History
Hotspot
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European Security

How Policy-Relevant is History?

With contributions by Jörn Leonhard,
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Calder Walton and Joseph de Weck

Körber Stiftung

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European Security as a History Hotspot

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine that started on 24 February can be considered as a "historical turning point" in the most negative sense of this overused phrase. It marked the beginning of the first full-scale war against an independent neighbouring country in Europe since the end of WWII. It also marked the end of the post-Cold War peace order and has been a landslide for European security policy.

Although the news about the war continue to confront us with massive destruction and human toll on a daily basis, we already need to start reflecting on the role that historical thinking might play in the analysis of this *Zeitenwende*.

What are the different levels on which history plays a role in current debates about European security policy and threat assessments? What can history teach us to solve the European security challenges posed by the war against Ukraine? How can we overcome the widespread habit to use history as a simple reservoir of comparisons and analogies? And what is the analytical benefit of applying long-term historical thinking to current threats posed to the rules-based international order?

Just as this *Zeitenwende* was happening, we asked five historians and political scientists from France, Germany, Poland, Russia and the United States for their assessment. In this digital volume on European security as a history hotspot they look at the role historical analysis can play for countering security threats and create awareness for misleading analogies drawn from the past. They highlight the differences between Cold War experiences and the geopolitical struggle that we are observing between East and West today.

The contribution from Russia points out how a different perception of "sovereignty" dating back to 16th century statehood and 19th century Great Power games has fueled Russia's total neglect of values and norms brought forward by the European Union in its relationship with Russia since 1991. We asked for the text before Moscow started its war against Ukraine. In consultation with the author we decided to publish a slightly updated version because it provides valuable insights into the world of Russian political thinking.

Connecting history and politics is the underlying pattern of all the work we do in our Körber History Forum program. Never since we started this program in 2016, historical thinking and analysis has been more relevant for policymaking than in 2022, the year that brought war back to Europe.

Gabriele Woidelko and Florian Bigge
Hamburg, April 2022

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Applying History: Analogy, Politics of the Past and Deconstruction

Little is known about the world that will arise from the Russian war against Ukraine in the long run. But everything in the perception of this war as a turning point is linked to history. By Jörn Leonhard, University of Freiburg

War has returned to Europe these days, as immediate as it is horrific, in shocking images and stories that only a short time ago we would have interpreted as part of a past long thought to have been overcome. Russia's criminal war of aggression against Ukraine, an independent state with a claim to respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, reminds us of the fragility of a peace order that had emerged in Europe since the end of the Cold War after 1989/91. Many people understood and still understand European integration as a major peace building project after the experience of two world wars.

At this moment of war, we still know little about the dynamics and potentials of violence and even less about the world that will arise from this war in the long term. But most of what we already understand in outline as the emergence of a turning point is indirectly or directly related to history. This is exemplary for our understanding of history, for the question of how we deal with it, what we expect from it, how we apply it. Therefore, it also helps to better assess the possibilities and limits of "applied history". Against this background, we experience history at different levels.

The power of analogies and narratives

Firstly, and not only since 24 February 2022, we experience the recourse to history as a reservoir of comparisons and analogies. In order to make the incomprehensible comprehensible, reference is made to a new "1914" or "1938", a new "Munich" or the return to a new "Cold War" is

Foto: Pavel Kritchko

Jörn Leonhard

diagnosed, not to mention the historical analogies to "Blitzkrieg" and "Nazism". We read a lot about the "return of empire", but the limits of this comparison cannot be assessed without taking a look at the history of empires since the 19th century.

Secondly, we are experiencing the suggestive and almost murderous effect of instrumentalised history, especially in the politics of history in Russia, which for years has had increasingly clear imperial connotations, a bipolar narrative of Russian Orthodox civilisation and imperialism on the one hand and a decadent West incapable of defending its values on the other. This narrative is full of falsifications of history, but it is still suggestive. The war that has now broken out is a dramatic reminder of the power of images and narratives, because they can create their own reality guiding action. Those who know nothing about empires and their history are left virtually defenceless against these narratives.

Repetitive structures in historical processes

Thirdly, it is important to recall the culture of remembrance that has emerged over many years and decades, especially in Eastern, Central Eastern and Southeastern Europe, which has made clear to many people throughout Europe the different time layers of experiences of victims and violence in the 19th and 20th centuries – a feature of remembrance that is now being challenged anew in view of the war in Ukraine.

And fourthly, these days the function of an internationally cooperative historical science becomes clear, to critically examine comparisons and analogies and to deconstruct historical instrumentalisation. Above all, this perspective may help to place the accelerated events of the present in more longer-term contexts and thus to understand them better – not as a simple learning from history as there are no historical blueprints for action in the present. There may be no repetitions in the historical process, but there is something like repetitive structures, and they allow us to recognise more in the present, to take a more sober view and to reflect more critically. Against this background we may be able to better understand the premises of "applied history".

This may be exemplified by taking a look at the problems of a common European security policy against the backdrop of different historical experiences with sovereignty. What kind of world will emerge from this crisis in the long term will only be revealed from an ex-post perspective. However, we do know something about the certainties we thought we could rely on just a moment ago and that are now dissolving under the sign of unleashed violence.

Dissimilar conceptions of sovereignty

These include the shaken confidence in the positive order model of European integration, the European Union as a "benevolent empire", focused on the pacification of Europe through expanding integration. This was successful in three phases: after 1945 for West Germany, in the 1970s for the former dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece, and finally after 1989/91 for large parts of Eastern, Central Eastern and Southeastern Europe. This pacification failed in the Middle East, in North Africa and finally in Ukraine. If the question of Europe's security policy autonomy in a multipolar world between the USA, Russia and China is now being posed anew, then historically dissimilar conceptions of sovereignty become clear within Europe. Germany's experience with federal nation- and state-building and with "semi-sovereign" statehood after 1945 was different from the self-perception of French political elites, who saw foreign and security policy as the self-evident expression of an unbroken tradition of nation-state sovereignty. With regard to Eastern and Central Eastern Europe, the history of the last 200 years in turn gives rise to quite different layers of time: experiences of multiethnicity as part of and in the neighbourhood of competing empires in the 19th century and a dramatic alternation of statehood won, violent repression, new sovereignty and European integration between 1917/18, 1939/41, 1945 and the phase since 1989/91.

To "apply history" here means to go beyond the day-to-day political or narrower contemporary historical context in the struggles over security and sovereignty, and to understand different historical experiences condensed into styles of thought, images, argumentations and vocabularies.

Jörn Leonhard

Jörn Leonhard is Professor and Chair for Western European History at the Albert Ludwig University in Freiburg. He was one of the founding directors of the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) from 2007 to 2012. Jörn Leonhard's research fields focus on modern European history in a comparative perspective, the history of liberalism and nationalism, research on multi-ethnic empires, and the history of war and peace. Among his most recent books are "Der überforderte Frieden. Versailles und die Welt 1918–1923" (Overburdened peace. Versailles and the world 1918–1923, 2018) and "Große Erwartungen. 1919 und die Neuordnung der Welt" (Great expectations. 1919 and the new order of the world, in print for 2022).

The Role of Applied History in Countering Security Threats: Recent Historical Lessons

If the study of the past was supposed to let Europe handle present security threats better, one must admit utter failure of this promising idea.

By Maria Domańska, Center for Eastern Studies, Warsaw

Foto: M. Gorczynski

Maria Domańska

Russia's invasion against Ukraine laid bare all of Europe's mistakes and miscalculations made over the past decade. Many years of appeasing the increasingly aggressive Kremlin with offers of dialogue, toothless sanctions, and continued economic-financial cooperation shaped Moscow's perception of the European Union as deeply disunited, weak, corrupt, and unable to invest in its security. Not willing to learn lessons offered by the recent past, the EU had been locked in deliberations about historical sources of different threat perceptions between Western and Eastern Europe for years.

However, the longue-durée perspective did not lead to a better understanding of Eastern Europe's historically motivated sensitivities. Nor did it empower us to counter imminent security threats coming from Russia jointly. Instead, a large part of the Western establishment was eager to "understand" Moscow's great power ambitions (disguised as "security concerns").

Poland's historical determinants

In early February 2022, Emmanuel Macron repeated that the European security architecture should be shaped with Russia and not "against" it. As he was talking about a country that labeled NATO as the enemy, attacked Ukraine in 2014, and became notorious for political killings committed on NATO's territory, his declaration was not only unrealistic but imprudent.

This approach ran counter to Poland's existential security interests. Polish debates on state sovereignty, national security, and desired alliances quite obviously evolved from long-term historical determinants.

Firstly, it was the long-lasting subordination to foreign powers, including the traumatic experiences of the 20th century when Poland fell victim to its totalitarian neighbours. It was only after 1989 that, for the first time since the 18th century, a whole generation of Poles was born and formed in a sovereign state. Secondly, it is the location between East and West – both geographically and civilisationally. It has traditionally been viewed as the axis of Poland's foreign policy and self-identification.

The politics of eternity

Even though Poland's protracted fight against Russian-Soviet imperialism constituted a formative experience, our perception of Russia in the 21st century has been formed more by present

threats than the distant past. Unlike in Polish-German relations, where decades of complex dialogue have finally brought us mutual trust, all attempts at Polish-Russian reconciliation fell victim to the authoritarian policies of the Kremlin.

The Russian *Memorial* society that invaluably contributed to investigating Soviet crimes against Poles was targeted by political repression and closed down in December 2021. The Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, set up by the two governments in 2002 to discuss contentious historical issues, lost momentum years ago as the Kremlin weaponized history.

While a survey conducted in 2021 by the Polish Institute of Public Affairs revealed that almost 60% of Germans and Poles prefer to focus on the present and future challenges rather than on memories in their bilateral relations, Russian official ideology has firmly locked the nation in the "politics of eternity." It is based on a cyclical concept of history, the myth of ever returning moments of glory and existential threats.

Putin's way of applying history

Now Russia is the only state we used to be subordinated to in the past that still demonstrates ambitions to limit our sovereignty. The December security ultimatum revived the spectre of the Yalta order and provided eventual proof that negotiations cannot solve Moscow's conflict with the West. The Kremlin views the very existence of liberal democracy as an existential threat to Putin's regime.

In his declaration of war against Ukraine, Putin offered his peculiar view on applied history: "In 1940 and early 1941 the Soviet Union […] sought not to provoke the potential aggressor until the very end [which] proved to be a mistake. […] We will not make this mistake again". In 2022, Russia is re-living 1939 and justifies fully fledged military aggression as a preventive measure, this time to ward off NATO as its principal enemy.

A new EU-NATO security architecture

The unprecedented unity of the EU and NATO vis-à-vis the Russian invasion caught Moscow off guard. Now the question is how resilient this unity will be in the future. Undoubtedly, the US's presence in the region will continue to be of the highest deterrent value. All EU actions in the security field should thus complement NATO operations in a non-competitive manner.

Investing in the European crisis management dimension (also in the context of mass migration from Ukraine and future reconstruction of this country) should not undermine the build-up of collective defense – something that, from now on, will be vital not only for Eastern Europe.

The post-war EU-NATO security architecture will require serious enforcement and broader engagement of the Non-Member States committed to democratic principles – in the spirit of a proper "indivisible security". The West must become capable of responding to emerging threats and preventing them effectively. Debates about further EU-NATO cooperation, like the concept of European Strategic Autonomy, must not weaken the Euro-Atlantic community as a whole. Let's hope that a lesson learned the hard way will be a lesson learned for a lifetime.

Maria Domańska

Maria Domańska is a Senior Fellow at the Warsaw-based Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW). She specializes in Russian domestic politics: state-society relations, formal and informal aspects of the political system, politics of memory, domestic determinants of Russia's foreign policy.
Between 2006–2015 she worked in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including as the Head of Political Section in the Embassy of of the Republic of Poland in Moscow (2012–2015).
Author and co-author of numerous papers on domestic political developments in Russia, including the recent "Forward, into the past! Russia's politics of memory in the service of 'eternal' authoritarianism", OSW Report, Warsaw 2021.

European Union's Strategic Sovereignty: What Russia Makes of it, Based on its Historical Experience

In the discussions within the EU about its strategic sovereignty, Russia is a frequent point of reference. Russia on the other hand disregards the EU's strive for strategic sovereignty due to a completely different Russian understanding of sovereignty rooted in in the 16th century.

By Tatiana Romanova, St. Petersburg State University

Foto: private

Tatiana Romanova

Russia is frequently a point of reference in today's discussions of the EU's strategic sovereignty. Moreover, for Russia itself sovereignty is the supreme value, as clearly expressed in its numerous strategic documents and in President Putin's speeches. Yet Russia has hardly taken notice of the concept of the EU's strategic sovereignty, introduced by President Macron in 2017[1] and further developed at both the EU's[2] and Member States' level[3]. There are at least three historical reasons, that define such attitude displayed by Russia.

What is sovereignty?

Firstly, Russian understanding of sovereignty is rooted in the initial 16th century concept of a sovereign: this is one ruler who represents the ultimate authority and decides on everything in the space that (s)he controls.

The ideal cherished by pro-Kremlin foreign policy experts is that of the Congress of Vienna where sovereigns, i.e. monarchs, decide on territories and borders; each sovereign with an equal status to others and ultimate say. Moscow does recur to the notion of people's sovereignty[4] but that seems tactical, which is to lay the basis for exercising a ruler-based sovereignty.

The EU's strategic sovereignty is certainly not about people's sovereignty (in contrast to that of Member States'). Nor it is about the sovereign right. Rather it reflects the EU's new round of soul-searching where Moscow sees a profound ambiguity.

Discussions are about unity and technological independence; about the EU shielding itself from external influence and at the same time exporting its values and norms. These discussions do not have the frosty clarity that Russian leadership is looking for and that would enable Moscow-style cooperation with the EU.

Sovereignty based on hard military power

Secondly, President Macron linked the EU's strategic sovereignty debates to security and defence integration, to bolstering the EU's capacities to be a fully-fledged actor. Russia's understanding of sovereignty has also always been about hard military power. It is for this reason that Russia paid a lot of attention to the EU's 1990s attempts to

shape the European Security and Defence Policy with interests.

Russia's idea was to create something similar to the 19th century balance of power but at a global scale with the US, EU, Russia, China, India balancing each other. Yet Russia soon became disappointed with the military impotence of the EU. The EU then shaped a Common Security and Defence Policy, it experimented with communitarisation of EU defence spending and Permanent Structured Cooperation.

None of these steps has so far enhanced the EU's military significance. Most EU members still rely on the US/NATO security guarantees. There is nothing to suggest that the EU's discussions about strategic sovereignty would change that course.

Rather EU institutions have used the concept of strategic sovereignty to bolster discussions on civilian matters that have already been on the agenda, such as technological autonomy, cyber security, or green energy. Those are important issues but they have nothing to do with military security and defence that Russia has always been obsessed about. Moreover, they downgrade the notion of strategic sovereignty to the EU's tactical rather than strategic use.

Today's situation in Ukraine makes the EU bolster its security and defence capabilities but paradoxically those activities are not rhetorically linked to the notion of the EU's strategic sovereignty. Thus, the US have remained Russia's key security interlocutor, which is well reflected in today's confrontation around Ukraine; no discussion on the EU's strategic sovereignty has changed this course.

EU's Normative Power and Russia's Challenge

Thirdly, discussions about the EU's strategic sovereignty have been driven by values and norms. On the one hand, they are about standard-setting, especially for new areas such as artificial intelligence or cyberspace. On the other hand, they involve the EU's ability to promote its values beyond its borders. There is nothing new in it for Russia; both components have been present in the EU-Russian Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and in the practice of EU-Russian relations.

Russia has even achieved some significant results in the approximation of its technical standards to those of the EU. Yet, it has also gradually increased its challenge of the EU's normative power, of its predisposition to talk to Moscow in a patronising and thus an unequal footing. Russia's challenge culminated in Russia's severe criticism of the rules-based order that the EU promotes.

When two subsequent Commission Presidents (Jean-Claude Juncker and Ursula von der Leyen) as well as other officials linked the EU's strategic sovereignty to values, they certainly integrated the new notion better into the EU's discourse. At the same time, to Russian leadership it sounded like more of the same irritating message. Yet, equality is of paramount importance to Moscow's foreign policy thinking of today. Hence, the linkage between sovereignty and values in the EU's discourse naturally led official Russia to ignore this category.

Disregarding the EU's strategic sovereignty

In sum, three kinds of historical experience led to Russia disregarding the EU's sovereignty. The first one is Russia's understanding of sovereignty, which is rooted in the 16th century and praises the practices of the 19th century in particular.

The second one is the disillusionment with the EU's ability to become a substantial actor in military security and defence, capable of contributing to Russia's hopes of setting up a global balance of power in the style of the 19th century.

The third and final experience is the linkage of the EU's strategic sovereignty to values and norms that bears the legacy of EU-Russia relationship from 1990s until the present, which Russia is challenging openly.

Dr. Tatiana Romanova

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Footnotes

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Putin's War and Western Intelligence

For Russian President Putin the Cold War never really ended. Nevertheless, in their policities toward Russia, Western governments should use the term "Cold War" with care and push for a future-oriented practice of intelligence instead. By Calder Walton, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Vladimir Putin's horrific war underway in Ukraine already marks a watershed in the history of European security and postwar international relations. Putin's grand strategy, as we are seeing it unfold is driven by a revanchist fanaticism, to overturn the international order established after the Cold War and correct what he sees as injustices inflicted on Russia following the Soviet Union's collapse. For Putin, in many ways, the Cold War never really ended. A digital Iron Curtain has fallen in Europe.

Putin's worldview is shaped by his experiences as a former KGB officer. As an old Cold Warrior, he has unsurprisingly used Russia's intelligence and security services in ways he knows best, updating old Soviet tradecraft for the twenty-first century. His small inner circle is comprised of "men of force", siloviki, who have backgrounds in Soviet/Russian military and intelligence services. They harken back to a largely imagined Soviet intelligence past. It is not for no reason that his security (FSB) and intelligence (SVR) services call themselves "Chekists", in honor of the Bolshevik secret police established soon after the October Revolution in 1917, the Cheka.

The value that Putin's Kremlin attaches to history is revealed by the fact that his foreign intelligence (SVR) director, Sergey Naryshkin, author of an apparently plagiarized doctorate dissertation in economics, is also head of Russia's Historical Society. Putin and his national security sycophants are applying history – in reality, misapplying it – as Putin's rambling published essay about Russia's "historical" claim to Ukraine reveals.

Prisoners to the past

As far as Putin and his intelligence services are concerned, there is, then, a direct continuum between the Cold War and Russia's war-fighting grand strategy today. There is not much new about this Cold War; rather it's an extension of the last one. Western governments, however, would be advised to use the term "Cold War" in the contemporary context, and build policies around it, with care.

Foto: Calder Walton

Calder Walton

History provides a roadmap about where we have come from, but decision-makers also need to look forward. Western governments cannot afford to be prisoners to the past, for there are significant differences between the Cold War and the geopolitical struggle we are seeing unfold today between East and West.

As far as intelligence is concerned, it would be misleading to suppose that the Cold War provides a sufficient prescription for dealing with Putin's Russia today. The world has changed over the past thirty years. Although they call themselves "Chekists", the FSB and SVR are significantly different to their Soviet predecessor, the KGB. The FSB works for the vast personal enrichment of Putin and fellow oligarchs in ways that Soviet intelligence never did for the Politburo. After

Putin became FSB head in 1998, and then leader of Russia the following year, the FSB has been a state-run mafia operation for him.

Lessons from the Cold War

The greatest change to the intelligence and national security landscape between the end of the Cold War, three decades ago, and today, is the cyber digital revolution, which is transforming all our societies, as well as the nature of intelligence collection. During the Cold War, it is thought that 80 percent of US intelligence collected on its primary strategic target, the Soviet Union, came from secret clandestine sources (intercepted communications, human sources etc.) and 20 percent from open sources (monitoring Soviet state media etc.).

Today those proportions are thought to be precisely reversed. Open source is the future of intelligence. It is likely that a significant part of the accurate intelligence that the US and British governments disclosed before Putin's invasion of Ukraine was derived from open sources. Consider satellites, for example. Three decades ago, satellite intelligence collection platforms were some of the most expensive and closely guarded secrets in the world. Today, private sector outfits like Maxar are providing breathtaking satellite intelligence about Russia's military operations in Ukraine for the world to see.

The transformation of intelligence and national security, from stealing secrets during the Cold War, to collecting data today, offers an opportunity for European strategic autonomy. Intelligence agencies of all major Western governments are racing to compete with private sector providers of open source (more accurately, commercially available) intelligence. We are currently at an inflection point for intelligence and national security, which in turn offers an enticing opportunity: for the EU to become the leading provider of open-source intelligence in the world.

The future of intelligence

My proposal: to create a new EU-wide open-source intelligence body, which would collect, analyze, and provide assessments to Member States. Doing so would require proper, significant, EU-wide resourcing and funding. In principle, there would be minimal security risks for Member States because the body would not be dealing with state secrets, only open data.

There are both practical and symbolic potential benefits for such a body: it would offer an opportunity for EU decision-makers to receive valuable intelligence assessments, providing them with decision advantages, and it would act as a symbol of European strategic autonomy.

The latter may become even more important if Donald Trump is re-elected US president in 2024, and the United States becomes an unreliable ally for Europe. My suggestion would be for a trial period for this EU open-source intelligence body, of five years, after which time its customers (EU Member States) could judge whether it has provided something meaningful compared to intelligence delivered by their home agencies and allies like the "Five Eyes" governments. The gauntlet would be thrown down for all to compete.

The true lesson to be derived from Western intelligence in the Cold War is the importance of forward-thinking imagination. British and American codebreakers after 1945 never succeeded in recreating their wartime triumphs of breaking German Enigma communications, this time against the Soviet Union.

There was never a Soviet "ULTRA" secret. Instead, they threw resources into collecting intelligence in imaginative new ways, from the air (with CIA U-2 spy planes) and then from space. That same spirit of imagination is needed today. Europe, at the frontline of Russia's aggression, is the obvious place for such imagination; and open-source intelligence is the area for applying it.

Calder Walton

Calder Walton is Assistant Director of the Belfer Center's Applied History Project and Intelligence Project. His research is broadly concerned with intelligence, history, grand strategy, and international relations. His research has a particular focus on policy-relevant historical lessons for governments and intelligence communities today. Calder is finishing a book, "Spies. Russia's Hundred Year Intelligence War against the West", to be published in 2023. His research and commentary about national security issues frequently appear in major news and broadcast outlets on both sides of the Atlantic.

When History Converges, Europe Emerges

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is invalidating historical concepts that informed Germany's and France's Russia policy over a long time. Europeans' historic views on Russia, previously very dissimilar, are converging.

By Joseph de Weck, Greenmantle, Paris

Foto: Joseph de Weck

Joseph de Weck

Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine is precisely the kind of event that both creates new history and that buries the powerful concepts that we had drawn from history and that had long determined how we think about and conduct politics.

This is especially true for Germany and France, the European Union's two major foreign policy powers, who set the tone for policy towards Russia for the continent as a whole.

End of the road for Ostpolitik

In Germany, *Ostpolitik* – the longstanding idea that a non-democratic Russia can be tamed through dialogue and the creation of economic interdependencies – has now died. Initiated by the first Social Democrat Chancellor Willy Brandt (1969–74), Germans and in particular the country's left-wing had since celebrated *Ostpolitik* as a success. They argue that it allowed for détente in the Cold War; some even suggest it was the basis for the Soviet Union's peaceful collapse.

The *Ostpolitik* paradigm was enthusiastically revived by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1999–2005), who deepened Russian-German energy cooperation, and continued by Angela Merkel (2005–2021). Merkel persevered despite fierce opposition from the EU's Eastern members, who consistently warned the bloc of Russia's neoimperialism; and despite Putin translating his revisionist ambitions increasingly into aggressive actions over the past 10 years.

Even as recently as 3 months ago, as Russia amassed its army on the Ukrainian border, Olaf Scholz set out *Ostpolitik* as a guiding principle in his first address to the Bundestag.

With Putin's invasion of Ukraine, this policy of engagement has hit a wall. *Ostpolitik* may have had its merits when Germany was engaging with the Soviet Union, where after Stalin there was some form of collective leadership. But it doesn't work with Putin's Russia, where political power is completely centralized and the president is motivated by historic revisionism.

But beyond the difference in Russia's power structures since the times of the USSR, it is also clear that German public discourse, and in particular left-wing parties and the business community, overstated how effective *Ostpolitik* has really been. Sure enough, it was very convenient. Politically, it chimed perfectly with the Social Democrats' pacifist wing and anti-American reflexes. Economically, it legitimized the *Wandel durch Handel* (change through trade) doctrine, which came in handy for Germany's export-oriented businesses.

With Putin's invasion, Germany has discovered that it is not just Germans that have a say on whether there is *"nie mehr Krieg"* (Never again

war). This has been a brutal shock. And like public opinion on nuclear energy after Fukushima, the views of Germans on Russia and defense have shifted radically within days.

Upping deterrence and energy independence is now the imperative instead of practicing diplomacy and relying on Russian gas. *Ostpolitik* and *Wandel durch Handel*, Germany's guiding Russia and foreign policy principles of the past decades, are, all of a sudden, history.

French wishful thinking

For France, Russia's aggression necessitates less of a policy adjustment compared to Germany but an equally big change in its perception of Russia.

Modern France's foreign-policy imperative is not "never again war", but "never again defenseless." This stance was motivated by repeated German invasions and by the U.S.'s initial hesitation in intervening in both world wars. Building strong military deterrence, while ensuring independence in strategic sectors, such as energy, was considered key. Paris never believed in *Wandel durch Handel* and in the normative power of economic interdependence. Its stance is vindicated today.

But Putin's invasion nonetheless exposes how France's Russia policy has been guided by wishful thinking and false perceptions of the country.

Gaullist France traditionally flirted with Russia. After decolonization, Charles de Gaulle wanted to reimagine France as an independent geopolitical power, removed from the Cold War schism. "Having given independence to our colonies, we have to retake our own independence," de Gaulle famously said in 1963. This meant reducing security dependence on the U.S. by building a French nuclear deterrent and maintaining a comparably large military.

But it also meant seeking détente with Moscow. Already before Bonn, Paris embarked on an *Ostpolitik* avant la lettre. In 1966, De Gaulle travelled from Kiev to Novosibirsk, telling roaring crowds: "Soviets and French, we can shake hands!" De Gaulle hoped to build a European security order stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Only with peace on the continent could France and Europe one day wean themselves off dependence on Washington.

Most French presidents followed De Gaulle's détente imperative. In doing so, Paris was willing to give anyone in power in Moscow the benefit of the doubt. Even as recently as 2019, President Emmanuel Macron sought a dialogue with Putin to build a new security order from "Lisbon to Vladivostok" and said "Who is NATO's enemy? It is not Russia anymore."

Like German *Ostpolitik*, France's policy of détente and grand visions on European security beyond the U.S. and NATO led Paris towards wishful thinking rather than a sober analysis of Russian politics.

Setback for Russia apologists

But French political elites' affinity with Russia also has a more romantic, darker background.

There is mutual admiration of each other's writers and composers, and the particular importance both France and Russia attach to culture.

There is the intuitive proximity of thought between the two highly centralized states that never believed in the "end of history" and the triumph of the American world order, and that are both struggling to digest the demise of their potency on the global stage.

And there is the French idea of Russia as a white Christian country, untouched by progressive identity politics and guided authoritatively by a "strong leader" – a sort of reactionary La La Land. This resonates with France's *pétainist* voter group, who like to think of France as a Christian nation rather than a secular republic, and that now primarily support the far-right presidential candidate Éric Zemmour.

But proximity to Putin is seriously hurting the French far right in the presidential elections. This all the more because Russia admiration is rather an elite phenomenon in France. Even before the war, only 17% of the French considered Russia an ally compared to 73% for Germany, polls show.

Converging histories

Putin's aggression is invalidating historical concepts that have long informed Germany's and France's Russia policy. The invasion has instead vindicated the central and eastern EU members.

For the first time since the end of the Cold War, Europeans now have a common perception of the most important geopolitical power in their neighborhood – and, unlike before, all see it unequivocally as a threat. For all the tragedy it has

wrought, Putin's war is enabling Europeans' previously starkly disparate historical views on Russia to converge.

It is this sudden, forced alignment that has allowed the EU to swiftly adopt tough sanctions against Moscow, and to send arms and economic support to Kiev. In the short-term, the EU's response has the potential to influence the war's outcome – particularly if further action will be adopted. But even after the war is over, it will also be these actions that will form the basis of a new, and this time EU-wide, historical understanding of Russia. A precondition for Europe to become an effective defense player alongside NATO.

Joseph de Weck

Joseph de Weck is the the author of "Emmanuel Macron: Der revolutionäre Präsident" (2021), a German-language essay on Macron's France. Joseph writes a column on French foreign policy for the German foreign affairs magazine Internationale Politik Quarterly and is a European Security Initiative Fellow with the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Joseph is the Paris-based Europe director at Greenmantle, a macroeconomic and geopolitical risk consultancy. He holds a BSc from the London School of Economics and a MA from Sciences Po Paris and the University of St Gallen.

"Like German Ostpolitik, France's policy of détente and grand visions of European security beyond the U.S. and NATO led Paris towards wishful thinking rather than a sober analysis of Russian politics"

Joseph de Weck, Greenmantle, Paris

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