability Washington seeks nor the more stringent nuclear constraints it has targeted. Instead, they have resulted in heightened tension and an Iranian nuclear program increasingly unshackled from the JCPOA’s key restraints. Moreover, and despite episodic and at times serious unrest, the Islamic Republic remains in full control at home.

For the first year of the US “maximum pressure” campaign, Iran’s approach was to wait it out and hope that the JCPOA’s remaining parties – France, Germany, the UK, Russia and China – could muster the economic dividends at the core of the agreement’s quid pro quo. That strategy began to shift in May 2019, as the burden of US sanctions weighed more heavily, and Europe failed to fashion a financial lifeline. Facing what it considered an intolerable status quo, the Iranians adopted their own version of “maximum pressure”: provocations on the regional and nuclear fronts to underscore the fact that Washington’s siege will not be met without a cost, and to prompt greater urgency toward stabilizing the JCPOA by means of an economic reprieve.

From Tehran’s perspective, the nuclear and regional escalations are thus two sides of the same coin. They are gambits aimed at breaking the financial stranglehold placed by sanctions, which have in turn fueled economic and political discontent within Iran and strengthened the hand of hardliners for whom the JCPOA

specifically, and international engagement more broadly, were strategic mistakes foretold and now seemingly fulfilled. But just as Washington’s approach has failed to yield Iranian concessions, Iran’s brinkmanship failed to deliver a favorable breakthrough.

At the regional level, tensions have risen steadily over the past year. Attacks against oil tankers in the Gulf in May and June preceded the brazen attack against Aramco’s Abqaiq-Khuraib facilities in Saudi Arabia in September. Iran has denied involvement but is suspected in each of these incidents.

US soldiers at the Ain al-Assad base. While the guns have since gone silent, that salvo is unlikely to be the end of Iran’s or its allies’ response, and the possibility of further direct or indirect retaliation against US or allied targets remains significant.

Meanwhile, Iran has been steadily and methodically breaching its JCPOA commitments: breaking the 300kg cap on its stockpiles of enriched uranium, upping enrichment rates beyond the deal’s 3.67-percent limit, activating advanced centrifuges, reviving enrichment activities

mechanism (DRM) that could see the case eventually referred to the UN Security Council. Should that transpire, and the pre-JCPOA international sanctions return to force, it would herald the agreement’s collapse. The consequence would be rolling the clock back a decade and reviving discussions on whether military action by the US and/or Israel is necessary to contain a nuclear program the JCPOA had successfully kept in check.

With the region on a knife-edge, the nuclear deal increasingly at risk and the prospects for direct diplomacy between Tehran and Washington looking increasingly dim, third-party intervention may well be the only way to break the impasse between the two sides. Efforts by French President Emmanuel Macron to fashion a US-Iran détente at the UN General Assembly in September 2019 stumbled at the last minute, but they revealed the contours of a potential arrangement: economic reprieve for Iran in exchange for Tehran’s compliance with the JCPOA and regional de-escalation.

Soleimani’s killing likely precludes the already unlikely presidential summit the White House was keen to showcase and thus reduces the scope of what could be agreed upon. But a more modest arrangement remains plausible. In particular, more vigorous European steps to operationalize the Instrument for Support of Trade Exchanges with Iran could buoy trade, be supplemented through credit lines for Iranian humanitarian goods and go hand-in-hand with a resumption of Iranian adherence to the deal.

At a minimum, this would buy time, avert a UN showdown and perhaps press the pause button until the US presidential elections in November. Although Soleimani’s killing has significantly soured the atmosphere, Iran and the US might also seek to build on the successful exchange of detainees last December and pursue additional discussion on releasing US and other foreign nationals held by Iran on highly dubious charges.

Now that the E3 (France, Germany and the UK) have triggered the DRM, they will likely be pressured by the US to take the case to the Security Council as quickly as possible, not least with the end of a UN arms embargo looming in October, unless UN sanctions are re-imposed. That makes it all the more imperative for the E3 to use the coming period to engage Tehran, seek to the greatest extent possible to provide sanctions relief or economic reprieve, get Iran to resume full compliance and, possibly, to agree to the initiation of broader negotiations. Considering how close the region came to a conflagration, Iran and its Gulf rivals – Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in particular – ought to build on initial steps in parallel and develop diplomatic engagement of their own.

Finally, Tehran should recognize that the combination of quashing dissent, avoiding major reforms and playing a perilous nuclear and regional game of chicken is unlikely to prove sustainable. Sanctions have exacerbated many of Iran’s political and economic problems, but they did not create them. Tackling the endemic ills of corruption and mismanagement, refraining from adding fuel to regional fires and avoiding brash moves that could see it increasingly isolated financially and diplomatically may be a tall order. But the alternative could be considerably worse. ■

ROBERT MALLEY is president and CEO of the International Crisis Group.

# The other quid pro quo

The conundrum of the Washington-Tehran stalemate



THE WORLD AHEAD OF US

# WE'RE CLEANING UP OUR ACT.



Worldwide from July 2020, our ships will exclusively use marine gas oil with a maximum sulphur content of only 0.1 %. We are thus going above and beyond the statutory provisions and – thanks to forgoing heavy fuel oil – are reducing the sulphur emissions of our fleet by 80 %. In this way, we are setting standards for the cruise industry and protecting that which fascinates both us and our guests.



HAPAG <sup>18</sup>/<sub>91</sub> LLOYD  
CRUISES

Catalytic converter technology, cold ironing and forgoing heavy fuel oil. More about this and other environmental protection measures at [www.hl-cruises.com](http://www.hl-cruises.com).



Rail entrance to the concentration camp at Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/JULIANO GALVAO GOMES

# Our responsibility does not expire

“Blessed be the Lord for enabling me to be here at this day”

THE SPEECH GIVEN BY GERMAN PRESIDENT FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER AT YAD VASHEM

What a blessing, what a gift, it is for me to be able to speak to you here today at Yad Vashem. Here at Yad Vashem burns the Eternal Flame in remembrance of the victims of the Shoah. This place reminds us of their suffering. The suffering of millions. And it reminds us of their lives – each individual life.

This place remembers Samuel Tytelman, a keen swimmer who won competitions for Maccabi Warsaw, and his little sister Rega, who helped her mother prepare the family meal for Sabbath.

This place remembers Ida Goldish and her three-year-old son Vili. In October, they were deported from the Chisinai ghetto. In the bitter cold of January, Ida wrote her last letter to her parents: “I regret from the very depth of my soul that, on departing, I did not realize the importance of the moment, [...] that I did not hug you tightly, never releasing you from my arms.”

Germans deported them. Germans burned numbers on their forearms. Germans tried to dehumanize them, to reduce them to numbers, to erase all memory of them in the extermination camps. They did not succeed.

Samuel and Rega, Ida and Vili were human beings. And as human beings, they live on in our memory. Yad Vashem gives them, as it says in the Book of Isaiah, “a monument and a name.”

I, too, stand before this monument as a human being – and as a German. I stand before their monu-

ment. I read their names. I hear their stories. And I bow in deepest sorrow. Samuel and Rega, Ida and Vili were human beings.

And this also must be said here: The perpetrators were human beings. They were Germans. Those who murdered, those who planned and helped in the murdering, the many who silently toed the line: They were Germans.

The industrial mass murder of six million Jews, the worst crime in the history of humanity, it was committed by my countrymen. The terrible war, which cost far more than 50 million lives, it originated from my country.

Seventy-five years after the liberation of Auschwitz, I stand before you all as President of Germany – I stand here laden with the heavy, historical burden of guilt. Yet at the same time, my heart is filled with gratitude for the hands of the survivors



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Fifth World Holocaust Forum “Remembering the Holocaust: Fighting Anti-Semitism,” Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Jan. 23, 2020

stretched out to us, for the new trust given to us by people in Israel and across the world, for Jewish life flourishing in Germany. My soul is moved by the spirit of reconciliation, this spirit which opened up a new and peaceful path for Germany and Israel, for Germany, Europe and the countries of the world.

The Eternal Flame at Yad Vashem does not go out. Germany’s responsibility does not expire. We want to live up to our responsibility. By this, dear friends, you should measure us.

I stand before you, grateful for this miracle of reconciliation, and I wish I could say that our remembrance has made us immune to evil.

Yes, we Germans remember. But sometimes it seems as though we understand the past better than the present. The spirits of evil are emerging in a new guise, presenting their anti-Semitic, racist, authoritarian thinking as an answer for the future, a new solution to the problems of our age. I wish I could say that we Germans have learnt from history once and for all.

But I cannot say that when hatred is spreading. I cannot say that when Jewish children are spat on in the schoolyard, I cannot say that when crude anti-Semitism is cloaked in supposed criticism of Israeli policy. I cannot say that when only a thick wooden door prevents a right-wing terrorist from causing a massacre, a bloodbath in a synagogue in the city of Halle on Yom Kippur.

Of course, our age is a different age. The words are not the same. The perpetrators are not the same. But it is the same evil.

And there remains only one answer: Never again! Nie wieder!

That is why there cannot be an end to remembrance. This responsibility was woven into the very

fabric of the Federal Republic of Germany from day one. But it tests us here and now.

This Germany will only live up to itself, if it lives up to its historical responsibility. We fight anti-Semitism! We resist the poison that is nationalism! We protect Jewish life! We stand with Israel!

Here at Yad Vashem, I renew this promise before the eyes of the world. And I know that I am not alone. Today we join together to say: No to anti-Semitism! No to hatred!

From the horror of Auschwitz, the world learned lessons once before. The nations of the world built an order of peace, founded upon human rights and international law. We Germans are committed to this order and we want to defend it, with all of you. Because this we know: Peace can be destroyed, and people can be corrupted.

Esteemed Heads of State and Government, I am grateful that together we make this commitment today: A world that remembers the Holocaust. A world without genocide.

“Who knows if we will ever hear again the magical sound of life? Who knows if we can weave ourselves into eternity – who knows?”

Salmen Gradowski wrote these lines in Auschwitz and buried them in a tin can under a crematorium.

Here at Yad Vashem they are woven into eternity: Salmen Gradowski, Samuel and Rega Tytelman, Ida and Vili Goldish and so many others. They were all murdered. Their lives were lost to unfettered hatred. But our remembrance of them will defeat the abyss. And our actions will defeat hatred.

By this, I stand. For this, I hope.

“Blessed be the Lord for enabling me to be here at this day.”

# History is not a weapon

Germany’s president delivered a valuable and nuanced speech in the Bundestag

BY WOLFGANG BENZ

The speech given by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in the Bundestag on the 2020 Day of Remembrance for the Victims of National Socialism was notable for three reasons: it was moving, it represented the very best of what statesmanship can achieve and it delivered rhetoric that was entirely fitting for the occasion. Instead of limiting himself to the well-worn ritual of uttering the words “Never again!,” Steinmeier spoke of Germany’s friendship with Israel and his gratitude for the Israeli President’s presence in the Bundestag on that day.

His commemoration also included remembrance of other victims of National Socialism – groups that had either been neglected or perhaps deliberately omitted from mention in decades of commemorations in the Bundestag: homosexual victims who had waited years to be acknowledged; victims of the other Nazi genocide against the Sinti and Roma; the sick and disabled exterminated under the cynical title of “euthanasia”; and those individuals murdered for being “anti-social” or “career criminals.”

Steinmeier also issued a demand for education and the providing of information. Rather than lament the fact that the last eyewitnesses to the Holocaust will soon be gone, he called for a new form of

remembrance for a younger generation. This new generation wants to know what the past has to do with their lives today, he explained, and they are right to ask the question.

It is now widely accepted that the way to reach subsequent generations is not by erecting more memorials. This fact is well-known among those who are now calling for new forms of approaching and processing history, rather than standing idly by and watching the emergence of a new nationalization of memory.

Of course, the erection of historical memorials as reminders of the past and warnings about the present remains a fully honorable act. This is especially true in Berlin, the city in which the horrors that befell the civilian population of almost all European nations in the 20th century were planned and set forth.

If such monuments are necessary for the sake of expressing emotion and responsibility, however, they must also be accompanied by a corresponding site of learning, information and a cognitive debate, where the full extent of the crimes of German occupation can be documented and experienced. There is thus far no such center of information and debate.

The most important messages contained in any speech can often be found in its subtleties and nuances. Steinmeier made it clear that the acceptance and treatment of historical guilt and responsibility among democratically minded members of the

German Bundestag was beyond question. He also pointed out that there are, in fact, non-democratic forces present in Parliament today. Steinmeier noted that *völkisch* and nativist ways of thinking, stagnant nationalism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism are on the rise again, and that a new wave of politicians is now slogging the very phrases that led to catastrophe in the 1930s.

In the most important message of his speech, Steinmeier warned that history must not be allowed to become a weapon. This implies that we should consider it counterproductive if and when anti-Semitism is used as the ultimate reproach by one person to silence another. Indeed, the invocation of the term “anti-Semitism” has become a thought-terminating cliché in the struggle for sovereignty over the politico-cultural narrative and correct political behavior of today.

Justified criticism of the politics of Israeli governments is not anti-Semitism; it is an obligation born of friendship. This is precisely what former German President Johannes Rau once said at an international anti-Semitism conference in Berlin – to thunderous applause.

Only a few days ago, Former Israeli Ambassador to Germany Avi Primor gave voice to a current truth when he told the local Berlin-Brandenburg broadcaster *rbb* that today’s good German-Israeli relationship could be credited to Chancellor Angela

Merkel. This was the case, he argued, even though she had deep reservations about the policies of the current Israeli government and even disliked the prime minister. Still, he noted, there could be no doubt about her pro-Israeli stance.

Of course, a former Israeli ambassador can say many things that others might no longer have the courage to utter for fear of being tagged an anti-Semite. This label has long been the *ultima ratio* used by excited moralists, by those individuals suffering from a justified degree of shame and guilt, by those naïve and malicious sectarians hoping for reconciliation, and by those who demand blind, unconditional allegiance to Israel. Any real friend to Israel – a country that faces threats from many sides at once – would do well to wish it supporters wiser than such zealots.

Steinmeier’s speech on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was also reassuring. He insisted that memory should not be instrumentalized, that politicians must not be allowed to decree history and that historiography must comprise freedom and open discussion between historians.

WOLFGANG BENZ is a historian and former head of the Center for Research on Anti-Semitism at TU Berlin.



All quiet on the western front: A US soldier from the 12th Armored Division guards a group of Wehrmacht soldiers after their surrender.



Singing a different tune: Horst-Wessel-Straße, named after a Nazi propaganda martyr, becomes Francis Scott Key Street, named for the lyricist of “The Star-Spangled Banner.”



The ruins of the Reichstag: In 1985, German President Richard von Weizsäcker declared May 8, 1945, “a day of liberation.”

PICTURE ALLIANCE/GEORGIUS/PUTNIKOPA

# The skin of our teeth

A war’s end and a fresh start: 75 years ago, the war launched in 1939 Europe by Hitler’s wanton, megalomaniacal and criminal ego came to a close. This began a difficult period for the Germans, but those on the western side of the country’s divide would soon gain some hope, and ultimately even a bit of brazen good fortune

BY THEO SOMMER

At 2:41 in the early morning of May 7, 1945, Chief of the German General Staff Alfred Jodl, Commander in Chief of the German Navy Hans-Georg von Friedeburg and Luftwaffe General Wilhelm Oxenius fixed their signatures to the German Instrument of Surrender in a little red school house in Reims, the headquarters of US General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The ceremony was then repeated the next day, with greater fanfare, in the mess hall of a former Wehrmacht pioneer school in Berlin-Karlshorst, the headquarters of Soviet Marshal Georgy Zhukov.

Stalin had insisted on the second event to make it clear to all the world that the German Reich had laid down their weapons on all fronts. This time, it was Chief of the Armed Forces High Command Wilhelm Keitel who signed for the Germans. When he departed, he raised his marshal’s baton, but no one took notice of his farewell. The capitulation took effect at 12:01 a.m. Central European Time on May 9. The war was over.

Adolf Hitler had shot himself in the head ten days earlier in the Führerbunker of the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. For the three weeks following his suicide, the German Reich was presided over by a government in Flensburg under President Karl Dönitz, the Supreme Commander of the Navy. On May 23, all members of the government were arrested by the Western Allies. At the Mürwik naval academy that sunny morning, the Imperial War Flag of Germany was lowered for the last time, never to be raised again. There was no more Third Reich. To put it more bluntly, there was no more German Reich. Supreme authority now lay with the Allied victors.

At that time, no one was capable of imagining that just a few years later, a new German state would appear on the scene in the form of the Federal Republic of Germany; indeed, by accident of fate, it was exactly four years after the capitulation in Flensburg, on May 23,

1949, that West Germany’s Basic Law would come into force.

The German Reich ended in rubble and shame. The shame was manifest – the war of aggression, the cruel reign of the Swastika in occupied lands, the gas chambers of the extermination camps. The Nazi regime had brought the European continent under its yoke, branded as sub-humans the conquered peoples in the east and murdered six million Jews in its death factories.

For the most part, it was Germans, willingly or otherwise, who wreaked the horrors. For almost six years, the Germans had been perpetrators, now they became victims.

By the end of the war, the Germans started suffering to no end – flight and expulsion, the bombing war by the Royal Air Force and its US comrades, the mass raping of civilians committed not only by the Red Army, prisoner-of-war and detention camps, humiliation and deprivation, hunger and exposure was our lot. But there is no question about it: German suffering was born directly from our own atrocities.

Germany was a landscape of ruins. When the survivors looked at what lay around them after the unconditional surrender of the Wehrmacht, they saw massive destruction everywhere. Rubble was the only thing in abundance in the world of debris that the war had left in its wake: around 400,000,000 cubic meters of it.

From the beginning of January until the end of April, 1945, British Bomber Command alone conducted 79,000 sorties. In the last four months of the war, Bomber Command and the US Air Force together dropped 370,000 tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs over the Reich, which amounted to one-quarter of the total dropped on Germany during the entire war. This final four-month phase of the war accounted for one-quarter of the half-million people who were killed by Allied air attacks on German cities over the course of the war. During this period, the bombing war claimed and average of 1,000 casualties a

day – a total of 130,000, 25,000 of whom died in Dresden alone.

One German city after another was reduced to blood and fire. The old Germany disappeared – the land of half-timbered villages and towns, renaissance façades, baroque buildings and Prussian Classicism was no more.

This was the result of Hitler’s fanatical perseverance and his will to destroy, which culminated in his proclamation: “We may go down, but we will take the world with us.” But it was also the result of the Allied terror strategy of bombing campaigns.

Sure, Hitler began it all in Warsaw, Rotterdam and Coventry: “We will obliterate their cities!” But the conscious, premeditated, merciless conversion of Germany’s residential neighborhoods into piles of rubble by far surpassed any strategic necessity. Even Churchill expressed misgivings when he saw the aerial photographs of destroyed German cities. “Are we animals?” he asked. “Are we taking this too far?”

The retribution turned out to be much more severe than people in the US imagined, cabled General Lucius Clay to the US Department of War after the cessation of hostilities. “Our planes and artillery have really carried the war directly to the homes of the German people.”

Theodor Eschenburg described the resulting circumstances as follows: “The number of homeless people was in the millions. In many cases, entire families lived in a single room. Cellars and attics, barracks and Quonset huts, ruins and warehouses – anything was used as a shelter,” wrote the political scientist from Tübingen. “In the inner cities where narrow streets and alleyways had been the norm, new paths formed over the mountains of rubble. Forsythias, lilacs and jasmine grew freely and furiously in the gardens of houses that no longer stood.”

According to official statistics, the British occupation zone had an average of 6.2 square meters of living space per person. Living quarters in the American, Russian and French zones were only insignificantly more spacious.

For tens of thousands of Germans, the watchword month in and month out was “shovel, clear rubble and stack bricks.” Anyone at any time could be enlisted to join in the monumental project of clearing debris. Former members of the Nazi party were forced to take on extra shifts.

But the brunt of all the work was borne by women. In 1945, Germany had 7.5 million more women than men. The war had claimed the lives of 3.7 million German men; 12 million had been taken prisoner. It was now up to the women to hold families together. They foraged the countryside for food and goods. They trudged into the forest with axe and saw to chop lumber. They gathered mushrooms and dried apple rings. They queued at the slaughterhouse for a boar’s head, a couple of horse chops or maybe just a handful of soup bones. They raised chickens and rabbits and fashioned jackets for their children using their fathers’ old uniforms.

## Rubble was the only thing in abundance in the world of debris that the war had left in its wake

Often enough, they forwent their own rations of bread to feed their children. And these *Trümmerfrauen*, the rubble ladies as it were, have become legendary. They cleared the lots and streets in every city and town across Germany.

Moreover, conditions in defeated and occupied Germany were pure chaos. Millions of people were on the move as part of the most comprehensive mass migration of modern times:

- 300,000 survivors of the concentration camps
- 8.5 million forced laborers, the former work slaves of the Third Reich, who were now displaced persons awaiting return to their home countries, were left to provide for themselves any way they could, which often meant plundering the surrounding region and raiding local farms

- 5 million German prisoners of war who had the good fortune to be allowed to return home over the course of 1945
- Several million Germans who fled west as the Russians progressed from the east, plus, after the beginning of the forced resettlement, millions more Germans brutally driven from their ancestral homes in East Prussia, Silesia, Hungary and Czechoslovakia
- And, finally, millions of bombing raid evacuees who now struggled to get back home, including hundreds of thousands of youths who had been moved out of cities as part of the Children’s Evacuation Program.

They were all caught up in the maelstrom of chaos following the end of the war in Germany, where hardly one stone still rested on another, where all machines in all factories had come to a stop, where schools and universities were closed. Of the 60,000 kilometers of German railroad, one-third was unnavigable; a half of all

could be had: furs, jewelry, carpets, furniture, artwork, food, footwear and clothing. Hot tickets were nylon stockings, chewing gum, soap and sweets.

In July 1945, Erika Mann recorded the following prices: butter – 1000 marks per pound; sugar – 175 marks; coffee – 500 marks; tea – 600 marks. A loaf of bread cost 30 marks. The bulk of the goods sold on the black market originated from the supply stores of the US and British Armies.

This was especially true of American cigarettes, which became the anchor currency of the black market. One carton – 10 packs of 20 cigarettes each – cost between 1,000 and 1,500 marks; so, five or sometimes even 10 marks for one butt was the going rate. The Reichsmark, the currency in which workers and employees were paid, played comparatively no role; its use was more-or-less limited to purchasing officially rationed food or clothing.

An illustrative example of how the black market functioned can be found in a report to the US Congress. There was a miner who earned 60 marks a week. But he also owned a hen that laid an average of five eggs a week. The miner usually ate one of the eggs himself and exchanged the other 4 for 20 cigarettes on the black market. As each cigarette fetched a price of 8 marks, the 4 eggs sold for the equivalent of 160 marks. Thus, on a weekly basis, the hen earned almost 3 times more than her owner.

According to estimates at the time, a half of Germany’s commercial revenue derived from bartering and the black market, and was thus beyond the reaches of state regulation. It goes without saying that the black market was fertile ground for organized crime. For many normally law-abiding citizens, however, the black market was a savior, as it allowed people to meet needs that they could not otherwise fulfill.

Decades after the end of the war, Germans were at odds about how to classify what had happened in 1945: Was it a collapse or liberation? To be sure, this question was seldom asked during that fateful



Rubble, rubble, toil and trouble: Trümmerfrauen at work cleaning up after the men



spring. But the answer is: both. It was a collapse as well as a liberation.

The collapse was patently obvious. Many had survived by the skin of their teeth. Countless Germans had lost their homes, others their homeland. The cities lay in rubble. Industry, commerce and manufacturing all but ceased to exist. Government stopped functioning; schools and universities remained closed for an extended period of time.

To most Germans, occupation by the Allied victors at first felt more like oppression than liberation. Sure, people were liberated from the fear of getting killed in the next night of bombing; from the fear of losing a husband or a son on the front; from the fear that the war could go on forever. But these were then replaced by new fears: How do I survive until tomorrow? What will become of me – and of Germany? How complicit was I in all that happened under Hitler? Am I guilty for things that I did, or thought, or tolerated? Am I guilty for not having protested all the injustice?

Those who truly felt liberated after the war were the political opponents of the Nazi regime, those who were active in the resistance, the Jews, the Sinti and Roma and the homosexuals who were persecuted. They all breathed a sigh of relief in May 1945.

However, all those whose naïveté and idealism had led them to believe in Hitler experienced the end of the Third Reich as an utter collapse. They became embittered by the miscarriage of their illusions, by the futility of their devotion and the hollowness of their suffering – and then fully so when they toured the liberated concentration camps, as decreed by the occupying powers, and saw the mountains of corpses; once and for all they had to relinquish the cold comfort that the documentary films and photographs displayed everywhere after the war were mere phonies produced as Allied propaganda.

Theodor Heuß, who in 1949 became the first president of West Germany, once described the end of the war as follows: “In essence, this eighth of May remains the most tragic and questionable par-

adox of history for all of us. But why? Because we were at once redeemed and destroyed.”

Redeemed and destroyed: With most Germans, the feeling of having been destroyed outweighed the relief of redemption. In 1985, only after 40 years had passed could another president of the Federal Republic, Richard von Weizsäcker, count on widespread understanding when he said:

*May 8 was a day of liberation. It liberated all of us from the inhumanity and tyranny of the National Socialist regime. Nobody will, because of that liberation, forget the grave suffering that only started for many people on May 8. But we must not regard the end of the war as the cause of flight, expulsion and deprivation of freedom. The cause goes back to the start of the tyranny that brought about the war. We must not separate May 8, 1945, from Jan. 30, 1933.*

Immediately after the war, few Germans were in a state of mind to entertain such weighty thoughts. Coping with everyday life exhausted all of their strength; coping with the past was a “luxury” that would only come much later. And those who brought feelings of guilt upon themselves felt an extra weight of oppression.

In an initial wave of denazification, all office holders in West Germany were stripped of their jobs: 150,000 working in public service and 73,000 employed in trade and industry. They received neither a salary nor a pension; they were now permitted only to do “ordinary work.” Around 180,000 were detained, sometimes for years.

In the second wave, denazification procedures resembled a bureaucratic inquisition, culminating in the questionnaire campaign by which the Western Allies sought to vet the Germans by tooth and nail. The questionnaire comprised 131 questions. It became both feared and ridiculed – ridiculed for its many pointless individual questions and feared because the future of many Germans hinged on the questionnaire’s findings.

By March 1946, 1.4 million questionnaires had been submitted in

the American zone, 742,000 of which had been processed. The results were that 19 percent would be fired; 7 percent were recommended to be fired; 25 percent would be fired at the sole discretion of their employer; and in 49 percent of cases, there was no evidence of any National Socialist activity. One-half of one percent of those examined were found to have verifiably aided the resistance.

The flaws of this process, the harassment it unleashed and, ultimately, the solidarity it engendered induced the US military government to soften its approach as early as in January 1946. The Law for Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism established 545 German Spruchkammer – or civilian tribunals – employing 22,000 staff that would now deliver verdicts on the basis of the 13 million submitted questionnaires. This process concluded with 3.5 million accusations and 950,000 trials. In the three-and-a-half years of denazification ending in 1948, 1,549 Germans were found to be “major offenders,” 21,600 “offenders,” 104,000 “lesser offenders” and 475,000 “followers.” The tribunals issued 9,000 prison sentences, more than 500,000 fines and 25,000 seizures of assets. The Soviet occupation zone saw 30,000 war-criminal trials, 200,000 Nazis banned from public service and industry, 20,000 – of 40,000 – teachers fired and the delivery of 500 death sentences.

The denazification trials were accompanied by the process of dismantling German industry and the exaction of reparations by the victorious powers. Germany was to make amends for the destruction it had wreaked from the Atlantic to the Volga. The Potsdam Agreement stipulated that German production would be reduced to between 50 and 55 percent of its capacity in 1938, which corresponded to totals reached in the bleak crisis year of 1932. Germany’s primary production was to be set at 40 percent of the 1936 levels, which would deplete the pharmaceutical industry by 80 percent. The production of gasoline, ball bearings, synthetic rubber and

radioactive material was forbidden altogether, along with commercial shipping and aviation.

When the beaten Germans looked back six months after capitulation, they saw nothing but gloom and doom. Add to this mix the beginnings of the division of Germany into East and West. While the East was not yet barricaded with barbed wire and walls, officially permitted border crossings were few and far between.

Those wanting to get from East to West or West to East had to hoof it across the “green border” through forests and fields avoiding Soviet control points and patrols. Many were apprehended and detained while attempting to cross. One woman from Thuringia – in the Soviet zone – who wanted to visit the Schwabenland – in the West – was intercepted between the towns of Probstzella and Hof and forced to spend several days in a prison cell. While detained, she noticed that a former inhabitant of the cell had carved these words into the limestone wall: “Here I sit, a German imprisoned in Germany / Because I went from Germany to Germany.” The land reform that took effect in the Soviet zone in the fall of 1945 marked the beginning of the expropriation of the middle class and the oppression of all “bourgeois elements,” which spurred the eventual division of Germany.

But there were also rays of hope, which grew brighter and ever more frequent. Life amid the ruins gradually began to normalize. People settled in to their world of rubble, became accustomed to the black market and its cigarette currency, resigned themselves to the occupation and established new political organizations and new administrative bodies. They rolled up their sleeves, spat into their palms and went to work. Under the most adverse conditions they learned to develop initiatives, to improvise and to make ends meet, while embracing humility and accepting that life may be a long hard slog.

Already in the first fall after the war, news bulletins published by the military government became more and more frequently supplied by

German newspapers. The schools and universities opened the gates anew. And, most astonishing of all, culture began to flourish again. Theaters that Goebbels had closed in September 1944 raised their curtains and found audiences eager for artistic and cultural experiences. Gotthold Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise* was the favorite. At long last, concert halls and churches performed works by those composers who had been outlawed by the Nazis, including Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Paul Hindemith, Arnold Schönberg and Igor Stravinsky. And museums exhibited “liberated art” that for 12 years had been banned as “degenerate.”

In June 1945, author and satirist Erich Kästner managed to capture the spirit of optimism: “If you try to describe what you’re experiencing all around you, only antiquated terms come to mind, like ‘gleams of hope,’ ‘aurora,’ ‘creative joy,’ ‘rush of exhilaration’ and ‘vital courage.’ The stomach churns but the eyes sparkle.”

The title of Thornton Wilder’s play, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, captured the sentiments of most Germans at the time. From today’s vantage point, even we Germans can say that we got away lightly, that is, by the skin of our teeth.

First, Germany was spared from being as fragmented as the Allies had originally contemplated. While Roosevelt had imagined splitting the country into five or seven states, Churchill envisioned one state in the west, one in the north and one in the south. The eventual division of Germany into east and west, a burden born by the Germans for 40 years, was not ultimately an element of the punitive peace, but rather the result of the Cold War, which began in earnest in 1945. When the East-West conflict subsided, the Germans could finally redress the division.

Second, this Cold War, as paradoxical as it may sound, had its upsides. As opposed to being further ostracized and minimized, both Germanys, ours and theirs, rose in rank rather quickly to become something akin to guest-victors. Almost immediately, they took on crucial roles within the

opposing state systems. Pariahs became partners.

Third, we had tremendous luck with respect to our economy. Instead of the planned \$80 billion in reparations, the Allies ultimately exacted only \$12 billion. But to the extent that they succeeded in their process of de-industrialization, by means of their dismantling of German factories right up to 1950, in many cases this proved to be a blessing in disguise. The outdated facilities went to the victors, but the Germans, after the currency reform, were able to succeed in modernizing their industrial sector to state-of-art standards. Germany’s “economic miracle” of the 1950s relied heavily on this fortuitous upgrade.

And there is still a fourth dimension to the luck Germans experienced in the immediate postwar period: the fact that America’s first successful test of an atomic bomb was on July 16, 1945, and not six months earlier. Had “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” already been available, the first two targets of America’s nuclear arsenal would likely have been German cities. Hiroshima and Nagasaki would not have been incinerated and contaminated; it would have been Berlin, perhaps Munich, Cologne, Bremen – or Dresden.

In 1945, the Germans oscillated between hope and fear, the hope sprouting only with hesitation. A flyer published by the resistance movement known as the White Rose had once augured that “we will forever be the people that are hated and outcast by all of the world.” The fact that this prophecy proved wrong will forever be a credit to those men and women who, 75 years ago, set out to craft a better future for our people on the rubble and wreckage of a loathsome war. Without them, we would not be what we are today: not hated and outcast, but accepted and respected – esteemed not spurned.

**THEO SOMMER** is the executive editor of this newspaper. He was 15 years old when World War II came to an end.

BY TANJA PENTER

The fascists are facing their final hour. Our hearts are filled with joy,” wrote Ukrainian scientist Mikhail Usyk in his diary as the Red Army’s liberation of the city of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine grew near. “Our own people are close. We are waiting impatiently for them, the liberators.”

Usyk had lived through the German occupation and was full of happy yet fearful anticipation. “But how are you going to judge us and our mostly forced service for the Germans?” he asked. “The provocateurs among the Germans spread rumors about the supposed terror of the ‘Reds,’ alleging that they are going to shoot everyone who worked for the Germans. Nonsense! Lies!” The people of Kharkiv and other cities had endured so much, he noted. They had learned to appreciate the merits of Soviet power. Usyk insisted his people would be “the most zealous and obedient” in the future, the best at their work. “Under German rule, the people faced starvation, lost relatives and endured physical and moral oppression. They know what slave labor means and they have endured the cold and managed without light and water.” Precisely for this reason, he argued, there had been “a palpable change in people’s attitudes towards Soviet power. There is no longer any talk of resentment against the Soviets like there was in the days when the Germans came.”

Any hopes or expectations held by Soviet citizens that the USSR would undergo a change of direction after its victory – thereby yielding to the people’s desire for more bread and additional freedoms – were soon dashed. Life after the war did not get better at first; it got worse. Most Soviet citizens continued their everyday lives in a permanent state of emergency, just like in the 1930s and in wartime, with hardship and misery now winning out over their feelings of victory in the war.

People who lived through those times recalled how immediately following the war, all conversation focused on how people were going to survive the next day. In the winter of 1946/47 there was a drought followed by another famine, which affected Ukraine and parts of Russia and claimed up to 1.5 million lives.

The Soviet Union emerged from World War II as the “impoverished victor.” On the one hand, it had greatly increased its international standing, become a world power alongside the US and recorded large territorial gains. On the other hand, it had suffered enormous losses – an estimated 26 million Soviets died in the war – and destruction on its own territory. The demobilization of the army, re-evacuations, repatriations and deportations had also set giant swaths of the population in motion. Moreover, the economic reconstruction and restoration of the social order after the liberation of the occupied territories was accompanied by various ethnic, social and political purges.

What did the end of World War II mean for the people of Ukraine? “The war has come to an end. Victory, hurray!” wrote Nina Gerasimova, a student in Kyiv, in her diary on May 9, 1945. “The long-awaited day has finally come. It is difficult for me to describe my feelings. How many terrible things were we forced to endure in these past years, and now all of this is behind us!”

As one of the main battlegrounds of World War II, Ukraine had suffered a tremendous amount of physical and emotional destruction. Most of its cities and much of its industry were reduced to ruins. There were also huge population losses – it is estimated that between 6 and 9 million Ukrainians died in the war. Roughly 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews were killed in the



A Nazi propaganda photo of a Ukrainian woman harvesting sunflower seeds.

DPK-ZENTRALBILD

# Borderland

Victory and liberation from the Nazis in Ukraine was followed by starvation, forced labor, purges and guerrilla warfare

Holocaust, while around 2.4 million forced laborers, especially young women, had been deported to the German Reich.

Research into the crimes of the German occupiers in Ukraine – including the mass murder of Ukrainian Jews and Roma, the killing of the sick and disabled and the inhumane treatment of Soviet prisoners of war in the camps in Nazi-occupied Ukraine – is still in its infancy yet is currently the subject of a research project at Heidelberg University. The population loss in Ukraine was all the more dramatic as the country had already suffered 4 million fatalities under Stalin in the great famine of 1932–1933, a catastrophe caused by the willful mismanagement of Soviet leadership.

To this day, Ukraine’s share of the victims of World War II and the German occupation and extermination policies continue to attract scant acknowledgment in the European culture of remembrance. For this reason, any plans to erect a memorial in Berlin to the victims of the Polish occupation should therefore also include victims in Ukraine and other Eastern European countries.

The end of World War II also brought an expansion of Ukraine’s territory in accordance with the Soviet annexation of eastern Poland, which had been agreed upon in the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939. At the Allied conference in Yalta in February 1945, the Curzon Line was set as the binding western border of the Soviet Union. From that point on, all Ukrainians lived in a common state, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

However, the political and economic integration of western Ukraine presented immense challenges to Soviet post-war politics. In the early post-war years, Soviet authorities – particularly the secret services – focused their attention on smashing Ukrainian national forces, which had temporarily collaborated with the Nazis during the war. This tied up many Soviet resources. After the war, members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) continued their activities in western Ukraine, carrying out acts of sabotage and attacks on representatives of the Soviet state while often enjoying strong public support for their efforts.

This guerrilla warfare in western Ukraine continued until the mid-

1950s. After 1945, the UPA waged a parallel war against Polish authorities in the areas of eastern Poland.

Late Stalinism in Ukraine was generally characterized by a new version of the fight against Ukrainian nationalism. It was accompanied by repressive policies against Ukrainian intellectuals and an intensified policy of Russification. In other words, the Soviet leadership responded to its post-war problems by using pre-war repressive measures in an attempt to wrest control of the population by means of old, tried and tested techniques, including purges, repression and mobilization propaganda.

By 1953, more than 320,000 Soviet citizens had been arrested by the Soviet secret service for being suspected Nazi collaborators, including 93,590 individuals in Ukraine. Most of those arrested were sentenced to prison terms and forced labor lasting between 10 and 25 years. Some were even sentenced to death, including some former forced laborers and members of the police force that had murdered on behalf of the Germans. They also comprised women who had been deported to the Reich to perform such tasks

as cleaning and cooking for the Germans.

Mikhail Usyk’s fearful anticipation proved to be prescient. In post-war Ukraine, it wasn’t just the former active supporters of the Germans who were suspected of treason, but everyone who had lived under German rule. After the war, several million inhabitants of the occupied territories had a note to this effect inserted into their identity cards, which restricted their career opportunities and often led to other forms of discrimination and stigmatization.

All the while, the Soviet leadership was repeatedly forced to make pragmatic concessions to urgently needed skilled workers, who were essential in tackling the massive challenge of economic reconstruction. New groups of forced laborers – including repatriated *Ostarbeiter* and Soviet prisoners of war as well as German prisoners of war and ethnic German civilians who had been deported to the Soviet Union from Eastern and Southeastern Europe – were used in large numbers in this reconstruction. In October 1945, in some factories in the central coal basin of Donbass, 80 percent of the workforce

was made up of members of this unpaid, involuntary labor force.

Large-scale ethnic purges also shaped the initial post-war years in all of East-Central Europe. Roughly 800,000 Poles were deported west, mostly from Ukraine, and more than 500,000 Ukrainians were relocated from Poland to Ukraine by the Soviet NKVD, often by the use of massive force. In spring 1947, roughly 150,000 Ukrainians who had resisted resettlement were forcibly relocated within Poland from the southeast to the north and west of the country as part of Operation Vistula. This undertaking was designed to assimilate the Ukrainians to Polish culture.

Polish troops were almost exclusively responsible for carrying out Operation Vistula, but it was undoubtedly coordinated with Moscow and sought in particular to weaken the Ukrainian resistance. Moreover, roughly 200,000 western Ukrainians were deported within the Soviet Union to the Siberian Gulag. All the while, the post-war governments of the Soviet Union and Poland coordinated their ethnic purges between themselves and worked to remove the minorities from their territory on both sides of the Polish-Soviet border.

Due to the fact that millions of Jews and Poles had fallen victim to the Nazi extermination policy during the war and that many Ukrainian Germans had emigrated, Russians now represented the largest minority in Ukraine. After 1945, tens of thousands of Russians emigrated to western Ukraine as skilled workers and laborers. It stands as yet another tragedy suffered by Ukraine that as a result of both wartime and post-war purges, the country lost the multi-ethnic character it had developed over centuries.

For Poles and Ukrainians, this mutual history of ethnic cleansing presents a difficult legacy. Violent Ukrainian-Polish conflicts had already taken place in the war years. For example, starting 1943, the UPA had carried out acts of terrorism against Polish settlers in Volhynia and Galicia, which killed around 100,000 Poles, including many women and children. In return, the Polish home army – Armia Krajowa – murdered about 20,000 Ukrainians.

The Ukrainian decommunization or “memory” laws passed in 2015, which stipulate that members of the UPA and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) must be fully honored as “fighters for Ukrainian independence,” have met with massive protests in Poland. Some Polish historians believe that the murder of Polish civilians carried out by Ukrainian nationalists qualifies as genocide. In 2018, amendments to Polish laws specified that the investigation of crimes carried out by Ukrainian nationalists against Polish citizens would be a central focus of official Polish history policy and research in the future. The political relationship between Ukraine and Poland, which had been somewhat reconciled since the 1990s, is now increasingly burdened by these historical-political controversies.

Competing interpretations of the history of World War II now also provide potentially explosive content for the already difficult relationship between Ukraine and Russia. After the Euromaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Donbass, both sides have begun using distorted views of the history of World War II as weapons in their political conflict as well as a means to mobilize their own populations. There is ample evidence that the difficult legacy of World War II will continue to pose major challenges for societies in the successor states of the Soviet Union.

**TANJA PENTER** is a German historian and professor of Eastern European history at Heidelberg University.

BY KLAUS GRIMBERG

We worked 12 hours every day,” recalls Larissa Shvydchenko. “After the night shifts, you just went back to your bunk and collapsed. Even when they shouted ‘There’s food, get up!’ you simply could not open your eyes.” Pavel Mikhailov writes, “We were nothing but skin and bones. We weren’t even people anymore, just mummies. No idea how we managed to stay on our feet. It was only because we were young that we survived.”

These are just a few examples of the hundreds of thousands of memories held by Soviet citizens forced to do labor in Germany during World War II. Beginning in the spring of 1942, nearly three million men and women were rounded up under threat of violence and other forms of retaliation in areas of the Soviet Union occupied by the Wehrmacht. The average age of the deportees was 20, but many were substantially younger, at just 15 or 16.

Of the 11 million slave laborers the Nazis rounded up to work in Germany, it was Soviet citizens – whom Nazi bureaucrats lumped together with other Eastern and Central European captives and referred to as *Ostarbeiter* – that were by far the largest single group. They were also treated with particular brutality; in the Nazis’ depraved hierarchy of nationalities, *Ostarbeiter* occupied the bottom rung.

In West Germany, historical interest in the fates of Soviet forced laborers, along with the idea of compensating these individuals for their suffering,

first arose in the late 1980s. In the Soviet Union, too, the slave laborers’ stories were silenced for decades. Under Stalin, they were even denounced as traitors or collaborators. Only in the 1980s under Gorbachev and his policy of *Glasnost*, or openness, did many surviving forced laborers finally share their experiences.

A civil-rights society called Memorial, founded in Moscow in 1989 to shine light on Stalinist injustices, joined forces with the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany to focus on Nazi-era slave labor. It received a boost from a misleading newspaper report published across most of the USSR in April 1990, which claimed that anyone who wrote in to report their experiences could count on a pension from Germany. Almost immediately, Memorial received more than 400,000 letters.

These letters and many resulting interviews with slave labor survivors constitute a vast archive of the history of the *Ostarbeiter* in wartime Germany. Letters, postcards, photos and other documents unveil a panoramic window onto what these men and women were forced to endure so far from home. In 2017, a team of Russian historians published a documentary volume of the many memory fragments yielded by correspondences and interviews. That volume has now been published in German translation.

Rather than tracing the fates of individual persons, the book arranges fragments of recollections into thematic groups, beginning with the years before and during deportation to Germany. The great focus, however, is on accounts of living and working in Germany.

There are two key motifs that emerge time and again in these recollections: the brutality of the work and the constant hunger felt by the workers. It could make a huge difference, however, whether an *Ostarbeiter* worked for a major arms producer in a city or on a rural farm.

Alongside exhaustion and hunger, people felt lost and longed for their homes. “A foreign land, a foreign language and foreign customs. Some girls were only 13 or 14. They had it especially hard,” wrote Antonia Maxina. As Vadim Novgorodov recalled, “we did not really believe we would ever return home. We wanted to go back; we missed our families. It was hard to accept that we were no longer free.”

Despite their suffering, many forced laborers had nuanced memories of Germany and the

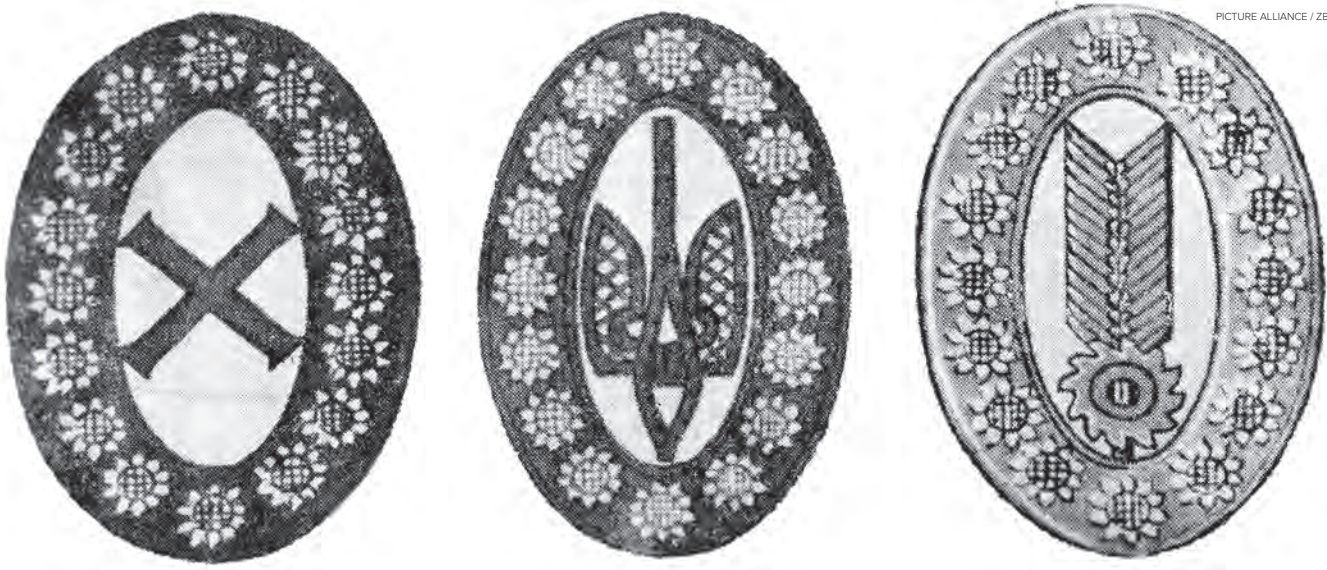
Germans. Gestures of sympathy were very clearly recognized. Tatiana Veselovskaya recalls: “When I came back and opened my drawer, there was always some buttered bread and something else inside. Whoever it was who put it in there, I don’t know. The Germans were afraid of one another.” And Nadyezhda Bulava: “You know, I also met completely normal Germans. There were good people, including some who helped us. But most were fascists.”

For nearly all of these individuals, returning home became yet another bitter experience, as they were often treated with distrust and suspicion. “We noticed immediately: We were aliens, second-class. We could not be trusted. We have to be vetted, re-vetted, and vetted again,” recalls Zoya Yeliseyeva. “We were all interrogated: When did we leave where, with whom, who else was there,

where were you over there, what did you do there, when did you return, who set you free?”

Some forced laborers were rewarded for their time in Germany with additional years in Soviet prison camps. Or they were openly discriminated against, as Valentina Yanovskaya recalls: “Whenever I tried to find work, the first question was always: Where was I during the war? In the occupied territory or evacuated? And then I had to listen to things so horrible that I didn’t want to live any more. How many times have I regretted having ever returned home?”

KLAUS GRIMBERG is a freelance journalist based in Berlin.



In 1944, the Nazis introduced so-called *Volkstumabzeichen*, or ethnicity badges, for forced laborers from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (l. to r.).

# Home-sickness

Soviet forced laborers worked brutal shifts under the Nazis, and then returned home after the war to suffer additional years in Soviet prison camps



*Für immer gezeichnet. Die Geschichte der Ostarbeiter in Briefen, Erinnerungen und Interviews*

(Forever marked. The history of *Ostarbeiter* in letters, recollections and interviews), edited by Memorial International in Moscow and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin; German translation published by Christoph Links Verlag.

+++BREAKING NEWS FROM GERMANY+++

+++ ПОСЛЕДНИЕ НОВОСТИ ИЗ ГЕРМАНИИ +++

WHAT PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW  
ARE ACTUALLY READING ABOUT GERMANY

DOUBLY SINGULAR –

the only German-Russian newspaper and the only  
English-language newspaper from Germany

– FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD

PUBLISHED BY PRINZ MEDIEN – TIMES MEDIA

PETERSBURGER

DIALOG

The German Times

# Revolution starts in the streets

Sometimes the only way to preserve our way of life is to change the way we live. The Volkswagen ID. family puts the climate first without putting your mobility needs second – this means no compromises when it comes to driving pleasure or range. Let's change things for the better.



Near-Production Prototype



BY ALEXANDER HAGELÜKEN

Donald Trump says that Donald Trump has a date in mind. By then, America’s trade deficit with Europe is supposed to have vanished. Until that date, the US president will deploy the same threats he’s using to blackmail China, a global power. But Trump has not yet considered the ways in which Europe can defend itself, nor has he realized that in turning the global system of multilateral free trade on its head, he is risking the prosperity of the entire Western world.

America is being cheated. This is the vague claim Trump uses to justify a strategy of aggression that has led to the slapping of unprecedented tariffs on China. He has raised prices on goods to the tune of \$360 billion – more than the GDP of Denmark, Colombia or the Philippines. Since Trump’s inauguration, the average tariff on Chinese exports to the US has risen from 3 to 20 percent, according to the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics.

In January, Beijing buckled and agreed to buy \$200 billion of additional soy, natural gas, pork and other US goods in 2020 and 2021. Now Trump is demanding similar concessions from the EU, which he says is “worse than China.” Trump is threatening the EU with tariffs of up to 25 percent on cars. According to Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman, this is an “abuse of presidential power, contempt for the rule of law and dishonesty about motivations.”

Trump fails to realize that his supposed victory over China is nothing of the sort, not even for the US. Nor does he realize that Europe – for a variety of reasons – is likely to respond differently than the Chinese did. The result would be a further weakening of the global economy and an isolated US.

Europe is not China. It is piloted not by an authoritarian regime but by a relatively weak central institution in Brussels. Its real power lies in its self-assured, democratic member states, of which there are many. The EU is not going to simply order additional US products in volumes approximating the GDP of Greece, as President Xi Jinping has done.

No indeed. Europe’s national governments have held firm, along with their well-organized farmers and citizenry in general – who have harbored mixed emotions about US swagger ever since the Vietnam War. Give in to Uncle Sam in the guise of Donald Trump? What could be less popular than that?

And there are other reasons why it would be hard to imagine Europe ever buckling under. For example, “America First” blatantly challenges the open-market logic the West has followed ever since the advent of the industrial age. Its initial policies were hesitant, with occasional protectionist relapses, but they then became resolute following World War II, with the establishment of supranational institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the OECD and the International Monetary

Fund to fix a monitoring eye on the markets.

Even 200 years ago, economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo spelled out the fundamental principle that free trade is not a zero-sum game. Both sides win because they can play to their strengths, thereby fostering the growth of the economic pie from which they take their slices. The West’s great advances in prosperity since World War II stand as vivid proof of the validity of this theory.

be merely a reprise of the mercantilism of the French Sun King Louis XIV and his finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert.

Smith and Ricardo displaced mercantilism, and rightly so, as current events attest. Trump’s aggression against China is not going to solve the problems of the US. Sure, the trade deficit with China has fallen by \$50 billion. But the US has simply bought its products elsewhere. It is estimated that the aggregate deficit climbed to a new record of more than \$900

### Trump fails to realize that his supposed victory over China is nothing of the sort, not even for the US

Under the influence of his advisors, Robert Lighthizer and Peter Navarro, author of *Death by China*, Trump regards trade as indeed a zero-sum game. He claims that the US has lost out because China and Europe have been booming. And, accordingly, he mistakenly thinks that the US wins when it harms China and Europe. But that would

be merely a reprise of the mercantilism of the French Sun King Louis XIV and his finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Smith and Ricardo displaced mercantilism, and rightly so, as current events attest. Trump’s aggression against China is not going to solve the problems of the US. Sure, the trade deficit with China has fallen by \$50 billion. But the US has simply bought its products elsewhere. It is estimated that the aggregate deficit climbed to a new record of more than \$900

Under the influence of his advisors, Robert Lighthizer and Peter Navarro, author of *Death by China*, Trump regards trade as indeed a zero-sum game. He claims that the US has lost out because China and Europe have been booming. And, accordingly, he mistakenly thinks that the US wins when it harms China and Europe. But that would

the global economic pie because free trade is decidedly not a zero-sum game. The WTO estimates that the global exchange of goods, which grew by 4.6 percent in 2017, expanded by only 1.2 percent in 2019. The global economy is growing more slowly than at any time since the 2008 financial crisis, the OECD warns.

Europe has no interest in assisting Trump in pushing this downward trend. Too much is at stake. Germany alone sells half a million cars in the US every year. Likewise, Europe has no interest in moving production to the US and thereby sacrificing jobs. The EU could respond to Trump’s aggression with retaliatory tariffs against US online companies, which would further depress the global economy but serve as a necessary means of addressing Trump’s attempted blackmail.

All in all, it is a dangerous cocktail for industrialized nations, where middle-class frustration is already feeding populist tendencies. An economic slump could unleash greater social unrest.

Furthermore, alongside the day-to-day confrontations, a longer-term change is also underway. “And, remember, the nations Trump was trying to bully are or were among our most impor-

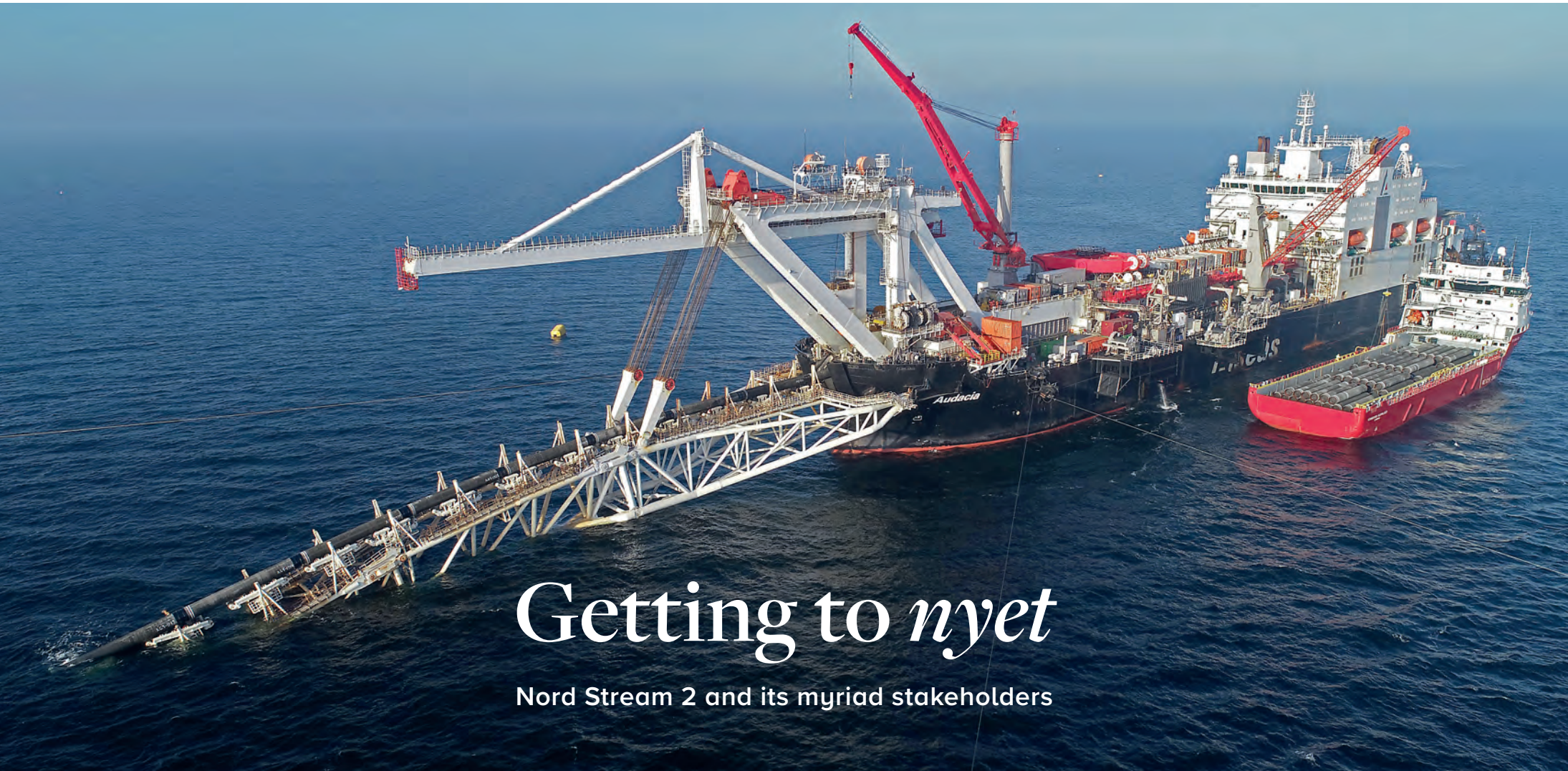
tant allies, part of the coalition of democracies we used to call the Free World,” Paul Krugman points out. “These days, our erstwhile allies can no longer consider America a reliable partner, on trade or anything else.”

Europe has begun turning elsewhere. The EU is knitting a network of free-trade agreements with Japan, Latin America (Mercosur), Mexico and other states that prefer cooperation over coercion. China is moving in the same direction. It would appear that Europe and China are entering a period of greater cooperation.

These trends reveal two lessons. First, the US is gradually isolating itself economically. Global trade will, increasingly, flow towards an avoidance of the US. Trump is attacking globalization, a trend that has acted as a force of integration for the countries of the world. This will harm US economic output and most likely reduce its political influence in the world. Traditional constants such as the geopolitical influence and global dominance of the US dollar, which allows for cheap credit, are now being called into question.

Second, America’s alliance with Europe is falling apart. What about the idea of setting technological standards by means of the TTIP trans-Atlantic trade deal before a competing scheme is established by Beijing? Forget about it. What about the prospects of teaming up to stop China’s discrimination against foreign companies? Unlikely. While Trump rebrands the US as a force of darkness, Europe is on the lookout for new partners. In the 2020s, our world is headed for major uncertainty.

ALEXANDER HAGELÜKEN is senior editor for economic policy at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.



Laying pipe: The Audacia at work on Nord Stream 2 in the Baltic Sea

DPA/BERND WUSTECK

BY ANDRÉ WOLF

The project was almost 90 percent finished. Preparations for the inaugural festivities were underway. But the US was set on putting a halt to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline no matter what. Even though the ships belonging to the Swiss contractor Allseas would most likely have completed their work within a couple of days, Donald Trump abruptly threatened sanctions on companies involved in the project. And then, early this February, he announced additional sanctions. The pipeline at the bottom of the Baltic Sea was designed to ferry gas from the huge fields in Russia’s arctic Yamal Peninsula to the German coast near Greifswald, where it would be fed into European grids. Today, the project is on ice.

The controversy surrounding the Baltic pipeline has a long history. As early as the 1950s, during one of the Cold War’s tensest periods, West German industrialists spoke with Soviet representatives about a deal that would benefit them both. The young Federal Republic’s fast-growing economy had its eye on the Soviet Union’s comparatively cheap oil and gas. In return, pipes imported from Germany would help modernize the USSR’s gas infrastructure. A US trade embargo put an end to those plans.

The sanctions were dropped during the détente era. It was the economically burgeoning German region of Bavaria that restarted talks with the Soviets in the late 1960s. They culminated in 1970 in

a far-reaching agreement for three billion cubic meters of natural gas to be delivered annually to Essen-based Ruhrgas AG for 20 years. In return, the West German steel industry provided pipes for building pipelines.

A series of economic factors encouraged the continued expansion of these ties. The 1973 energy crisis saw West German industry clamoring for more independence from the caprices of OPEC states. And the Soviets were always open to hard currency and a stable revenue source.

Points of political dispute were deliberately excluded. On both sides, neutral technology experts were tasked with management. It was believed that stable trade ties would foster reciprocal trust and lay the groundwork for development cooperation in other sectors as well.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, plans were drawn up to expand available transport routes. The goal there, too, was to link the Russian Federation more closely with the West through increased trade.

Meanwhile, Ukraine became a new, independent transit country, only too happy to charge transit fees and finding itself in a position to threaten the flow of gas. As a result, in the mid-1990s, much to the chagrin of the Ukrainians, the idea of building a supplementary underwater pipeline through the Baltic, with Germany as its terminal, gained currency.

In July 2004, a memorandum of intent was signed regarding construction of a 1,224-kilometer duct from Vyborg to Lubmin near Greifswald. It resulted in a 2005 agreement in principle among the

operating consortium made up of Russia’s Gazprom and German contractors Wintershall and E.ON Ruhrgas, and was shepherded politically by German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The proprietor and operator of the project would be the newly founded company Nord Stream AG.

In 2013, it was revealed that plans were in the works to augment the two existing lines with two additional, largely parallel pipes. From the beginning, this new pipeline project, called Nord

to Russia, thereby possibly undermining the effectiveness of Western sanction regimes in current areas of conflict.

Economic interests also play an important role. It is no secret that the US wants to greatly expand delivery capacities to Europe for its domestic fracking gas in the form of LNG tankers. The necessary infrastructure has recently undergone a substantial expansion, with Europe now operating 36 LNG terminals. However, because it must be liquefied and transported by ship – both of

## From the very beginning, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has elicited heated international political reaction

Stream 2, elicited heated international political reaction. Some arguments similar to those witnessed during the earlier project evolved due to new geopolitical realities.

The current debate is characterized by three different yet related spheres of argumentation, namely economy, security and ecology, which are emphasized to varying degrees by the parties involved.

At one end of the spectrum stand the clear opponents of the project – the US, Ukraine and many Eastern European states. Washington regards Nord Stream 2 as detrimental to US interests for several reasons. The US sees a geopolitical threat in Europe’s energy supply becoming even more closely tied

which require energy – LNG has the disadvantage of still being more expensive than the Russian pipeline gas.

Then there’s the general alliance policy perspective. US grievances over the low military expenditures of many NATO allies, first and foremost Germany, did not begin when Trump took office. The fact that these “freeloader” states would then also seek closer energy ties to Russia must seem especially reprehensible from Washington’s perspective, which explains the US government’s broad bipartisan opposition in to the project.

From the vantage point of the main Eastern European transit states, Ukraine and Poland, the

matter is likewise clear. Although both countries no longer rely heavily on Russian gas for their own energy supplies, the transit fees they collect remain an important source of revenue that would be jeopardized by the detour through the Baltic.

The project also poses great security risks for Ukraine. In the country’s ongoing conflict with Russia, Nord Stream 2 would deprive Ukraine of an important advantage against its big neighbor. Furthermore, closer ties between its important continental partner, the EU, and Russia are also not in Ukraine’s interests. In sum, the economic and security interests of Nord Stream 2’s opponents are generally congruent.

From Russia’s perspective, the project eases its own vulnerability to pressure from neighboring states and weakens the West’s political unity, yet the economic consequences are harder to judge. In connection with other pipeline projects such as Turkish Stream, Nord Stream helps diversify sales channels for Russian gas and stabilize revenue over the medium term. But it is doubtful that the additional income for Gazprom will suffice to offset the high construction costs, especially in light of the new EU gas directives.

As the entry point for Nord Stream 2, Germany can expect savings on transit fees. On the ecological level, disputes continue over the compatibility of the project with the long-term goals of Germany’s own energy transition project. On the one hand, gas is considered a necessary medium-term bridging technology for the generation of electricity. With their flexibility and low

CO<sub>2</sub> intensity (in comparison to coal), gas-fired power stations are an essential backup for absorbing natural fluctuations in power generation from wind and the sun.

On the other hand, Europe’s own gas production will fall sharply. Critics fear that the additional pipeline will produce lock-in effects in energy acquisition that could turn a bridging technology into a permanent solution.

It can be argued, however, that under the conditions of the liberalized European gas and electricity markets, the production technology and means of delivery that yield the greatest value will ultimately prevail regardless of infrastructural conditions, so that the success of the “green transition” will be decided in one way or another by the market.

The European Commission has become increasingly critical of the project. Ever since the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict of 2005 temporarily affected gas supplies to Europe, the Commission has backed a policy of diversification. Yet it is not actively obstructing the Nord Stream 2 project. Nevertheless, initiatives such as the recent amendment to the EU Gas Directive, which further eases ownership unbundling and expands third-party access to include suppliers from non-EU states, can certainly be seen as defensive steps – even if exceptions are still possible.

**ANDRÉ WOLF**  
is head of the Energy, Climate and Environment research division at the Hamburg Institute of International Economics (HWWI).

# Knock, knock! Huawei’s there

The EU has settled the dispute over Huawei’s role in its 5G network. Or has it?

BY DANIEL LEISEGANG

It appears that the impasse relating to Huawei is finally coming to an end. Starting back in May 2019, a heated discussion had emerged within the EU as to whether or not the controversial Chinese tech giant should be involved in the expansion of the ultra-fast fifth-generation (5G) mobile network in Europe.

Ever since, two distinct fronts have stood almost irreconcilably opposed to one another. On one side are the representatives of EU security authorities and intelligence services, who fear that Huawei could spy on European mobile networks and sabotage critical infrastructure on behalf

of the government in Beijing. On the other side are industry representatives, a majority of whom is in favor of using Huawei’s services because they see it as the only way to avoid lagging behind other countries in the high-speed digital age.

The European Commission has now come up with what looks like a way out of this stalemate. In late January, after months of negotiations with member states, it announced that it was explicitly opposed to excluding particular 5G providers per se from the European market, arguing that the decision as to whether a supplier is considered risky or not must be made solely on the basis of specific security considerations.

At the same time, Brussels presented a bundle of recommendations designed to minimize the risks involved in setting up 5G networks – including an instruction to keep suppliers that had been classified as “high-risk” out of critical areas of the network. The commission included among these risks any influence coming from a third country.

In other words, Huawei will now be permitted to participate in the expansion of the 5G network in the EU, but under strict conditions. Does this mean that all’s well that ends well? Not at all. The US government, in particular, reacted very angrily to the European decision. After all, it was US President Donald Trump who declared a telecom-

munications emergency in the US last May as part of his trade war against China. This was the point at which the US Department of Commerce put Huawei on a kind of blacklist, and since then, the Trump administration has urged all of its international allies to similarly refrain from using Chinese mobile phone technology for reasons of cybersecurity. An extra component of this request was a thinly veiled threat that the US would restrict intelligence cooperation if it felt it had to.

Even if the US government is more concerned with China’s expansive economic policies than with actual data security, the suspicion that Huawei could carry out surveillance on behalf of the Chinese government is entirely

justified. Indeed, Chinese intelligence laws require that private sector companies assist state intelligence agencies on the collection of information whenever requested. However, the US has so far been unable to provide any evidence to support its allegations.

As long as this evidence is unavailable, the German government is not eager to automatically ban Huawei from participating in German networks. As Chancellor Angela Merkel has made clear from the very beginning, she is in favor of a more moderate approach that would include increased security requirements and stronger controls.

Merkel’s posture on the issue, however, has caused a measure-

able degree of uneasiness, not only in Washington, but also in Berlin, and even in her own party, the CDU, and among her own ministers. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD), in particular, is intent on ensuring that “political trustworthiness” is an essential criterion for the approval of any 5G suppliers. On the other hand, Economic Affairs and Energy Minister Peter Altmaier (CDU) and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU), like Merkel, are against the complete exclusion of Huawei.

The European Commission’s decision has now provided Huawei supporters with some tailwind. All parties involved already agree that other providers should also be involved in the

# Scold war

Radicals have hijacked the climate debate. It’s eco-dictatorship vs. eco-Calvinism

BY JULIA BOEK

When *Time* magazine chose climate activist Greta Thunberg as its person of the year last December, US President Donald Trump fumed in a tweet: “So ridiculous. Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!”

Several journalists interpreted Trump’s tweet as a tasteless spin on the “Run Forrest, Run!” clip from *Forrest Gump*. The eponymous character in Robert Zemeckis’s masterpiece has a very low IQ and is considered to be mentally handicapped. Sweden’s Greta Thunberg suffers from Asperger’s syndrome, a vulnerability that is exploited with constancy and hostility by her political opponents.

In Berlin-Mitte this past summer, four pedestrians were killed when a Porsche Macan swerved onto the sidewalk. Even before the cause of the accident was officially announced, the SUV had become a multi-ton public enemy number one. At dinner tables, in the Bundestag, at roundtables and in op-eds, half of Germany began debating a ban on sports utility vehicles in cities. In the rhetoric of climate activists, the Left, the Greens and environmental groups, these half-car-half-trucks have become “motorized murder weapons” that are “responsible for climate change.”

Automobile industry executives, conservative politicians and car fans alike are countering with warnings about thousands of lost jobs while, above all, evoking the right of older people to have a comfortable way to get around town. They detect signs of a rising eco-dictatorship out to ban cars altogether.

Ecological issues have become a key component of a major culture war. In almost all segments of our society, climate protectors are pit against car owners, meat eaters and airline passengers. But what exactly is the nature of the problem?

As shown by its carbon countdown clock in Berlin-Schöneberg, the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change now gives the world just 25 years and 8 months until the global population, at its current rate of emission, has spewed so much CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere that the much-discussed two-degree threshold will be surpassed.

The world produces 1,332 tons of carbon dioxide per second – 42 gigatons per year. These greenhouse gas emissions are caused above all by oil, coal and gas, that is, by the fossil fuels upon which the growth of prosperity and advancement of the industrial world are based. As a result of these forces, scientists predict more frequent severe storms, heat waves, drought and rising ocean levels; and these in turn will lead to hunger crises, land loss, wars and climate refugees. At stake is nothing less than a livable future

This culture war is quite distinct from the emancipatory turmoil that began in 1968. Peter Unfried, senior correspondent for the left-wing *tageszeitung*, points out that up until now, the dynamic has been “men against women” or “heteros against homos,” that is, a disenfranchised group asserting its rights in the face of a dominant opponent; today, however, this narrative dichotomy of “us against the fill-in-the-blank” no longer holds. The old deep trenches are losing significance, as the obstacle, which was formerly “the others,” has now

But how do we go about creating this green industrial revolution? How do we achieve the democratic majorities we need to usher in innovative social and ecological policies and industries? No one can say exactly how. Nor can we know how much it will cost. At the moment, political and industrial decision makers are under tremendous pressure to agree on innovative climate policies that produce a smaller carbon footprint, as well as alternative concepts for mobility and production and huge investments in renewable energies.

conflict posed to their business models.

At the same time, we cannot overlook the fact that politicians are shifting the climate problem to a moral and cultural level – a phenomenon that Ralf Fücks, a Green Party politician and cofounder of the Center of Liberal Modernity think tank, calls the “privatization of the climate issue.” This trend is bolstered by the claims of many climate activists that the looming climate disaster can be mediated by individuals rethinking their habits and values.

But how can the environment debate become more civil? How can we craft a rational and advisable climate policy? Climate experts like Unfried are demanding a new societal discourse that forgoes prophesying the apocalypse while constructively discussing the opportunities presented by the green transformation. It would behoove us to embrace a liberal democratic attitude bent not on dividing society with regulation overload vis-à-vis elite lifestyle questions, but on maintaining open and honest dialog.



SHUTTERSTOCK/ RYAN RODRICK BEILER

for all coming generations of humans and other species alike.

Climate protection has become an existential question. It affects all segments of society and all political camps. But different groups’ perceptions of the issue vary to the utmost degree. While economic liberals, social conservatives and those generally on the right – including globalization critics, traditionalists, climate deniers, etc. – cannot or will not see the danger in it, the left-leaning cosmopolitan big-city elites have elevated the ecology issue to a matter of lifestyle and life philosophy.

become ourselves – that is, Western societies that consume ever more energy in order to satisfy their ever-expanding range of needs.

With its heavy dependence on fossil fuels, the world’s growth economy is pushing its limits. At the beginning of the industrial revolution, the capitalist principle of economic growth relied on the idea that the Earth’s resources would always be available for exploitation. Today, we are faced with the challenge of developing an energy economy to replace fossil-based raw materials with renewable energy sources like wind, sun, water and biomass.

However, instead of pushing forward with these policies, all their efforts seem to go toward forging half-baked compromises to buy themselves more time, such as modest increases to air-travel taxes in lieu of introducing a Europe-wide kerosene tax or gradually decommissioning the coal industry.

They embrace the former because they fear losing votes and possibly even re-election as a consequence of the socio-economic changes that will inevitably result; and they ignore or reject the latter because of the

At issue here are lifestyle factors like eating meat, fashion, driving SUVs, long-distance travel and the most extreme encapsulation of climate consciousness, “eco-Calvinism,” which preaches the renunciation of our consumer society, the abandonment of old norms and the acceptance of certain prohibitions and limitations, no matter what social disadvantages may accrue. This relocation of the climate question to the private sphere increasingly polarizes society and, so Fücks fears, could ultimately foment resignation and radicalization.

Finally, we could all use a little humor. And Greta Thunberg has some. The young Swede countered the petulant Trump’s verbal attack by temporarily changing her Twitter bio. Under her photo she wrote: “A teenager working on her anger management problem. Currently chilling and watching a good old fashioned movie with a friend.” ■

**JULIA BOEK**  
is a journalist based in Berlin and works for the Berlin daily *taz*.

development of 5G networks, a move that would increase technical diversity. In addition, all parties agree that Huawei should be excluded from security-related network and system components.

One compromise proposal currently under discussion stipulates that the German Interior Ministry has the authority to exclude providers from involvement in 5G-network expansion if they run contrary to any of Germany’s “predominantly public interests” or “security policy concerns.” In addition, a strict system of compulsory certification for all equipment is also in the works.

It’s hard to believe that the US government will be satisfied with this compromise, especially since Berlin knows full well that such

an arrangement cannot offer 100 percent security against spying and sabotage. The fact that the EU ultimately decided in favor of Huawei has one simple and weighty reason, namely that most EU countries are highly reluctant to forgo the economic benefits of a relationship with Huawei and China.

Industry experts agree that Huawei offers by far the most modern and affordable 5G technology worldwide. It is already being used in two-thirds of commercial 5G networks outside of China; it is far greater use than the technology provided by its competitors, including Nokia, Ericsson and ZTE. Mobile phone companies are using this argument to put pressure on the

deployment process, warning that the expansion of the economically key 5G network would be delayed by years if the Chinese equipment supplier were excluded.

At the same time, the economic powerhouse that is China is tightening the reins to a noticeable degree. Today, the annual volume of trade between China and the EU is roughly €600 billion. In the 20 years since 2000, the exchange of goods between the two trading partners has almost tripled. The EU thus has zero interest in jeopardizing its relationship with such a powerful economic partner. This applies especially to Germany, which is more dependent on foreign trade than many other EU member states.

Beijing is well aware of this fact, that is Germany’s Achilles’ heel. In December, China’s ambassador to Germany, Wu Ken, warned that the Chinese government would not take a German boycott of Huawei lying down. Wu pointed out that a quarter of the 28 million cars sold in China in 2018 came from German production facilities, an implicit threat that drew the attention not only of German car companies, but also of authorities in Berlin itself.

In other words, a European turnaround is long overdue.

An economic predicament such as this leaves hardly any room for something akin to free choice. In fact, it makes one thing all too clear: Even if it looks like

the trade dispute surrounding Huawei and 5G has been settled for the time being, the EU still faces tremendous challenges with regard to its economic future.

In the next couple of months, the first thing EU member states must do is agree on how to secure and control their vitally important communications infrastructure. They have until the end of April to implement the recommendations stipulated by the European Commission. After that, they must once again discuss whether the steps taken up until now are sufficient or whether further protective measures are required.

Yet this alone won’t be enough. In recent years, the EU has

gravely neglected the research and promotion of key digital technologies in its own sphere; in that same time span, China has grown into a global superpower. This failure is now taking a bitter toll, as the Huawei case shows. It would behoove the EU to clarify as quickly as possible how it intends to achieve digital and economic sovereignty moving forward. Only then will it be able to counter growing pressure from the US and the Far East. ■

**DANIEL LEISEGANG**  
is an editor at the monthly magazine *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*.





A touching scene: Saddleback Church in Berlin

NANA BRINK

Robert, a 50-year-old Berliner, turned his back on the Protestant church, like so many others here: “If the sermon is about Jesus, I really don’t care where I am. The national church is too stiff. People are happier here. People are happy to have contact with Jesus.”

And Pastor Dave Schnitter knows how to warm up his congregation – singing, praying, clapping and dancing. It’s a party atmosphere every Sunday morning, including childcare and

brunch after the service. While the message can be somewhat vague, the subtext is always the same: Jesus loves you. “And you are not alone in this big city of ours, not alone with your spiritual need for community,” says Fred, a computer science student.

Saddleback is focused on maintaining a strong connection to congregation members beyond Sunday services. Members regularly meet up in what they call “small groups,” a cooler term for

“bible study groups.” But these get-togethers essentially function as such meetings always have. What does partnership mean for me today? How do I raise my kids? How can I be better at my job? “And then we search for what the bible has to say on the matter,” explains Schnitter.

The trick is to engage people precisely where their problems lie – life coaching with a spiritual twist. According to theology professor Rolf Schieder, Saddleback

has deftly exported this “American interpretation of religion” to Germany: “Usually, if we’re talking with a friend and he expresses some spiritual quandaries or needs, we would probably recommend seeing a therapist or suggest going out for a beer; for most of us, religious vitality is something we’re critical of. But things are different in the US.”

The appeal that Saddleback seems to exert on the global community in Berlin should not

obscure the fact that the congregation is strictly organized according to the principles of the mother ship in the US, where the church subsists on the contributions of its members. In fidelity to the bible, these dues constitute a “tithe” of one’s income.

Saddleback also financed its Berlin affiliate in accordance to the regulations of its “mission concept.” But today, Pastor Dave Schnitter assures us, the Berlin branch is independent – albeit not spiritually. Saddleback can be considered something like a franchise system. And like in any franchise company, central command prescribes the direction its affiliates will take. Every Sunday, the California sermon given by founder Rick Warren is broadcast via video. Dave Schnitter himself does not preach.

For Professor Radermacher, this is a clear signal that the congregations are not independent: “Saddleback is centered around the figure of Rick Warren, a very charismatic individual, a preacher who can mesmerize the people.”

How that works was on display when Warren appeared at Berlin’s Zoo Palast. For one hour he preached about his favorite topic: “We don’t wanna be a boring church of just one nation,” he roared to the crowd. They rejoiced. “God loves diversity. God made about 6,000 beetles!”

The audience was enthralled, including the young man sitting right by the door – he wanted to be sure to hug Warren one more time. Beside him stood his partner. The two men wore their wedding rings. Huh? Don’t they know that as a conservative Baptist, Warren has denounced gay marriage? That he believes firmly in monogamous relationships and in abstinence until marriage? – “Doesn’t matter,” they say.

When asked about this directly, Warren steers deftly around the theme. He knows very well that in Germany, he must alter how he speaks. He explains with a wide smile: “Everybody deserves dignity and respect. I don’t agree with everybody, but everybody is welcome! No matter what life-style or gender.” And then there’s one more selfie with the young man and his husband. He’s Rick Warren, the approachable star. His appearance at Zoo Palast pays off for his church in Berlin. After the service, the congregation has won a few dozen new recruits.

**NANA BRINK**  
is a Berlin-based freelance journalist for various newspapers as well as a radio reporter and moderator (*Deutschlandfunk*).

# Quarzwerke – more than just mining

- Sustainable long-term vision
- Reliable supplier of industrial minerals to key industries
- Innovative products – traditional values
- Committed to social responsibility
- Awarded for maintaining biodiversity



**Quarzwerke**  
FAMILIENUNTERNEHMEN SEIT 1884

[www.quarzwerke.com](http://www.quarzwerke.com)  
[blog.quarzwerke.com](http://blog.quarzwerke.com)

BY INGE KLOEPFER

It took Ludwig van Beethoven only four resounding notes to erect an everlasting monument to himself during his own lifetime. The intractable start to his Fifth Symphony, which he wrote between 1804 and 1808, more or less exploded everything anyone had ever heard in classical music prior to that moment. The idea of building a symphony around just four notes was more than stubborn; it was entirely unique and completely outrageous.

Ludwig van Beethoven is a singularity in the history of art. He is one of those very few artists able to usher in a fundamental paradigm shift – a transformation after which nothing is ever the same again. Indeed, Beethoven initiated a deep shift in classical music, choosing to write his works beyond the boundaries of the traditional harmonious cosmos in which Mozart and Haydn were still composing.

But he was also responsible for propelling many other things forward. He established the figure of the freelance artist; someone who works independently of the emperor’s favor and endowments from the princely courts, and instead turns directly to the public to present his art. He went even further to fully revolutionize the concert scene itself. In fact, Beethoven can be credited with creating the public concert system itself.

Beethoven also transformed himself into a brand, not only in his music, thanks to breathtaking compositions like his Fifth Symphony, but also through his savvy business acumen and, last but not least, his own appearance. He never wore a wig in the streets of Vienna or at concerts. He lived and worked in Vienna for 35 long years, and it wasn’t only in the music scene there that he turned everything on its head; he also influenced the emancipation movement of the emerging bourgeoisie. He was nothing less than one of its major proponents.

But let’s take this one thing at a time. When Beethoven hit the Austrian capital at the age of 22, he was still guided by traditional notions of what it meant to be a musician. Much like his teacher Joseph Haydn had achieved fame and a certain degree of prosperity thanks to the wealthy Esterházy family, Beethoven also mused about seeking a position as a *Kapellmeister*, perhaps even back in his hometown of Bonn.

But nothing came of all that. It was an era of great economic and social transformation, and the Viennese noblemen were no longer spending their money as loosely as they once had. Even the Esterházy had fired Haydn and dismissed the entire court ensemble. Everyone could see that things were not going to be able

to continue in the privileged manner they had before. The bourgeoisie was growing stronger and more confident and the social classes were beginning to mix. This development did not escape Beethoven’s notice; it prompted him to pursue the clever strategy of first making a name for himself as a magnificent concert virtuoso of other composers’ works – not an easy feat in a Vienna filled to the brim with topnotch performers.

In 1795, Beethoven first committed to publishing some of his own works by advertising his intention in newspapers. He already had a name, so it didn’t take long before people showed enough of an interest in his work to make it possible to publish his compositions. Beethoven himself raised 700 guilders for the purpose, which was the equivalent to the annual salary of a middle-ranking government official.

To put it in more modern terms, at the age of 25, the wunderkind pianist officially became a freelance composer. He would soon have a field day with the publishers, whose heated battle to claim his work meant that he was often able to dictate the price himself.

Beethoven’s next step came soon thereafter, when he started putting on his own “academies” to prove his chops as a pianist and composer. As an artist without a permanent position, he saw no other way than to take this entrepreneurial risk.

Of course, this brought him yet more success. His concerts were extremely popular. And when he later began improvising, he simply made his audiences go wild.

By organizing these events – at which he personally sold the tickets – he managed to fill a gap in the market. There had been no public concert system in Vienna prior to Beethoven’s performances. From that moment on, concerts suddenly became accessible to anyone who could buy a ticket. This was completely new.

The first to compose music with a clearly identifiable message; his work was loaded with content and utterly overwhelming emotionality. And with the help of his “academies,” he was able to create his own audience for himself, all of whom wanted, of course, to hear exactly the kind of music he was making.

Today, an artist like Beethoven would be called a “game changer.” A game changer is someone who ushers in a revolution in an industry while providing completely new access to it – a person who breaks down old structures and fundamentally changes the behavior of the actors involved.

By definition, game changers are ingenious inventors who are born – as fate would have it – into eras of change and, earlier than others, recognize this transformation for what it is. These are exactly the elements that converged in the case of Beethoven: his genius as a musician, his ingenuity as a businessman, his nose for social change and the brute social and economic upheavals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The French Revolution swept away the feudal structures of the Ancien Régime in France, and then did the same all over Europe. All the while, the

advent of industrialization was creating entirely new opportunities for earnings and, in the process, leading to the emergence of new social classes.

Game changers and the eras in which they live tend to relate to one another in a recurring pattern. The dynamics of change impact these extraordinary personalities until they come to the fore and are expressed with ingenuity and creativity by the artists who work to drive them forward even further. This is still the way it works today.

The attitude with which Beethoven carried out this transformation in his day is nowhere better expressed than in his Fifth Symphony. “True art has a mind of its own and cannot be forced into flattering

forms,” he wrote in 1820 in one of his conversation books. These were the cahiers he used to communicate his thoughts with others despite his deafness.

These and other utterances reflect Beethoven’s thoughts on the human right to individual freedom, which is, for him, clearly non-negotiable; it is the very thing that constitutes man’s dignity – and not only in art. He also formulates the obligation each individual has to actually make use of this freedom, that is, to develop and to search for something new that can only be found beyond traditional thinking. He himself sought to live this way throughout his entire life, always looking for new musical solutions in every composition and finding them beyond the compositional rules of his time. This accounts for the expansive, dynamic nature of his music. He never repeated himself. In his everlasting embrace of transformation and change, he never stopped developing and transforming himself.

In terms of his art, Beethoven never allowed himself to be led astray. Not even towards the end of his life, as the Viennese turned their attention to a new star in the sky above the Hofburg. Everyone suddenly went crazy for the shallow and playful Rossini. Perhaps the ears of Vienna became weary of challenge, for Rossini’s compositions were by no means as bulky and difficult as Beethoven’s.

Beethoven, however, continued to provoke stubbornness. As a true artist, he simply couldn’t help it. He wrote string quartets that were so modern, they already pointed to what would emerge among his musical brethren almost a century later when Arnold Schönberg first experimented with free atonality.

Beethoven was born 250 years ago and has been dead for 193 years. But his music and its themes are still very much alive – particularly the headstrong Fifth, the so-called symphony of fate, in which the composer needed only four notes to deliver his indelible message. With such a mind of his own, he set out and succeeded to change not just the game, but the entire world. ■

**INGE KLOEPFER** is a business journalist and contributing writer at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. She has written a number of books, including a biography of publisher Friede Springer that garnered her the title of “Business Journalist of the Year” in 2005.



# Game changer

Beethoven was more than just a composer; even today, he can teach us much about business, obstinacy and freedom

Swarms of Viennese residents were eager to hear him play. And there was good reason for them being so receptive to the humanistic ideals Beethoven set to music in his symphonies; these ideals postulated nothing less than a complete transformation in values on the path to a free society. Such themes were highly popular at the time – a fact no one understood better than Beethoven himself. After all, he counted himself as among their ranks; it was they for whom he composed his finest works.

In the person of Beethoven, music and commerce came together in a unique way, making him what one might call the *avant-garde* of an innovative new form of the classical music business. He was one of



## BLOOD OF THE LIBERALS

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Germany’s conservative paper of record, recently reported that Jan-Werner Müller had turned down the opportunity to take over Herfried Münkler’s post as political science professor at Humboldt University in Berlin. Until his recent retirement from one of Germany’s most prominent universities, Münkler had been a preeminent scholar and his position there highly coveted. Müller’s rejection of the post is evidence



of how profoundly he has developed and moved beyond Germany’s often rigid scientific and journalistic borders. Today, Müller teaches at Princeton University and writes in both German and English. His most recent book has been published in German only, with a translation likely to follow.

In *Furcht und Freiheit* (Fear and freedom), Müller makes the case for “a different kind of liberalism.” Drawing on the famous 1989 essay by Latvian-born Harvard professor Judith Shklar, who escaped Nazi persecution and fled to North America, Müller sets out to

update and redraft her notion that a “liberalism of fear” draws its strength not from abstract theory, but from historical memory. For Shklar, the lesson was to learn to understand suffering, rather than to find “logical proofs in moral philosophy.” Müller, of course, writes very much in the vein of a professor steeped in academic discourse, albeit with a keen sense of the political fault lines beyond classroom debates. He argues for a more inclusive understanding of the oft-maligned identity politics: “The goal is to better realize the principles of freedom and equality that are widely shared, not to undermine them in the name of the particular.”

What unifies people should not be their backgrounds, but rather their commitment to the notion that rights be negotiated for everyone. For example, workers’ movements have always been more than just lobbying organizations for employees demanding higher wages for one group – it was “a joint cultural project to preserve dignity.”

**JAN-WERNER MÜLLER**  
*Furcht und Freiheit. Für einen anderen Liberalismus*  
Edition Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2019

## ALL THE OTHERS

According to Immanuel Kant, a very German philosopher, “Words without perception are empty, for they are mere formal thoughts devoid of purpose.”

Alexander Grau’s essay on what he calls “a German specialty” offers plenty of definitions of what political kitsch is at its core, namely “sentimental empty phrases, obtrusive touchy-feely-ness and overblown gestures of concernedness.”

The sacralization of everything worldly is kitsch, he claims. The basis of kitschy thought is the notion that reality is actually something else. Kitsch is the helpless attempt to ennoble the trivial and the ordinary. In longing for a world that is warm and fuzzy and wholly unhurt, kitsch praises pure conscience over rational thought. And so on.

Grau writes for *Cicero*, a glossy political magazine with centrist bearings. His short book reads at times like a Wikipedia entry on the history of political thought since 1789. It’s so schematic that even when following his basic premise, the reader is tempted to interject: “Not so fast!” At other times *Political Kitsch* reads like a 120-page David Brooks column – broad sociological statements stuffed with apodictic certitude.

Grau’s essay suffers from an absence of real people, fleshed-out thoughts and any ideas that either he or the reader could deconstruct. The author seems to harbor a vague dislike of perceived progressive do-gooders, yet fails to mention even one. The kitschy perceptions he rails against come across as cartoonish; even if people actually think in such illusory terms, they may not be worthy of Grau’s haughty takedown.

Toward the end of the book, he claims German intellectuals have always been aware of kitsch and happy to point to how much everyone else was living in a dream world: “Kitschy is always the other guy.” Duh. Grau’s hollow plea for undefined rationality and an undiluted world he never adequately depicts ultimately comes across as the definition of kitsch itself.

**ALEXANDER GRAU**  
*Politischer Kitsch. Eine deutsche Spezialität*  
Claudius Verlag, Munich, 2019



## AS WE KNOW IT

For years, Bernd Ulrich has been publishing the most erudite, well-reasoned and original pieces on the state of politics in Germany and the world. In 2017, he wrote a brilliant assessment of the political and moral decline of the West and the divergent public perceptions of it – nationalist and progressive alike (see the October 2018 issue of *The German Times*).

But it was a personal essay Ulrich wrote later that year about becoming a vegan that was his most-read and most-debated article. Ulrich had had his come-to-Jesus moment. Critics and trolls alike accused him, as they are wont to do, of proselytizing. What Ulrich actually did was study religion – or rather atheism – to understand just what made so many people overly defensive if not angry when confronted with the data and implications of man-made climate change.

Ulrich is deputy editor-in-chief of the weekly *Die Zeit*, the progressive paper of record, or, as he calls it, the “central organ of middle-of-the-road rationality.” In his new book *Alles wird anders* (Everything will be different), which focuses on the looming “age of ecology,” Ulrich delivers a fully developed political argument for a complete upending of climate policy.

However, the book is far more than just another plea to save the planet from climate doom. Ulrich forcefully deconstructs the shoddy reasoning for inaction beyond the usual suspects of unadulterated greed, right-wing denialism and complacency. His main argument is that German politics since 1945 has held centrism in such high moral regard that meaningful, if not radical, change is inconceivable. This very German notion has long served a noble purpose. Ulrich himself has been one of its most eloquent advocates. Still, he says, the ingrained fossil-centric way of life has become so extreme as to blind people to the costs in lives and euros and to impel Germans to blame other places and other peoples. No debating, haggling or shouting match about climate change should commence without first digesting Ulrich’s praiseworthy insights.

Ulrich is deputy editor-in-chief of the weekly *Die Zeit*, the progressive paper of record, or, as he calls it, the “central organ of middle-of-the-road rationality.” In his new book *Alles wird anders* (Everything will be different), which focuses on the looming “age of ecology,” Ulrich delivers a fully developed political argument for a complete upending of climate policy.

**BERND ULRICH**  
*Alles wird anders. Das Zeitalter der Ökologie*  
Kiepenheuer und Witsch Verlag, Cologne, 2019





This is going to be fun! Or not.

IMAGO IMAGES / CHAI VON DER LAKE

# Zee Germans & their Karneval

Exploring the joys and follies of carnival season in Germany

BY J. J. HAGEDORN

In this era of global pandemics, it's hard to imagine anyone having any interest in a folk tradition that involves repeatedly being pecked on the cheek by a steady flow of complete strangers. And the tradition is made even more inconceivable if we add packs of tipsy women roving the streets, sharp scissors in hand, intent on snipping off the tips of men's ties.

But no worries if you can't imagine these and other amusing customs being carried out in our time, it only means you've never experienced *Karneval* in Germany.

Every year, the festive season known as *Karneval*, *Fastnacht* or *Fasching* officially gets underway on Nov. 11 at 11:11 am. In Catholic cities throughout the Rhineland and elsewhere, costumed revelers storm town halls and loudly seize power – but only symbolically, and only for a day. This prank marks the beginning of what Germans call the “fifth season,” a period that lasts right up to Ash Wednesday, when all the balls and parades come to an end and Lent begins.

Most people equate *Karneval* with the series of events that takes place in the final six days of this long fifth season. In fact, the unbridled stream of drunken celebrations in Cologne, which begins on the abovementioned tie-snipping *Weiberfastnacht* (Old Wives' Day) and runs until Ash Wednesday, is usually what garners the most attention in Germany and abroad.

What is it exactly about this festival that prompts large groups of otherwise straight-laced Germans to ignore threats of a pandemic and abandon their stark adherence to stereotypically rigid rules of social conduct? While we've all seen images of Germans in *Lederhosen* consuming pitchers of beer and sausage at the annual Oktoberfest in Munich, what in this case compels them to dress up as Pippi Longstocking and dive with élan into the candies and kisses of *Karneval*?

The answer is simple: it's the very notion of role reversal that makes *Karneval* such a hoot. The modern form of this centuries-old tradition was established in 1823 and encouraged Germans to turn the world on its head and forget about all the things they worry about during the rest of the year. For one crazy week, they take over the streets of their city, gather together, make music, drink to their heart's content, cel-

ebtrate the end of winter – the original pagan party upon which *Karneval* rests – and allow themselves to be everything they're otherwise not.

When walking the streets of any *Karneval*-related street celebration in Germany, one is confronted with the full breadth of costumed revelers: there are witches, French soldiers, Roman soldiers, packs of angels, pirates, Marvel heroes and thousands more. There is no age limit; participants can be anything from zero to 100 years old. However, as this is *Karneval* and everything is topsy-turvy, small children can also expect to have the candy given to them by a complete stranger stolen right out from under their nose by yet another complete stranger.

North Americans would do well to imagine it as an unruly union of Easter and Halloween, with a dash of Spring Break and Mardi Gras thrown in for good measure. In fact, the celebration known in the US as Mardi Gras – established by French settlers in Alabama and Louisiana in the 18th century and literally translatable as “fat Tuesday” – also marks the last day of the German version of carnival, albeit under the name *Fastnachtdienstag* or *Faschingsdienstag*. An experience similar to the events associated with Rio's *Carnaval*, the ultimate idea behind the German merry-making is to celebrate and engage in precisely those things they'll not be able to do as soon as Lent kicks in.

However, not everyone is so gung-ho about the southern revelry. Those who live in northern Germany's traditionally more Protestant areas have been known to watch the goings-on in the south with slight irritation and puzzlement. And there are always some *Karneval*-resistant residents of southern German towns who vow to stay indoors or even take flight during the days leading up to Ash Wednesday. In 2015, the satirical website *Der Postillon* announced that northern Germany would be officially accepting *Karneval* as legitimate grounds for granting asylum to individuals seeking refuge from the *Jecken*, or jesters, in the *Karneval*-ravaged south.

Indeed, *Karneval* means different things to different people. For people in Cologne and Mainz, it brings a week of street parties, where even their local bank teller might be swigging a beer while dressed as a clown. For someone up in Berlin or Kiel, it might mean making a colorful costume for their

child to take part in the one-day *Fasching* celebrations held at day-care or school. For others, it might mean enduring a week of seemingly endless coverage of the events on German public TV, which preempts regular programming for days of parades and festival speeches. After last year's events, the Hamburg-based comedy show *Extra3* celebrated the end of carnival, noting “Now we can turn the TV on again without having our IQs automatically cut in half.”

But enough of the party-poopers. In 2018, one Cologne merry-maker dressed as a 19th-century soldier noted that there's no way to explain *Karneval*: “It's like an infection,” he said, drink in hand. “It just appears one day, and by Ash Wednesday, it's gone.” While it might sound like this drunken soldier has a condition that should definitely be looked at by a doctor,

## Not all politicians take part in this form of revelry, but when they do, the result is almost always regrettable

he's nevertheless onto something. The only real answer to the question as to why *Karneval* is so popular, of course, is that it's just a lot of fun for a lot of people.

*Karneval* also provides countless costume artists and float designers with a variety of opportunities to make bold social and political statements on current issues: there have been memorable recent floats depicting the VW emissions scandal, Brexit, right-wing dictatorships and an endless array of large-scale, mobile commentaries on political figures of all stripes.

Which brings us to *Politischer Aschermittwoch* (political Ash Wednesday), an umbrella term for the evenings of political potshots and satire organized during carnival season by Germany's major political parties at the local and regional level. The practice was made popular at the start of the last century in Bavaria by groups of farmers wishing to have their voice heard, but these days, *Der Spiegel* describes the events as more like “a party conference in a slightly drunk parallel universe.” Not all politicians take part in this form of revelry, but when they do, the result is almost always regrettable.

The latest victim came in 2019, when Germany's current defense minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK) – at the time Angela Merkel's successor as party leader of the Christian Democrats – made a number of appearances immediately after attending the Munich Security Conference. Among them was a 25-minute performance dressed as a cleaning lady named Gretl in which she claimed, among other things, that German Minister of Economic Affairs Peter Altmaier (CDU) had been passed over for the position of foreign minister on account of his weight. She also called her CDU-rival Friedrich Merz “the revenant of German politics” and insisted that the SPD party's proposal for a new *Grundrente*, or old-age pension, was “the most expensive self-therapy the SPD has ever asked German taxpayers to pay for.” Although AKK (pronounced

ah-ka-ka) had played the character many times before – back when she was minister president of Saarland – and her timing and performance were solid, she was now in a significantly greater position of power as head of the CDU and accordingly received much greater criticism for her portrayal of a character who was precisely the type of person her party has traditionally left in the lurch.

It was yet another speech, however, in which she referred to the “Latte Macchiato faction” in Berlin and appeared to make fun of bathrooms for third-gender people, that actually sparked a major debate and led to a drop in her approval ratings. And it was only months later, just two weeks before the 2020 *Politischer Aschermittwoch*, that AKK announced she was giving up the position of CDU head and would not run as a candidate for chancellor in 2021. Perhaps the thought of having to give up her Gretl character at the next *Karneval* celebrations was too much to bear.

Meanwhile, the 2020 *Politischer Aschermittwoch* gathering organized by the local CDU in the Thuringian town of Apolda enjoyed tremendous buzz after announcing that

Friedrich Merz, the man AKK referred to as a “revenant,” would be their guest speaker on Feb. 26: the 1,300 tickets to that event sold out in a matter of days.

Needless to say, you would never catch Angel Merkel – the daughter of a Lutheran pastor from a small town in northern (East) Germany – making such an appearance. As AKK's experience has shown, the type of role reversal that takes place at these regional carnival events runs a very tangible risk of not translating well to the national stage. In other words, at its worse, *Politischer Aschermittwoch* is a minefield for politicians, a feeding-frenzy for journalists and a nightmare for publicity managers. At its best, it's politics as usual, just with costumes, beer and orchestral rimshots after every joke.

Still, there have been a number of encouraging signs coming out of *Karneval* universe in the past several years. In contrast to disturbing news that the number of *Wildpinkler* (wild urinaters) remains high and the ongoing suspicion that parade participants are giving their horses sedatives to help them make it through *Rosenmontag*, the emergence in 2019 of the *Kölsche Kippa Koepp*. (literally the Cologne yarmulke heads), an official Jewish carnival group eager to reinvigorate the tradition of Jewish participation in the festivities, was greeted with cheers. Its founders took inspiration for their club's name from the *Kleiner Kölner Klub* (Small Cologne club), a bowling association founded in the 1920s that quickly gained popularity among the city's Jewish residents, but was dissolved after the Nazis came to power in 1933.

At the fifth-season launch held at the Tanzbrunnen stage in Cologne last November, the *Kölsche Kippa Köpp* was invited by the city's oldest carnival club (*Die Grosse von 1823 e.V.*) to join them and 10,000 revelers in making it clear – especially in light of the recent anti-Semitic attack in Halle – that xenophobia had no place in Cologne. As this was *Karneval*, however, where everything is turned on its head, instead of a moment of silence, they showed their joint distaste for racism by clapping loudly and nonstop for one minute.

Yet, as with all traditions in Germany going back more than a hundred years, it's worth investigating any potential skeletons in the *Karneval* closet. This is exactly what historians Carl Dietmar and Marcus Leifeld did in a 2008 TV documentary called *Alaaf und Heil*

*Hitler – Karneval im Dritten Reich* (Alaaf and Heil Hitler – *Karneval* in the Third Reich) and a subsequent book of the same name in 2009. Their work details the manner in which the Nazis pursued the goal of *Gleichschaltung* – the steady process of enforced conformity in every aspect of society, including *Karneval* – alongside the propagation of a *Völksgemeinschaft* (national community) and other fascist ideas. The Nazis instrumentalized *Karneval* as a “national” custom, thereby removing much of the regional identity of local celebrations and seeking to replace them with rituals focusing on *Kraft durch Freude* (strength through joy). They also removed one of the fundamental purposes of *Karneval*: to mercilessly criticize those in power. In its place, carnival clubs were encouraged to make fun of foreign leaders, such as Joseph Stalin and New York Mayor Fiorella La Guardia, and to deliberately ridicule Jewish citizens.

In one anti-Semitic float that made it to the Cologne *Rosenmontag* parade in the Nazi era, revelers dressed as orthodox Jews stood next to a sign saying “The last ones on their way out.” As Dietmar and Leifeld are careful to point out, *Karneval* organizers in the Third Reich were often willing participants in such approaches. Plus, starting in 1935, members of official *Karneval* clubs were required to show their *Arier-nachweis* – an identity card that proved they had no Jewish blood – or otherwise be excluded from membership.

This was a dark period in the history of *Karneval*, one that limits any subsequent jesters' insistence on their right to be unabashedly politically incorrect during the fifth season.

And it's true, for all of its revelry, *Karneval* will always be a serious business. Love it or hate it, it remains a multimillion-dollar industry that attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. Indeed, when the key ingredient to your festival is alcohol, you can be sure that each new generation will provide a steady flow of jokers and jesters. There will also always be naysayers, who make the most of the opportunity to gripe and look down on the revelers.

Either way, as the 19th-century soldier explained, the infection will go on appearing and disappearing before you know it.

J. J. HAGEDORN is an author living in Berlin.



DEUTSCHE BAHN  
STIFTUNG

# Discover the world of railways

Nürnberg | Koblenz | Halle/Saale



DB Museum

[www.dbmuseum.de](http://www.dbmuseum.de)