



By: *Joschka Fischer*

Internal divisions weaken Europe's ability to resist global threats



Four and a half years after Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine, no end is in sight.

What initially looked like a "special operation" that would end in a matter of days (or weeks, at most) has evolved into a seemingly interminable war of attrition.

At the beginning of the war, Western countries—primarily the United States and its European NATO allies—formed a united front in support of Ukraine.

But the political situation has deteriorated dramatically since Donald Trump's re-election as US president, with the US no longer behaving like a global leader or a responsible power.

Although the Trump administration has not formally announced a withdrawal from NATO or from the coalition supporting Ukraine, it has substantially curtailed its involvement and announced a sharp reduction in its military presence on the European continent.

Fortunately, Europe's NATO members stepped in to fill the resulting gap, reaffirming their "solidarity with Ukraine."

Moreover, Ukraine's growing strength on the battlefield, driven above all by advances in its homegrown drone and missile technologies, together with continued provision of US satellite data, has allowed it to change the course of the war.

Hybrid warfare

But the Kremlin has recognized the importance of Western European supplies to Ukraine and is seeking to disrupt them through hybrid warfare—whether by seeking to influence electoral results in Europe or by launching covert attacks on key nodes in the supply chain.

The less progress Russia makes on the battlefield, the greater Putin's domestic political problems will become

Europe therefore must assume that the less progress Russia makes on the battlefield, the greater Russian President Vladimir Putin's domestic political problems will become, and the more Russia will seek to extend the war into Europe.

Just in the past few weeks, we have seen an explosion and fire—almost certainly an act of sabotage—at an Italian weapons factory belonging to the Franco-German company KNDS, followed soon thereafter by an attempted drone strike on a parked Antonov transport aircraft at Leipzig Airport. (Fortunately, a technical failure ended this second attack—a case of sheer good luck.)

Notably, these events occurred just as America's weakness as a superpower was becoming apparent to everyone.

Convergence between the wars in Ukraine and Iran

Trump has effectively lost his war of choice against Iran and is now desperately trying to push back against reports that the US is rapidly depleting its stocks of ammunition and missiles.

Is this mere coincidence, or does it mark a deepening convergence between the wars in Ukraine and Iran, and thus of a covert struggle for global leadership?

Either way, Europe will have to prepare itself to withstand not only more frequent Russian hybrid attacks but also potential threats from Iran, which has already signaled that it may target sites in Europe if full-scale hostilities with the US are renewed.

Europe will have to adapt at breakneck speed to new realities and dangers emanating from its own continent and its periphery

That means old, war-weary Europe will have to adapt at breakneck speed to new realities and dangers emanating from its own continent and its periphery.

But it will also have to come to terms with the decline of US global power under Trump.

That change, more than any other one, profoundly alters Europe's global strategic position, with far-reaching implications for its security, its energy and raw-material supplies, and its trade interests.

European sovereignty

Europeans must harbor no illusions. Geopolitics is what matters during this period of transition from one world order to another, but Europe's claim to global power remains more of an aspiration than a reality.

We are an unfinished alliance of sovereign individual states, comprising only a handful of "middle powers," most of which are in poor economic and political condition.

Making matters worse, despite all the threats facing it, Europe lacks a common political will and the decision-making mechanisms needed to strengthen its geopolitical position.



European sovereignty is a fine phrase, but given the

divisions among Europeans, it risks becoming yet another fantasy - Joschka Fischer

As long as Germany and France—the two middle powers whose leadership remains indispensable—continue to quarrel and distrust each other, rather than jointly taking the steps necessary to complete the European project, Europe's much-desired technological and strategic autonomy from the US will remain out of reach.

Clinging to the old model of the European nation-state, or to nostalgic visions of past greatness, is a role for museum guides.

If Europe remains a mere collection of small states and middle powers, the current period of profound geopolitical and historical change will also mark the end of its role on the world stage.

"European sovereignty" is a fine phrase, but given the divisions among Europeans, it risks becoming yet another fantasy. There is no "sovereignty" in wishful thinking.

Putin knows this all too well, and he is the man we Europeans must deal with now.

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.