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QI Panel:

Europe and the Trump Administration

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Anatol Lieven 0:20

Hello, everyone. I'm Anatol Lieven, director of the Eurasia program here at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Before introducing today's webinar, I just like to flag a couple of upcoming events. On Friday at an earlier time, 830 Eastern Standard Time, we have a webinar on the Chinese century, which should be extremely interesting. And then next Tuesday, at this time, we have a book talk. I will be discussing with Nathan Robinson his book, co-authored with Noam Chomsky on the myth of American Idealism, possibly actually, since the incoming Trump administration, a myth which no longer really needs to be debunked, since it is being debunked from an even higher level of authority. Anyway, I hope you can make both these events. So today we're going to discuss the European and British although Britain is, of course, still part of Europe, geographically, if not totally, in other ways, the British and European response to the Trump administration, and it's pretty radical moves in international affairs.

And to discuss this, we have an extremely interesting and distinguished panel. Uh, sir Tony Brenton was the British ambassador to Moscow from 2004 to 2008 and he was previously chief of Global Affairs at the Foreign Office, and he is author of several books on global affairs, including the greening of Machiavelli, the history of international environmental politics.

Ambassador Rüdiger Lüdeking is a German diplomat, a retired German diplomat whose last position was ambassador to Belgium. Pascal Boniface is the founding director of the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, IRIS, not to be confused with IFRI, a different institution. And he's director of the quarterly journal *la REU* anti-national e strategic since 1991 and he is the author of my god, more than 60 books that makes me envious on a range of issues of French Foreign Policy and International Affairs. And he also writes regularly for the newspapers. Alexandra Dienes is a senior researcher for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, but based in Vienna, and since 2023 she has headed the Austrian branch of women in international security. So thank you all for coming. I thought I would begin with our German guest, simply because, as you will all be aware, we have extremely important German elections coming up on the 23rd of this month with radical implications for both German and European politics. So I thought I would begin by asking you, Rüdiger, how do you see the impact of the Trump administration and its moves, both on German policy but also on German internal politics, since Germany, for so many years, has been closely influenced by what's happening in the US does something of a revolution in America portend a revolution in Germany as well?

Rüdiger Lüdeking 4:09

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Well? Thank you very much. I think Anatol, the question is still open, because Trump is quite a vain and and self centered and unpredictable person, and so one doesn't know, and he has not, as yet spoken about what he will plan in terms of tariffs for Europe. I know that we will be very affected by whatever the Trump administration does, but I think we will be in a new situation with the new government, hopefully soon, and it's quite open what we will do. And unfortunately, I think. So far, I'm not quite sure whether we will respond in the necessary ways to perhaps also accept some bad things, like some some bad things coming from the US like new tariffs. And it seems that Trump is banking on new tariffs, which will affect us quite heavily, as it will also do so when and if the reported tariffs on on the importation the imports from Mexico will affect us and German companies, like, for example, Mercedes Benz and and other German car companies like Fauci, they have their facilities in Mexico, and they will be affected by it. So I'm not so sure, but I think what we will need to do is to get into a better shape in terms of leading in Europe, because you Europe needs to be returning to some sort of unity and self assertion to perhaps be able to respond to some of the threats which come out of Mr. Trump's office, and he seems to bank on on making deals. But that will primarily, first in first instance, of course, affect the EU as a whole, but primarily also Germany economically, because we have very close relationship with the US. And I'm somewhat, sometimes wondering about what, what Trump has up his sleeve, because that's quite, quite, you know, it defies, also the teaching that I had about, you know, economics and what needs to be done to ensure that there are no trade wars and that free trade is really benefiting All countries involved. Thank you.

Anatol Lieven 7:19

And if Trump pushes ahead successfully, or at least, things are going in a positive direction on a Ukraine peace deal with Moscow, in your view, will this lead to German independent German attempts at rapprochement with Moscow, especially in the area of energy supplies, or will this, in your view, continue to be to be blocked by feeling in Germany and by pressure from Poland, the Baltic states and so on?

Rüdiger Lüdeking 7:56

I think it will be blocked still, because, I mean, everybody thinks that Mr. Mattis will be the next chancellor, and his party has taken a hard line position vis a vis Russia, sometimes, in my view, too hard line, because some of the sanctions that need to be perhaps not lifted, but I think we have always defied the question of of talks with Russia or negotiations with Russia trying to end the war in Ukraine. But it's too early to tell, because already now we have had a very interesting debate last week about migration, where the CDU took a hard line position on migration, which also created a lot of anxieties and opposition by some of the more left leaning parties involved. So what? What will be difficult? It will be quite interesting to observe what a new government will look like and what kind of kind of line they will take vis a vis United States. And then we will, of course, be getting attuned to the Trump pension to try to get everything in terms of deals, and they should be favorable in to the US, which, in my view, of course, will not necessarily be favorable to us, at least not in the short term and and that's why I think there will be a lot of wait and see, to look at what Trump really does, and it's quite interesting to see that already. Now, he

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has been quite you know, he knows quite well, or perhaps some, somebody has told him that it's not good, perhaps, to. To to insert 60% tariffs on Ukraine and on China, but he has gone for 10% which is less, less clear. But I think China will respond in kind, and they have also, of course, stopped the exportation, or the exports of certain minerals, which will be hurting the us a lot. So one wonders whether Trump will learn quickly, or whether it will take more time. So it's, it's too early to tell really, because, as I said, Trump is quite unpredictable.

Anatol Lieven 10:46

I forgot, by the way, to say to the audience, please place any questions you may have for the panelists in the Q and A at the bottom of your screen, and I will pass them on to the panel Alexandra. You, I believe have some interesting information about German and European public opinion on these issues.

Alexandra Dienes 11:07

Yes, thank you very much. Anatol, thanks for having me. Indeed. I would like to share with you some very fresh results of public opinion polling that the Friedrich Ebert Foundation has been doing on foreign and security policy issues. We will be releasing the data I'm showing to you in a moment at the Munich Security Conference. So it's pretty much brand new, and I'm very glad to share it with you. I will highlight the German case, however, in some cases, in comparison with some of the European neighbors. And let me share with you the screen so that it's easier to follow my short talk, that you can see the data yourselves.

All right. So what I'm presenting to you now is part of the security radar poll, which is a 14 country poll we have been doing in several European states. And let me delve right into the German public opinion. The data was gathered in autumn, 2024 so a few months ago, and we have just finished analyzing it. And I guess although opinion is a few months old, it's still very relevant, especially for the upcoming elections. So what we generally see there are two countervailing trends. On the one hand, Germany presents itself definitely as a country of *zeitenwende*, where certain perceptions shifted radically. So just look how big of a threat is Russia these days. It's a increase of 22 percentage points compared to our last poll, which were conducted before Russia invaded Ukraine full scale. 2021 United States is still perceived as a threat by quite a significant share of people. 30% will speak about this in a second, because this is largely due to extreme far right voters. And in terms of threat perception coming from China, there's not, not a clear kind of view. Is China threat or rather competitor or something else? Another element of Titan vendor is certainly the overcoming of the decades old German reluctance towards increasing military spending. Here you will see Germany highlighted in our entire sample, aligning with the majority of other countries, with the only exception of Italy, majorities are in favor of increasing military spending. This is a big change in the German public opinion. However, if we ask people whether they would like to prioritize defense spending or spending on social economic affairs.

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The picture is very clear. Germans, just like most people in other polled countries, are in favor of rather spending on economic and social affairs. And this is a potential point of contention and also a very contentious point for any future coalition which might come out of the elections on the February 23 basically this guns versus butter question. But on this slide, I also would like to highlight that we see a certain continuity of German opinion in terms of this culture for strange we see that skepticism towards military intervention has been increased in the course of Russia's full scale war against Ukraine, and generally when it comes to foreign policy instruments, we see that Germans favor more than other respondents. Diplomatic means, diplomacy, strengthening international organizations, disarmament initiatives. So Germany is a country of *zeitenwende*, but it has not changed that radically. Decoupling is certainly an issue in Germany. Anatol mentioned already the aspect of potential energy cooperation with Russia, we see a somewhat mixed picture. Time.

On the one hand, Germans certainly want to reduce dependence on countries that do not share our values. They also would like to decouple from Russia, decouple from China. But at the same time, there's still a certain pragmatism that we can see in the public opinion in Germany, majorities say that Germany should cooperate with non like minded countries if it promotes peace and security in the world. And some sizable majorities still believe so. It's autumn. 2024 right? It's almost three years of the war in Ukraine. People still believe that Germany should collaborate more with Russia and China. 25 30% it's quite sizable minorities, if we have a closer look at parties, and I think this is where it gets interesting with regard to the upcoming election, what we see is that, generally speaking, majorities of Germans are in favor of continuing support of Ukraine. They think that Russia is a danger to European security. They think it makes sense to decouple from Russia and China. And these convictions are shared, really, across the board, with one exception, and this is this blue dot. You see, it's the AfD voters. We don't have data, unfortunately, on the new far left party. Good news out of Agnes. But I can imagine that these dots would also kind of stick out. So we see a clearly distinct position on many important foreign policy issues pertaining to cooperation with Russia, decoupling from Russia or China, threat perception emanating from Russia, or necessity to continue support for Ukraine. AfD voters see this differently than the establishment, so to speak, and as Mr. Ludeking already alluded to under Meredith Friedrich Smith, the CDU, the Conservative Party sometimes tries, well, very controversial rapprochement towards the positions of the AfD.

So why it has happened only with regard to migration, but who knows which other issues might be taken on. Germany is, of course, not alone in the EU, and we know from the political discourse how big of an emphasis German leaders put on collaboration within the EU. However, if we compare German public opinion to other fellow EU members, it's kind of conspicuous that Germany is still reluctant to be a hegemon. So this trend continues. Really small minorities believe that Germany should assume a stronger leadership in the EU, just compared with Poland, who are way more assertive. Germans do believe in the necessity of the strength of European institutions, but at the same time, there is a pronounced desire to concentrate on itself. So there is this branch towards inward looking, maybe even towards isolationism. And this can be a little bit dangerous at times where looking unity is required, especially when when tariffs from the Trump administration are imminent. Let us. Let us just throw this one last glance

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at the attitudes to the war in Ukraine, because I believe this will be also crucial for the German role in the EU just very briefly, as a sum up of the trends we see that disillusionment sets in regarding all issues of support in Ukraine, support for weapon deliveries is declining and has fallen compared to the last survey. Support for Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO has also fallen, and then no majorities in Germany, and also the majority of people believe that Germany should support diplomatic efforts to stop and to end the war.

So we see a divergence of opinions if we compare with other European nations, and this could signify a potential rift in the EU, as said at times when actually unity is more required than ever in the face of great power competition, pressure from the United States, pressure from China. And thus, I believe this will be a challenge for the future German leadership to be the leader of Europe and to unite other countries around a common approach in supporting Ukraine and in kind of placing Europe on a more firm footing in this new geopolitical competition. Thank you.

Anatol Lieven 19:52

Thank you very much. That was fascinating. One thing you said, though it did strike me, said. Many Germans believing in closer cooperation with like minded countries or governments. But of course, a critical issue now is, I mean, is in fact, the US administration like minded, because clearly, the Trump administration's closest ideological partners in Europe are parties like AFD and, of course, Orban in Hungary So Pascal, I wanted to ask you, I mean two things. One, how do you see the effects of the Trump administration on French domestic politics and given the political crisis in which France now finds itself. But secondly, and I'll very want to ask Tony about this as well. I mean France or the should I say, the Macron administration has gone pretty far out on a limb in supporting Ukraine and even suggesting French and European troops for Ukraine, with the Trump administration now in power in Washington, does this leave France, in fact, too far out on a limb? Is it isolated strategically in this matter.

Pascal Boniface 21:23

Yes, thank you. Anatol, so we are in a trouble on political issue, and there is nothing to see with Trump. So I don't think that Trump are even in power will have an effect on the French internal policy. We are in a very dark situation with we had four prime minister in the last year, and we don't know how long could last this government. He had escaped to a censure today and tomorrow, but perhaps tomorrow we will have a new government. So we are in a very dear dare situation, and we could not have a node, a new election till June, because the rule is not to be able to dissolve the National Assembly before one year. So we have, we have a free, very divided National Assembly in which there is no clear majority on internal issue. And so there is so and the parties are more or less unital regarding Trump and regarding regarding Macron, is true. But if we compare the first Trump pendant and the second one, Macron was he was working on the sea, on the water during the first mandate. He was the head of states of a strong country and united country, because he has a large majority in National Assembly, and we had a strong German front, COVID, German couple. It is no longer the case. And because Germany is

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in economic crisis, France is in economic crisis, so the two countries are weaker than during the first Trump mandate, and the two leaders are weakened by internal policy.

And Macron has not full hands on, yes, still full hands on diplomacy. But when you are weak on internal issue, we are not strong on external issue, so macro is much weaker than during the first Trump mandate regarding the strange idea to send troops during a war time in Ukraine, it was rejected, strongly rejected by most of the parties and by most of the French public opinion in a by a 2/3 majority, at least, because public has understood what it was, a crazy idea, what risk, escalation and risk to be confronted to a direct war with Russia, and I think that Macron has done that to take the lead in Europe and to make a reconciliation with Poland with Baltic States, because he was accused to be too lenient on Russia, and he wants to happy on the other side to be the strongest opponent to Putin and Macron time to time, switch to a position to Another one very quickly, and its motto is on mentor. It's in the same times. So it was in different times. The strong, the stronger advocate of dialog with Putin, and after the strongest, open on to Putin as a strong ex defender of Zelensky. But I think it's to be again, a leader in Europe, and to be in the centerpiece of Europe, and to be the one who could replace us if we want to stop the health of Ukraine.

But when you look at figure, we have an. He has anti pocket, because we could not increase much more our meeting expenditure, because we are huge budget deficit. The state of the hospital of university is very in a poor situation, and I think that the French people are not agree to increase much more to help Ukraine and to increase military spending. So I think this declaration are more verbal than policy. In action, it was more to be the one who stand load with Ukraine. But in fact, when you come to act, nothing has changed, because the first question of us, president of Germans and sonomas, it would be crazy to send European troops and NATO troops in Ukraine, even the Polish president was not agree with that. So I think it's more a very bad policy and acting policy. And so regarding Trump, in the first mandate of Trump, Macron was the leader of European opposition to Trump, I don't think he's as powerful now to do it again and and we have difficulties with the because the commission is less less strong than it was six years ago. And so I'm, I think that we have first to solve our internal problem, and when first to have a government where not under the threat of revocation and so and we have to give more time to we have changed so many times of Foreign Affairs Minister, and it's very difficult to impose yourself when your minister is changing every six months. And so we will see.

But we need allies, and I think that the European French dream of European sovereignty is not shared by other European countries and and so we are, it's, it's, it's very difficult to do to the Ukrainian war and and I fear my my own fears that we, we European countries, are to divided, to make a common front to Trump, because everyone want to have The best solution for him, for itself and not to have a common front. Six years ago, when Trump has increased the tariffs for Europeans goods, we have taken the decision to increase the tariffs for American goods as well. But we were in a time you were not at war, in the recovery for Russia and the need of protection, of military protection by most of German countries, is so important that most of there could accept economic concession in order to preserve military protection. It's not the French position, but I fear to be that French position will be in a minority regarding the concession to do

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with USA. But if Trump is to be the first man that at the end of the day, even the British we were still in Europe in this time, even the German Chancellor say it's time to think to a plan B. It's time to think to be independent from us. I fear that, due to the Russian war in Ukraine, nobody, or less countries think it could be possible, and the countries who were able and really to take a strong position against Trump. So not so numerous.

Anatol Lieven 29:09

Thank you, Tony. Of course, Britain is an even more ambiguous position, being not in the European Union, but critical, or potentially critical, to any European defense that can be created. And of course, on the one hand, you have the by now almost genetically programmed adherence to the special relationship, but you have governments in Washington and London which are ideologically very different indeed. How do you see Britain navigating this extremely complicated situation, especially with regard, of course, to Ukrainian peace?

Tony Brenton 29:53

I mean, with regard to Ukraine, we see ourselves as having been very much in the lead throughout the crisis and helping Ukraine. Ukrainians at the beginning, continuing to back them, and now, at this stage, the key issue that faces us as we see it, is that Trump, very clearly wants to wash his hands of Ukraine. He doesn't want to throw it under the bus, but he does want the problem. And he said this, he wants the problem to be dealt with by Europeans alone, not alone, but as far as possible. And our feeling in the UK is that if we cannot be seen to respond to some extent to that expectation, then firstly, we're going to see a US Russia. Negotiation about Ukraine taking place over our heads, which might produce consequences which are unhelpful to us. And secondly, Trump will write us off completely, and his attention to NATO more broadly, may significantly weaken.

So the position of British government is we need to be in there, doing what we can to find whatever arrangements will work for Ukraine as we move towards a ceasefire, Keir Starmer was actually in Kyiv, I think, last week, talking precisely about British troops possibly forming part the peacekeeping force or tripwire force, whatever it's there for. And came away. Couldn't commit himself. He needs parliamentary approval, whatever it is, but talking pretty warmly about British readiness to do it. Now, I think he's rather reinforced in that approach by reasonable confidence that we won't have to, because the Russians will veto any such force, but nevertheless, showing willingness, demonstrating to the Americans that we're up to do what is necessary to reach a respectable peace with regards to Ukraine, is very much part of what the UK is now pursuing, and believes it is pursuing it. It's helpful to our standing Europe, helpful to our standing with the United States.

Anatol Lieven 31:45

But is it serious, or is it more great power posturing? Because looking at the state of the British Armed Forces, the troops that we could actually deploy, even if, as you say, the Russians would

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certainly veto this would be surely grossly insufficient, and even, I mean, dangerously exposed, if they were to be sent to Ukraine.

Tony Brenton 32:15

Come on Anatol, I know that very well. We're not planning to do this on our own. We will be part of a we're talking complete fiction here, because this isn't going to happen. What we see is that, what we see and what could be quite useful, is symbolic. It shows European willingness to put itself where something is undoubtedly going to be needed. And it also, as I say, demonstrates the United States that we're not simply going to depend on them coming. And that's those are two quite important positions to take going forward, not least because there's going to be a big negotiation, and Europe needs to be in there. By Europe, I mean the UK, the EU in well, you don't need all of Europe really. You need the three or four serious European security players, Germany, France, UK, Poland, Italy, perhaps.

Anatol Lieven 33:06

Yes, he'll forgive my saying that. I'm not sure that Poland would be an asset to a peace process which inevitably will involve compromise.

Tony Brenton 33:17

You're right, I mean, but we're talking fiction. It is a matter of being seen to be ready to do whatever is helpful. Something will turn up, and by being ready, you get yourself a seat at the table when the serious talking starts.

Anatol Lieven 33:33

Yeah. So I've always had a strong sympathy for Mr. McCarver in foreign policy, because since one never knows what will turn up, especially under Trump, one could always hope that something positive will.

Tony Brenton 33:50

Let me just say, I think that Trump on Ukraine so far has got it virtually all right. He's said after after the there's a sterile deadlock we've had for the last two years time to get on with making peace. Ukrainians have instantly shifted their position to a much more realistic statement. We're not talking about peace. We're talking about a ceasefire in the negotiations. And now, pretty clearly, the focus of the pressure from the United States is going to turn to the Russians to get them to the table. He's got good people doing it. I'm really rather optimistic about the way things.

Anatol Lieven 34:24

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Amazingly enough, so am I. And for me, that says something very strange, since I'm not known for my optimism. But I mean on that score, turning back to our European participants, perhaps starting with Pascal, it's been suggested that since NATO membership is out in effect, that the prospect of EU membership is critical to bringing you getting Ukrainian acceptance for this, but also, you know, to anchoring Ukraine in the West in future and giving it its European path. And. But that, of course, raises the question when it comes to practicalities, leaving aside, of course, Russian opposition NATO membership was a lot easier. When I was last in Paris, I met, of course, purely in private, immense skepticism that especially if in 2027 we have a Sorry, I keep forgetting what its name is now, but Le Pen's party in the presidency that France would, in fact, ever agree to bringing Ukraine into the European Union in its present form is that unduly, having said something optimistic, I will now revert to my natural pessimism. Is that too pessimistic? Do you think that there is a realistic cause for Ukraine into the into the European Union?

Pascal Boniface 35:55

I would that is opposition, a strong opposition of the French public opinion, because it will be too costly, and it will be the end of the French agriculture and the French agriculture richness. And so I think that from the left to the right. So maybe the Macron party, but Macron party is very weak. Maybe the Socialist Party, but Socialist Party is not so strong. But in fact, I think that we have promised to the possibility to be candidate to Ukraine in an emotional way. There is no rationality, because Ukraine is not ready to enter into EU, not economically, not the way they deal with they manage their own countries, the level of corruption and so on. And so if Ukraine is entering inside EU, it could be the end of EU. And of course, for us, and it will be easier to say European countries will pay the bill, and because it's a protection of Ukraine, but paying paid by European countries, and I even suspect Russia could be in favor of such a solution, because it will weaken EU, UK, when inside EU will be a strong a strong contest, strong problems, economic and so on. And fortunately, we need to have 27 ratification of treaty electing Ukraine inside EU. So not only France, but a lot of other countries could oppose but most of French people think that let letting Ukraine entering EU, it's one of the most foolish idea. And we could help Ukraine. We could send weapons, and why not help them, but not by entering EU. And I think that at the end of the day, the one who are in favor of EU will understand that a strong EU and EU with Ukraine inside are just incompatible.

Anatol Lieven 38:16

Yes, that's what I heard. Rudiger, how is this scene in Germany?

Rüdiger Lüdeking 38:22

Well, first of all, I think I've listened very carefully to what Pascal bolifas has said. And also I think it was quite interesting to see the slides by Alexander dines, because they show perhaps the difficulty that we are in. So I believe, and I hope that the German government, new government, will take a different stance and will show some leadership. And I, for one, very much deplore the fact that the German French leadership role in the EU has gone and it's no

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longer active. And unfortunately, I think that was also due perhaps to the hesitancy of the German politicians. But so it would best be asking me for perhaps advice on what should not or should be done, because I think we need to revise some of our policies towards Ukraine and the peace process in Europe. I think, for one, I believe Trump has, perhaps, or he needs to get the credit for opening up the possibility of negotiations. And so far, if you look at it, there was no avenue for asking Russia to negotiate on Ukraine. On the contrary, there was the trend towards exclusion of Russia. And I for one, would hope that. That this will change dramatically.

But I'm not so sure whether to respond to Sir Tony's point that the that Trump was was immaculate on it, because I think he has, just, for example, today he knows he has announced that he will resume the help or the support of Ukraine, but he wants to have something in return that's probably the proper deal maker, and he wants to get some rare earth minerals for that and so forth. So I don't know what what really is in the offing now, and I think, for example, and I agree with with what has been said with regard to the EU having to take a perhaps stronger position. But on the other hand, I believe that the EU will not and the security guarantees in a framework that needs to be perhaps fulfilled, in terms of assuring Ukraine to to have security for the foreseeable future And for the for the future that might be perhaps the most difficult one, I think, and NATO membership is out, and not only due to the hesitancy that was shown by by Trump and his previous as a Biden, but also, I think there will be some hesitancy, and rightly so, from from us as well.

But I think even the deployment of forces to Ukraine might pose difficulty, because I think in the first instance, it will have to be between Russia and Ukraine to decide on if there is some sort of peace line, or or some sort of line for No, what's called, oh, my goodness, I'm unfortunately, I was bitten by a tick, and that doesn't help me in finding The right words. Sometimes, Cease fire. Cease fire line, but that that needs to be also decided by those involved. And I for one, would not go as far as saying, well, we need to deploy German or French or Polish forces there without the consent of Russia. And when you look at what is required to really control and and monitor the peace fire line, or the cease fire line, that that would, that would require 1000s of people, and why not go for also the inclusion of the Global South? And I have one have regretted that, for example, that has never been been entertained, the idea that has been put forward by China as well as as Brazil, for example, in terms of achieving a peace.

So I think what needs to be done in terms of, I mean, we need to really look at what is in for us, and we need to remember what the what NATO has set out in the 60s to do with the then Soviet Union, namely, to try to enter some sort of dialog with it, because there is an interest not to leave it aside totally, but to reintegrate it into Europe. And I think that also is an obligation that will require more attention because of the current Trump administration, where we are no longer perhaps in a position to bank on his willingness to fulfill the verbatim question or the verbatim commitment according to Article Five, because Article Five in the NATO Treaty is couched in very vague terms. So I think he wants to make sure that everything is being done as has been said before by the Europeans, but the Europeans are probably too weak to do that, and that's why I think we need first of all to unite Europe and see that we will rebuild our defenses and we'll spend more.

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On defense matters, I will not go into the discussion of 5% or 2% as the level for the defense expenditures in terms of the BIP, the the internal product of the the sides, but I think what what needs to be done, we need to really address very substantially and very quickly the very weaknesses that we are confronted with in terms of our defense postures, and that's why we are not looking at or we should not be looking at the mechanistic figures like 5% or 2% of CDP. But we need to really look at what is required to rebuild our defenses, and that will also make Europe a more interesting partner for the US, because so far, we have been banking on the US for our defenses, and I'm not so sure that we can bank on it in the future as well, because we are entering into a new phase of A new order in the world where we need to address the challenges that we are facing, and we are not doing that. And nobody has asked, or nobody has prepared for Trump getting into office, and he's sort of an egomaniac, and he seems to be only interested in what is good for the US and not for what is good for Europe or some other countries in the world.

Anatol Lieven 46:50

Alexandra, when I was in Berlin, I heard several people in the foreign security establishment talking about how, given the as they saw it, unreliability now of France and the Russian threat. How Germany must reorient its European policy and its security strategy from France and Western Europe towards Poland and the Baltic states, I would imagine, from the results of the polls that you cited that that is not something that a majority of German public opinion would feel comfortable with.

Alexandra Dienes 47:32

Well, you allude to the Weimar triangle, which is indeed, I think, a very viable alternative for leadership in the EU, not just the French German motor, which, as someone already said, is not doing quite great, but include Poland. Indeed, this is, if we look at public opinion in Germany, not the most favorite option, but it's second favorite to own leadership. And in fact, most other countries that we polled prefer this trio to lead the EU. And I think this gives us an idea that this might be the necessary step out of this reluctance of Germany and towards more unity within the EU, and towards bridging those gaps and perceptions. I remember how you said Anatol that including Poland in any potential negotiation on Ukraine might not be exactly helpful, but I very much agree with all previous speakers that our strength in Europe starts at home, meaning that we first need to get a common position and to get our act together. We know how difficult this is, because this is the very nature of the European project, but I think given the pressures from the outside and given the pressure even from one of our main allies, which is the US, which might show itself as at least unreliable or maybe even adversarial under this administration, we should just wake up to this.

I don't understand why it was a surprise for parts of the European public when Trump got elected for the second term, we should have been prepared, because we remember this from a few years ago, and in fact, a United States that is friendly to Europe, like was demonstrated by

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the Biden administration, maybe this is an exception and not a normal. So very much agree that we need to prioritize our own defense, prioritize our own strategic sovereignty, understood in broad terms, including economic however, there are some important COVID I would like to highlight, and I think one of them is kind of this bread guns versus butter question that I already alluded to, prioritizing Our defense, we should not forget, and by we, I mean in Germany, but in other European countries as well, that we need a certain degree of social cohesion to let our societies put up with, however high or low this defense expenditure will be, but it's quite clear that we need some additional funds in Germany.

Specifically, you know, there is this debt break enshrined in the Constitution, and as we know from our polls, supported by roughly half of the population, meaning that people prefer not to take on additional debt in order not to put a strain on future generation, while the reality shows with all the challenges, which are, by the way, not only limited to US security policy, but that also encompass planetary challenges like combating climate change and many others, they need, you know, additional investments in the future in order to Make sure the economy stays competitive. And one can prevail, or at least not completely become irrelevant, in this economic competition that is illuminating. Second comment I would like to highlight is that while we should try to, of course, maintain a constructive relationship with the United States. We should take care we in Europe, again, not to take all of the US positions as ours, for example, the US. Course that was, by the way, already present under the Biden administration, but will become way more pronounced now under Trump. The course towards more confrontation with China in economic terms, perhaps even in military terms. I don't think it's in Europe's interest to be on this confrontational course. The economic interdependence is much stronger than in the United States, and I think this would be detrimental for European economies, and especially to the exports dependent German economy. So these are two important COVID I think we should keep in mind while thinking about this more independent European posture, and while thinking about more investments in a defense.

Anatol Lieven 51:56

Thank you, Tony when it comes to relevance and defending British interests, both in terms of US economic policy and tariffs, but also in terms of European defense. How close do you think Britain can come to the European Union without being a member of the European Union? And will one see this leading to major political splits within Britain, this this dilemma, this issue.

Tony Brenton 52:29

I think the last thing we want in Britain is a replay of the whole ghastly Brexit debate on the economic side. I think it looks as if we're going to be able to sit to be able to sit to one side, and we're absolutely delighted to do that with our prime minister saying, sacramentally, we love everybody. We like the Americans, we like the Europeans. You're all our friends. I think we see ourselves as being much more central on the security side, because, as I've said, we're one of the three or four key European security players. We're a nuclear power. We have very battle hardened, in a way, and effective armed forces, and we're at a moment when security obviously

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has to rise up the European agenda, by which I mean not just the EU, but the European agenda in general. I'm slightly worried, listening to our European participants in this talk, that the debate in Europe is going to turn, is it so often does, into a huge internal row about who pays for what? How do we do? What this, that and the other thing, which with zero or very low productivity in terms of the war fighting ability of European, of Europe, should we? Should we need it? I rather hope we won't. But Russia is obviously in a much worse mood than it has been for some time.

There's going to remain something to worry about, and I, having worked quite a long time in the European Union, frankly, the European Union is not in any way, a war fighting institution. The Poles, for example, who know very well what goes on in NATO and what goes on in the EU know very well where their security fundamentally lies. It is going to continue to lie. We need to keep alive and effective, which means keeping the Americans on board. And therefore we need to spend more money to demonstrate to the Americans that we ourselves are prepared to come up to the plate as well Europe, the European Union has lots of peripherals. Are the wrong word, but background things that it can do, more coordination about shared tank projects and that sort of stuff, more just more talking about it in the EU would be, would would be quite useful. But the real focus of the debate in terms of holding European defense together at a time when we are undoubtedly going to have a more problematic Russia on our hands, is NATO, and keeping the US in NATO and actively involved in our defense has to be central to what we try to do.

Can I come come back to a point that Rudiger made, which I thought was a very good point, I think I mentioned earlier, it's very unlikely that the Russians are going to agree to NATO forces, British, French, German forces, going in as a peacekeeping contingent into Ukraine. Therefore, ultimately we're going to have somebody's going to have to go because you're going to need observers, you're going to need some sort of tripwire, we're going to need some sort of what looks at least like a guarantee to Ukraine. And as rudices says, this is likely to be big global south countries. China is an obvious candidate. India, Indonesia, perhaps should be a very refreshing contrast with our old colonial days when we sent troops over there them sending troops to the European continent, but they're not going to come for free. Money is going to be needed, equipment is going to be needed, some sort of basing is going to be needed behind the front line. So I think there's a real rule role for Europe in which I include the UK, for these factors to play in enabling an effective force to be put into Ukraine, even if we don't supply any troops to guarantee the peace once we've got the peace

Anatol Lieven 55:52

I agree entirely. Pascal, last question, as far as existing European establishments are concerned and mainstream parties. Is the present US administration in effect an enemy? Is it now supporting radical parties in Europe that wish, in fact, to overthrow the existing European political order, and of course, in the past, but to a degree today, are against the European Union, or are certainly deeply opposed to the further expansion both of European central institutions and of European Union membership. I mean, what do you think there? We've heard a lot about, you know, how Russia has tried to subvert the European Union from within. Is America under Trump now a bigger danger from that point of view?

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Pascal Boniface 56:53

Yeah, Trump has stated that EU is an enemy for us, and Musk is even bigger challenge, because not only Musk is supporting the far right in England and in Germany, but I think that he will try to demolish the Digital Service Act and also er regulation that EU has put in place. And so I think that so for the traditional Atlanticist in France, Trump is a disaster, because it's very difficult to support strong links with us when the USA supports the far right and declare that EU is an enemy. And so it's it's a very difficult position for the traditional Atlantic in France, compared to the so called colonialist. And of course, I think that when you have a US president who started that Guan land could be part of us and could attack us, Ally, to conquer us part of territory. It's very disturbing. And the most disturbing fact, it's very difficult to reproach to Russia to attack Ukraine and to annex Crimea, if US president is claiming able to do the same. And so it would be very difficult to prevent China to reclaim Taiwan if us, President want to control panama canal on green Greenland. So I think the real challenge, and for the, as you know, in France, division regarding internal policies, not between the left and the right, but between Atlanticist or neoconservative and colonialist on this. And of course, Trump is a disaster for the Atlanticist.

Anatol Lieven 58:55

Thank you. Yes, the there is a degree of profound ideological split now between, as I say, the mainstream in Europe. Well, what used to be the mainstream and and what is now the US administration. This has been a fascinating discussion. I wish we had 235, times as long, but unfortunately, we've run out of time. And I apologize to so many people who asked questions, I couldn't get to their questions, but thank you all so much, as I say, for a really fascinating conversation on a vital issue. And just to repeat, I hope that those of you who are interested can turn up to our webinar on Friday about China and the book talk next Tuesday on American idealism. So thank you all so much, and I hope to see you all soon.