NATO Summit in London 2019

Strategic Europe from 1989 to 2019 : from the break-up of the Eastern Block to the implosion of NATO ?

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Between 1989 and 2019 what are the dynamics that have taken European strategy from the break-up of the Eastern Block to the potential prospect of NATO's implosion ? The break-up of the Eastern Block was followed by NATO expansion that nonetheless provided no guarantees against subsequent implosion in the wake of Russian… and American manoeuvres.

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"**N**ATO is dead (…). Turkey has left, nobody reacted and the USA did nothing to prevent it", declared Jacques Attali on the *France Info* radio station on October 19 2019 [our translation]. Like other verdicts delivered by the one-time adviser to French President François Mitterrand, his assertion is not yet proven. Its shadow does however hang over the disquiet created by a recent power play by Turkey – whose troops form the second largest contingent in NATO – and Russia : Turkey purchasing Russian S-400 missiles and engaging a military incursion in Northern Syria without the agreement of any member of the military alliance, except perhaps that of US President, Donald Trump. This was followed by Russia's securing the suspension of Turkey's military intervention against the Kurds in Northern Syria. Further, in early November 2019, Russia and Turkey started to jointly patrol North-East Syria to check that the Kurdish forces had effectively pulled out. Could Moscow be in the process of fulfilling the major strategic objective it has been pursuing for decades : the weakening of NATO's coherence, indeed its complete implosion ? On November 7 2019, the French President, Emmanuel Macron (2017 -) expressed his concern in an interview with the weekly *The Economist*, lamenting "*the exceptional fragility of the European community*", and adding : "*What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO.*"

Yet on November 9 2019, exactly thirty years since the breaching of the Berlin Wall, 22 of the 28 European Union member nations were still entrusting all or part of their national defence to NATO. Juxtaposed, these two diagnostics are, at the very least, disconcerting.

Yet three decades earlier, Russia was down on one knee as the Eastern Block fell apart. The loss of its satellite states caused an upheaval in Europe's strategic configuration, understood here to extend to the Ural, including the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and subsequently post-Soviet Russia. The extraordinary game of three-cushion billiards that released the USSR's grip on the Eastern European nations between spring and winter 1989 led two years later to the self-destruction of its military alliance, the Warsaw Pact. At the end of the same year, on December 8 1991, the USSR broke up. Post-Soviet Russia was on its knees throughout the 1990s, while NATO set about expanding to absorb former Soviet satellites (1999) and then former USSR Republics (2004). Having won the Cold War (1947-1991), the USA seemed to hold sway in its aftermath. Yet, three decades later, the European Union – partially created by the USA – and NATO, led by the USA, are in limbo.

Between 1989 and 2019 what are the dynamics that have taken European strategy from the break-up of the Eastern Block to the potential prospect of NATO's implosion ?

The break-up of the Eastern Block (I) was followed by NATO expansion (II) that nonetheless provided no guarantees against subsequent implosion in the wake of Russian... and American manoeuvres (III).

Pierre Verluise
Doctor in Geopolitics at Paris IV University – Sorbonne, Pierre Verluise founded *Diploweb.com*, the first French-language Web site dedicated to geopolitics.
Patrimonia

I. The break-up of the Eastern Block...

Mikhail Gorbachev, elected Secretary General of the Soviet Union Communist Party in 1985, attempted to save the Soviet system by instigating movements that subsequently escaped his control, namely "*glasnost*" (a concept that we equate with transparency) and "*perestroika*" (roughly translated by reform) [1]. Quickly scorned in the USSR, Gorbachev was the darling of West European media as a result of active, powerfully conceived and cleverly implemented misinformation campaigns. Weakened by internal malfunction and external strategies such as the USA's decision to restart the arms race – the Strategic Defence Initiative (IDS) – the Soviet superpower nonetheless hastened its own decline. It was unable to keep a real grip on a territory spanning 22 million square kilometres. The cost of defence placed a strain on the health and food sectors and shortages became commonplace. By contracting a deliberate debt towards the Western European nations, the regime set out to anchor itself to the coffers of the capitalist democracies [2]. Faced with internal dissent, notably in the Baltic and Caucasian republics, the Soviet regime had for long been unable to deliver on false promises made to the satellite nations that had been press-ganged into joining the Warsaw Pact.

Formed in 1955, later then than the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (1949), the Warsaw Pact was a response to the German Federal Republic's decision to join NATO, France having previously torpedoed the European Defence Committee (EDC) [3]. The USSR largely dominated the Warsaw Pact military alliance which drew in six nations : the German Democratic Republic (GDR, known as East Germany), Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia [4]. This military alliance notably put an end to the Prague springtime (Czechoslovakia) in 1968. The six nations were also integrated in a regional economic organisation that benefitted the USSR : the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). By imposing political, strategic, economic and other ties, this process made the countries into satellites of the USSR.

The year 1989 was nonetheless a watershed as the satellite countries set out in different ways

to shed this unwanted status. Many as yet unopened archives could provide fuller insights into the events that unfolded between May and December 1989 [5]. Be that as it may, internal and external forces combined to enable them to happen. By the end of 1989, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia had broken free of the USSR's control. Moscow let go and, in some cases, notably Romania, facilitated a process that it used no coercive force to prevent [6].

The opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9 1989 caught the French Presidency napping. For several weeks, François Mitterrand (1981-1995) endeavoured to put the brakes on German reunification [7]. Freed from their satellite status six countries were now in a strategic void. What was to be done ?

The historian Georges-Henri Soutou offers this answer : François Mitterrand "initially sought to insert reunification into the construction of a Grand Europe including the USSR. On December 6 1989, in Kiev, he said to Gorbachev : "We must have reunification but as part of a Great Europe". Whence his December 31 proposal to organise a European Confederation including the USSR [8] ; in a like spirit, he hoped to frame the reunification by developing a security blueprint for Europe uniting the two pacts, an approach that matched Gorbachev's concept of "a Common European Home", as Mitterrand pointed out to him in May 1990 in Moscow. This Grand Europe would have been facilitated in the mind of the French President if classic Soviet Communism had been replaced in the USSR and Eastern Europe by a reformed brand of Communism compatible with Western Europe's democratic socialism. It was in this spirit that in the speech delivered at Valladolid in October 1989, he exhorted the peoples of Eastern Europe not to reject "the values of Socialism". This Great Europe would also have enabled France to oversee German reunification with the discrete agreement of the USSR ; Paris would thus have held on to its international role in the new ball game, as in the global conception mentioned above, the reformed USSR helping France to act as a counterweight to Germany and the USA." [9]

Manifestly, Paris had not understood that four decades of Communist totalitarianism under the Soviet heel had, for years to come, killed off any desire among the recently liberated satellites to share a common security organisation with the Soviet Union. This – like the 1954 collapse of the EDC – was to play into the hands of NATO. France had quit the integrated military command of NATO in 1966 to invent a hopefully subtle game between Washington and Moscow. A French game that would be diversely appreciated around the world, notably among the dissident Eastern European nations.

The French attempts to integrate a moribund USSR into a European security architecture did not prevent the reunification of Germany on October 3 1990 as part of NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC). Two enlargements for the price of one, which unquestionably modify the power plays within both the EEC and geographical Europe. On this point, François Mitterrand had been right.

After the six former satellites had broken free in 1989, the year 1991 witnessed two events that nobody would have dared to envisage at the start of the previous decade : the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (March and July 1991) and the break-up of the USSR on December 8 1991. Effectively, three of the fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics – Belarus, Ukraine and Russia – decided forthwith to do away with the most enduring totalitarian regime in history [10]. It is

important to note here that the Russian Federation, personified by its President, Boris Yeltsin, took part in this decision. This made it impossible for Russia to depict itself as a victim. Unless, that is, Boris Yeltsin could be branded a traitor – which is what the State Duma, the newly reformed Russian parliament, tried to do. Ultimately, Russia lost direct control over 14 former Soviet Republics accounting for a total area of 5 million square kilometres. The empire had probably become too burdensome. Boris Yeltsin's decision to sign off so much real estate lends itself to several interpretations, one being that it was an attempt to reorganise relationships between the centre and the edges. Post-soviet Russia remains, regardless, by far the world's biggest nation, spanning a landmass of 17 million square kilometres.

As from autumn 1991, strategists started to worry about the substantial arsenal of nuclear missiles spread over a number of former soviet republics, including Ukraine. Would the break-up of the USSR lead to the emergence of new nuclear powers, and indeed new conflicts ?

II. … was followed by NATO expansion…

Having subjected the planet to destruction and bloodshed during two World Wars, Europeans – and Americans – imagined European construction as a way to build peace in Western Europe. The result was the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which went on stream in 1952, followed by the European Economic Community (EEC), which entered service in 1958, institutions designed to build peace – a virtuous ambition – notably through trading agreements. The EEC's DNA, however, did not include a capacity to live with and conceptualize conflict, or indeed to build power in any other way than through the path of commerce. Further, the ideology of free market competition sometimes works against its own interests, for example in the fields of energy or technology, where it benefits external players, notably GAFA. When conflict or war breaks out, the EU prefers dialogue, compromise and seeks consensus via multilateral processes. To date, therefore, European construction and European power appear to have been, in many ways, antithetical notions.

This was amply and bloodily demonstrated during the 1990s with the dismantling of the former Yugoslavia. In the heart of geographical Europe, on the edge of the then EEC (Italy and Greece, with Austria joining in 1995), the EEC member countries stood by powerless as genocide was deployed on their doorstep. Ultimately it was NATO that interceded under the aegis of the USA, with aerial bombardment that left traces in graveyards and national symbols.

Yet in the wake of the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the break-up of the USSR, the worthwhileness of NATO became debatable. Firstly, of course, the Russians did not understand why the military alliance that had won the Cold War was still there, now that its rival had disappeared, given that Russia claimed that it was no longer a threat to anybody. Secondly, in France, where great minds were arguing in true Cartesian fashion along a three-step rationale : "NATO was the consequence of the Cold War. The Cold War is over. NATO has no reason to be." This brilliant reasoning struck few chords beyond the banks of the Seine. Lastly, in the USA, experts considered that NATO had fulfilled its mission and that the consensus-based deployment and the sharing of the financial burden at Washington's expense were enough to justify dissolution. The average life span of a military alliance is fifteen years…

However, the inertia of the representative bodies and structures, the uncertainties, indeed fears with regard to Russia and, above all, the demand from the USSR's former satellites and

components (the Baltic nations) for NATO to maintain its umbrella all worked together to ensure that NATO still had a life, post-Cold War.

It should be noted that in return for abandoning to Russia the Soviet nuclear missiles stationed on its soil, Ukraine secured guarantees of its international frontiers – including Crimea, acknowledged in 1954 - via the Budapest Memorandum, signed in 1994 by Russia, the USA, the UK, France and China. Ukraine continued to lease the Sebastopol naval base at the tip of the Crimean peninsula to Russia. The Budapest Memorandum thus prevented the emergence of a new nuclear arms player in geographical Europe.

On March 12 1999, after the reunification of Germany within the NATO framework (October 3 1990), NATO implemented its first post-Cold War enlargement, pre-empting even the tenth anniversary of the opening of the iron curtain, by ushering in three former USSR satellites : Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the latter created by the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia (1993).

NATO's second post-Cold War enlargement was enacted on March 29 2004 to the benefit of seven former Communist nations : Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, (former USSR Baltic states) ; Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria (former satellites) ; and Slovenia (former Yugoslavia). The first six of the above were members of both the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. When Poland (1999) was followed into NATO by Lithuania (2004), the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad now found itself encircled by two members of the military alliance that was anathema to Moscow.

In 2009, the third post-Cold War enlargement brought in Croatia and Albania ; followed by a fourth in 2017 with Montenegro. NATO now had 29 member states… until the fifth post-Cold enlargement took the total to 30, with North Macedonia coming on board. From Moscow's standpoint, these enlargements were so many provocations on its immediate or more distant periphery.

As these post-Cold War NATO enlargements unfolded there was a growing awareness of a geopolitical and strategic oversight : NATO set the pace, but the EU struggled to keep up. Expressed more brutally, it was the USA that was mapping out a strategy for geographical Europe, stretching as far as the edges of Russia ; the EU was adapting. Occasionally the EU played for time – for example by keeping Romania and Bulgaria waiting an extra three years – but, overall, it sat itself in the USA's slipstream. It all looked as though some unspoken casting session had been agreed : NATO – directed by Washington would take care of defence – while the EU would fund and upgrade economies ruined by four decades of central planning. Without exception, these countries were substantially poorer than the EU average (measured in GDP per capita in PPP (EU base 100)), the statistical effect of this being to lower the EU's relative wealth. A more serious question was whether these countries were truly capable of becoming "right of law" democracies, respecting the separation of powers and ensuring media pluralism. It would have required remarkable clairvoyance to accurately predict these outcomes during the 1990s and the 2000s. Hindsight has shown that the answer has in some cases been "no", notably in Hungary since 2010 and Poland since 2015, but also in the Czech Republic and Slovakia [11]. The EU has since shown a stunning incapacity to bring these nations back into the "right of law" fold.

The aftermath of the Cold War has therefore been marked by a significant expansion of NATO

and the EU in geographical Europe, but also by two reinforcements of relations between the European Union and NATO.

The first reinforcement of EU-NATO relations was embodied in the Treaty of Nice, signed in 2001, implemented in 2004, and designed to lay the ground for the May 1 2004 enlargement.

Article 17 of the European Union Treaty (EUT), amended by the Treaty of Nice, staked out the ball park. Paragraph 1 opened as follows : "The common foreign and security policy shall include all questions relating to the security of the Union, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy, which might lead to a common defence, should the European Council so decide. It shall in that case recommend to the Member States the adoption of such a decision in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

The same paragraph immediately went on to set the limits : "The policy of the Union in accordance with this Article shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework."

In other words, no way was the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) going to be "incompatible" with the interests of NATO. The same subsequently applied to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Conscientiously sabotaged by the UK – relaying USA policy – and a number of other member states, the CSDP has never really been able to get off the ground.

The second reinforcement of EU-NATO relations was embodied in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007). On December 1 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon entered force, bringing in a new concept : Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), superseding the CFSP. The EU emerged more tightly bound to NATO. It was, in fact, to comply with the obligations engendered by the North Atlantic Treaty that remained, for the member states, "the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation". The text made strikingly insistent use of the singular "foundation" and "forum". In February 2008, General Michel Fennebresque wrote in the review *Défense nationale* [our translation] : "This wording, added to the draft constitutional treaty by the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference, is very restrictive because, taken literally, it could preclude any European defence initiative or independent action by the EU in this area."

The same Treaty of Lisbon did however open up the possibility of progress in the field of defence with the "permanent structured cooperation" procedure. Intended to enable a few core countries to progress faster and further, this procedure was for long neglected. It was Russia that indirectly contributed to triggering the opportunity for action by overstepping its borders for a second time (2014), as we shall see later.

The enlargements of NATO and the EU, like the reinforcement of bonds between the EU and NATO provided no shelter from changes in the strategic context.

III … that nonetheless provided no guarantees against subsequent implosion in the wake of Russian… and American manoeuvres

After such results, indeed "successes" had been achieved, how is it that Jacques Attali could come to the conclusion in his October 19 2019 diagnosis that "NATO is dead (…)" ? To understand the background we need to go back to the end of the 20th century, but hurried readers may fast forward straight to 2015, the watershed year that sped up the process.

After being designated interim President of Russia by an exhausted Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin was elected President of the Russian Federation in 2000. The terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al Qaida in the USA on September 11 2001 led to a rapprochement with George W. Bush's USA, with a newly shared "war on terrorism" focus. The USA – and NATO – would soon launch a war in Afghanistan to eradicate Al Qaida and the Taliban. In 2002 and 2003, Russia – supported by France and Germany – opposed the war led by the USA and an *ad hoc* coalition against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. This operation set off a deadly chain reaction in the Middle East, rippling as far as Europe, via fresh terrorist attacks. For several years, however, Vladimir Putin's Russia continued to profit indirectly from the rise in hydrocarbon prices caused by the Iraq War, the nation-continent remaining a windfall economy. While the Russians were discovering the trappings of a consumer society, the State retook direct or indirect control of its cash-cow resources.

In the same year, 2003, Georgia, on the edge of Russia, initiated a new dynamic for freedom on the periphery with regard to the former centre. Its "Rose Revolution" was followed in 2004 by Ukraine's "Orange Revolution". Some suggested pulling both countries into NATO.

NATO had just completed its March 29 enlargement, bringing in seven former Communist nations : Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (former USSR) ; Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria (former satellites) ; Slovenia (former Yugoslavia). The Union European had just announced – shortly after the May 1 2004 inclusion of eight former Communist nations and two Mediterranean islands – the launch of a European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This aimed to stabilize the southern and eastern edges of the EU, notably by exporting some EU standards. Russia would have none of it, but this did not prevent the ENP from going to work on its "close foreigners", including Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, and, in the Caucasus region Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Inspired by the candidates that had already joined the EU, some of Russia's biggest critics, the aim was to repel the Russian threat, indeed transform these countries into "buffer states". It was a mixture of boldness and naivety that saw the European Union venture into what Russia rightly or wrongly considered to be its back garden. Though the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev had died in 1982, had Moscow really forgotten his doctrine acknowledging only "limited sovereignty" for the Eastern European satellites on its edge ? Vladimir Putin did not enjoy the unipolar game being played by the USA and made this clearly known, notably in 2007 in a speech in Munich. He announced that the system would "destroy itself from inside".

2007 was also the year in which the USA hit the subprime wall, a financial crisis of criminal origin [12] caused by rotten property loans, which spiralled to near-global proportions as from 2008. The states of the European Union – often members of NATO – used public funds to bail

out banks that, with stunning incompetence, had bought into purportedly innovative financial products that in reality concealed valueless debts transformed into securities as a craven way to get rid of them. The result was that the US rechannelled defence expenditure to mop up public deficits that were going through the roof, a fact that no US President has ever acknowledged. This somewhat undermines the moral high ground adopted by the US in its attitude to European NATO members, but nobody has ever made the connection. So let it pass.

In February 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia. The declaration was a head-on affront to the Serbs and their Russian allies, but the USA and some of the EU member states and NATO decided to go with Kosovo anyway.

In April 2008, France and Germany opposed the opportunity of instigating a dynamic that would have led to Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO, on the pretext that they did not want to ruffle Russia's feathers. It could be instructive to look at the combination of analyses and Russian network influence in Paris and Berlin that led to these vetoes and the subsequent open season for Moscow. It would have been harder for Russia to take on a State in the process of joining NATO than to attack or destabilize one to which the organization has closed the door.

During the summer of 2008, post-Soviet Russia made its first cross-border incursion having ensnared the Georgian government into opening hostilities, under the belief that Separatists had broken ranks. Moscow stabbed the Georgian government in the back twice by occupying two Georgian regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, i.e. 20% of the country. The NATO countries and the EU of course condemned the violation of Georgian sovereignty, but failed to secure Russian withdrawal on November 9 2019.

Barak Obama entered the White House (2009-2017) with the announced goal of "resetting" relations with Russia, but these soon worsened, notably around the Ukrainian question.

In 2009, the EU reorganised its European Neighbourhood Policy in two parts including, for the area we are focusing on here, the Eastern Partnership. This included the same six former Socialist Republics among Russia's immediate neighbours : Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Overtures were then made to some of these nations with a view to negotiating agreements with the EU, even though candidature, and even less, membership, were never on the agenda. The prospect still became a dream for some, a nightmare for others.

In 2010, Ukraine found itself a relatively pro-Russian President, Viktor Yanukovych. This led the Kremlin to imagine a scheme for a customs union including Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia and the Central Asian republics. This meant that there was now competition between, on one hand, the EU and NATO and, on the other, Russia over areas located between the European Union and Russia. Russia's back garden is perceived by the EU, even NATO – or perhaps the opposite – as an area to stabilize or even integrate. The biggest piece of this land is Ukraine, a buffer state in which Poland and Russia both claim historically "legitimate" interests. Tensions were heightened by energy issues, opposing, on one hand, Russia and Ukraine, and, on the other, Russia and the European Union, the latter having for long been filling the Kremlin's coffers by buying hydrocarbons that transit through Ukraine. This dependency was mitigated by the construction of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline carrying gas from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea as a result of an agreement signed by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder with Russia,

indirectly devaluing the strategic position of Ukraine. Shortly after the signature, the former Chancellor joined the management of the Russian company Gazprom in charge of building the pipeline… demonstrating a business acumen that logically led to a reappraisal of his diplomatic policy with regard to Russia.

In November 2013, the Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovych, under pressure from Vladimir Putin, bent on including Ukraine in his customs union, refused to sign the Association Agreement drafted with the European Union. This sparked off weeks of protests in Ukraine, many Ukrainians placing their hopes in a rapprochement with the EU, and resulting in the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovych fleeing to Russia.

This was the backdrop for post-Soviet Russia's second cross-border encroachment. In March 2014, with Ukraine in the throes of political revolution, Russian forces took possession of the Crimean peninsula, violating Ukraine's borders. The USA and the EU decided to take sanctions against Russia for violating international law (the Budapest memorandum). Only a handful of states recognized Russian sovereignty in Crimea. Russia then supported combat groups in Donbass, a mining region in Eastern Ukraine, on the Russian border. By the end of 2019, the death toll from this war had exceeded 13,000. Over and above the territorial issue and the symbolic dimension, Russia was looking to put the spanner in the diplomatic works between Ukraine, the EU and NATO. During the months following the occupation of Crimea, the EU nations stepped up their defence efforts, and the US, via NATO, symbolically escalated its military presence in Poland and the Baltic nations, while at the same time berating the European member countries for their insufficient defence commitment. This practice typified a certain ambivalence in the US attitude to NATO, even before Donald Trump's investiture at the White House.

2015 was a watershed. On one hand, the customs union championed by Russia entered effect on January 1 2015 – without Ukraine – under the name Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Moscow surrounded itself with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, then, a little later in the year, Kyrgyzstan. Further, during the US presidential election campaign, a Democrat party candidate, Hillary Clinton, known for her critical stance towards Russia, was caught up in a compromising imbroglio. In December 2016, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) revealed that individuals connected with the Russian government had sent thousands of e-mail messages hacked from the Democrat party and the chair of Hillary Clinton's campaign to Wikileaks. Based on the fact that the computers of the Republican National Committee had also been hacked, a number of persons working for the intelligence service considered that Russia's objective was to favour the candidate Trump over his rival Clinton ; Donald Trump, who the Russian services knew well as he had travelled several times to Russia on business. Is it possible that Donald Trump, whose countless sexual escapades have been headline news, could have had affairs during these trips, thus risking contributing in time-honoured fashion to the compilation of an embarrassing file that could subsequently be made available to exert pressure on his person ? It would be neither the first time nor the last, the old methods being well proven. Whatever the case, Donald Trump, on the campaign trail, declared that NATO was "obsolete". An utterance that echoed the Russian position since the end of the Cold War. This was a source of concern for the European members of NATO, who reassured themselves by waging that Hillary Clinton would prevail, only to be surprised when the US electoral system delivered Donald Trump as the victor in November 2016. He entered the White House on January 20 2017. He wasted no time in receiving the visit of the British Prime Minister,

Theresa May, to whom he ensured his support for Brexit, a perspective that would instantly significantly diminish the EU's demographic, economic and strategic ranking.

Donald Trump was quick to combat multilateralism, even though this policy had been largely formatted to its advantage by the USA since the end of the World War II. In this context, he threatened the EU with a trade war, reiterating his claim that NATO was obsolete and too costly for the USA, while the other member countries were not devoting enough to defence expenditure. Though American strategists strove to explain to him that the USA nonetheless derived benefits from the NATO alliance through soft power and weapons sales, experienced old-guard advisers were soon dismissed from the presidential entourage. Donald Trump was especially bent on transforming NATO into a military alliance that could face China, which he perceived, not without reason, as the USA's main economic and strategic rival. NATO's European members, on their part, fear an embroilment in a potential distant conflict without necessarily sharing the same interpretation or interests as the USA. From one tweet to the next, Donald Trump, without always consulting experts or US services, regularly generates uncertainty. This converts trust into suspicion, an unpropitious mood for a military alliance.

The USA was becoming an uncertain, not to say worrying ally. On May 8 2018, Donald Trump pulled out of the Iranian nuclear agreement that the European Union viewed as the alpha and omega of the multilateralism it supported. Moreover, forces rooted in both the USA and Russia more or less covertly support the emergence of populist and Eurosceptical movements within the European Union member nations. While it is true that the USA has almost always preferred that Europe be a "market" rather than a "power", this attitude has been ratcheted up by support in various forms for a veritable campaign to demolish the EU. This has gone down well in Moscow, since the aim of Mikhail Gorbachev's "Common House" strategy – indeed his consent to the opening of the iron curtain – was to anchor Russia to the European Community and its money bags. The political weakening of the EU works well for Moscow.

Having rejoined NATO under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, France sought to cajole, buy time and make counter-proposals, for example by hosting the Paris Peace Forum (November 2018), which Donald Trump elected not to attend. Paris attempted to "convert doubt into opportunity". An elegant formula that can impress in society but that is hard to convert into reality, such is the pusillanimity between member countries where other dynamics are at play. True, this gave birth to a project for "permanent structured cooperation", the hope being to mould a group of motivated countries into a small avant-garde focused on defence issues... until it turned out that 25 countries declared an interest. This was the best possible way to sabotage the initiative. Meanwhile the European Commission announced the creation of a fund to finance research into armament, the effectiveness of which remains to be assessed. Will it become something more than opportunism on the part of the defence industries to glean a few million euros from the EU's coffers ? "Three years since the 2016 referendum, the perspective of Brexit has still not been enough to relaunch European defence", confided a diplomat.

Meanwhile, NATO appears to be flaking away at speed. Turkey has been the first NATO member to break a taboo by buying weaponry from Russia, behaving like a "mobster" in the military alliance. At NATO meetings, Ankara had for long championed the need to "work with Moscow", in the process of becoming a structural presence, notably in the Mediterranean. When President Trump tweeted in October 2019 that he was withdrawing US troops from Northern Syria, Turkey immediately attacked the Kurdish forces that had fought Daesh

alongside NATO. The initiative was tantamount to treason. It was here that Russia interceded to secure a suspension of Turkey's advance in Syria. Meanwhile, the capitals of the NATO member countries suddenly started to worry about what would happen if the hundreds of EU nationals incarcerated for jihadism in Kurdish-held prisons were allowed to run loose. They prepared public opinion for the perspective of bringing them home to prisons already overpopulated and converted for several years into "The University of Jihad".

This is why on October 19 2019 Jacques Attali continued on the *France Info* radio news station : "If NATO is dead and if the USA no longer defends us, there is only thing left for the Europeans to do : unite to defend themselves." All this as we witness Russia and the United States undoing their control of nuclear armament. The EU nations stand by and watch as the capabilities for checking the nuclear missiles pointed at their heads are dismantled, epitomising an impotency that can be defined as a multiple incapacity : incapacity to do ; incapacity to have done ; incapacity to prevent from doing ; incapacity to refuse to do [13].

On November 7 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron drove home another nail, declaring that if the Europeans "don't wake up, face up to this situation and decide to do something about it, there's a considerable risk that in the long run we will disappear geopolitically, or at least that we will no longer be in control of our destiny [14]."

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During the period 1989 to 2019, what are the dynamics that have led strategic Europe from the break-up of the Eastern Block to a risk of NATO implosion ?

Over the last three decades, it has become clear that the extension of NATO offers no protection against a major crisis, partly orchestrated by Russia. This has been a reality check for anyone who forgot that the Russians are formidable chess players.

With Brexit burning up too much political energy since 2016, do the European Union member states have the capacity to assert a strategic autonomy that is more vital than ever ? If Donald Trump survives the impeachment procedure and wins a second term, what will remain of NATO ?

Weakened by Brexit, aged, divided on migratory issues, often short on innovation, generally in trade deficit, rarely focused on geopolitics and strategy [15], **are the European Union member countries hoping that the train of History stops before they hit rock bottom. How far do they have to fall before reinventing themselves ?**

Testimony to their relative impotency, the European Union member countries await with baited breath the outcome of the November 2020 Presidential election… in the USA !

What are the possible scenarios ? The following list of four scenarios has no claim to be exhaustive. All have one point in common : the USA, Russia – and China – have their eye on the ball and are fleeter of foot than we imagine, including in the fields of influence and intelligence.

Scenario 1 : the continuing weakening of NATO, possibly accelerated in the eventuality of

the re-election of Donald Trump. Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, still has a few years ahead of him and whoever succeeds him will most probably be driven by the same intentions towards NATO ;

Scenario 2 : the implosion of NATO, via the development of one or more crises during which the divergences in the interests of the members could outgrow anything witnessed to date. This scenario might or might not be compounded by an implosion of the EU, subjected to internal pressure cracks and to external power plays masterminded by Moscow, Washington or Beijing ;

Scenario 3 : yet another version of NATO which, for three decades, has proved its capacity to highlight new threats legitimating the enduring presence of an instrument whose ultimate utility has been to extend the shelf-life of US domination. If the European members accept the pressure exerted by the USA to turn NATO round to face China, this seems possible, at risk of finding themselves committed to conflicts that are beyond Europe's compass.

Scenario 4 : a recomposed European Union endows itself with the wherewithal to become strategically self-sufficient. Key to this are the reinforcement of analytical capability, a unified approach, the breaking of taboos surrounding the question of power, identifying allies and enemies, and accurately understanding threats and opportunities. The EU must be able to address the following issues : who are we ? What are our true values ? What are our true interests ? What are our strategic objectives and what resources are we going to dedicate to them ? Who will provide leadership ?

These scenarios are valuable in that they trigger thought processes, even though it is probably a fifth scenario that will emerge from the convergences and divergences of tomorrow's world.

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P.-S.

Doctor in Geopolitics at Paris IV University – Sorbonne, Pierre Verluise founded *Diploweb.com*, the first French-language Web site dedicated to geopolitics. He is the site's Director of Publications, an expert on geopolitics (articles, studies, books, lectures, classes, videos, etc.) and the author, co-author or director of some thirty works on European and global geopolitics. Translation Alan Fell.

Notes

[1] HELLER, Michel, "*URSS – 8 décembre 1991, pourquoi l'éclatement du système soviétique ?*" Interview with VERLUISE, Pierre, published on December 13 1991 in *Le Quotidien de Paris*. Available on the *Diploweb.com* Web site at : https://www.diploweb.com/URSS-8-decembre-1991-pourquoi-l.html

[2] VERLUISE, Pierre, *Le nouvel emprunt russe*, preface by General P.-M Gallois, Paris, éd. Odilon Média, 1996.

[3] HAROCHE, Pierre, *"L'Union européenne, combien de divisions ?"*, IRSEM, Le Collimateur, audio interview with Alexandre JUBELIN, March 26 2019. Available on the IRSEM Web site at https://www.irsem.fr/publications-de-l-irsem/le-collimateur/l-union-europeenne-combien-de-divisions-26-03-2019.html. For generations of pro-Europeans, the failure of the EDC was for long "a past that would not go away", a reference to the seminal work by ROUSSO, Henri and CONAN, Eric, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas*, éd. Gallimard.

[4] Albania and Yugoslavia espoused the Communist ideology but successfully remained outside Moscow's thrall.

[5] The case of Romania is particularly intriguing. For more insights, see DURANDIN, Catherine, HOEDTS, Guy *"Roumanie, vingt ans après : la "révolution revisitée"*, a PDF book containing the papers presented at the 1989 symposium *"1989 en Europe médiane : vingt ans après"* organised in Paris at the *Hôtel National des Invalides*, éd. Diploweb.com, 2010. Available on the Diploweb.com Web site at : https://www.diploweb.com/Roumanie-vingt-ans-apres-la.html

[6] A few months earlier, in June 1989, the People's Republic of China (PRC) used force in Beijing to quash demonstrations in Tian'anmen Square.

[7] VERLUISE, Pierre, *"20 ans après la chute du Mur. L'Europe recompose"*, preface by Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the *Fondation Robert Sc*human, Paris, éd. Choiseul, 2009. Published in Romanian. VERLUISE, Pierre, *"Dupa douazeci de ani de la cadera zidului"*, preface by DURANDIN, Catherine, Chisinau, Moldavia, éd. Cartier, 2009.

[8] On January 4 1990, at a joint press conference given with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the French President François Mitterrand declared [our translation] : "Thus I consider the fate of the countries that are not members of the Community but who are making clear strides towards democracy. When they will have got there, what will they do ? Who will they do business with ? While, on one side, we have the Community of Twelve, will there be nothing for them on the other side, no European perspective ? And, when I say that, I'm also including the Soviet Union with all the countries in the continent. This is, of course, a long-term idea : we need to organise a perspective for all nations that will adhere to democracy, and who, for one reason or another, will not be able to join a European Community that cannot go on expanding indefinitely." *Documents d'actualité internationale (DAI)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs / *Documentation française*, n°5, March 1 1990, pp. 95-96.

[9] Georges-Henri Soutou (dir.), *et al.*, *"La Pologne et l'Europe du partage à l'élargissement (XVIIIe-XXIe siècles"* PUPS, 2007, p. 272.

[10] It took two weeks for Mikhail Gorbachev, still standing but reeling, to realise that he was the President of a structure that no longer existed, and on December 25 1991, he resigned.

[11] Cf. GNESOTTO, Nicole, *"Union européenne : de l'illusion à la Résistance démocratique ?"*, interview with VERLUISE, Pierre, published on Diploweb.com on April 7

2019 at
https://www.diploweb.com/Union-europeenne-de-l-illusion-a-la-Resistance-democratique.html ; and KAHN, Sylvain, « *1989-2019 vu de la 'Mitteleuropa' Hongrie, Pologne, Tchécoslovaquie, République tchèque, Slovaquie* » published on Diploweb.com on October 13 2019 at https://www.diploweb.com/1989-2019-vu-de-la-Mitteleuropa.html

[12] Cf. GAYRAUD, Jean-François, "*Le nouveau capitalisme criminal*", interview with VERLUISE, Pierre, published on the *Diploweb.com* Web site on March 30 2014 at https://www.diploweb.com/Le-nouveau-capitalisme-criminel.html

[13] This is a reference to Serge Sur's definition of power, inspired in turn by the philosopher Raymond Aron. Sur wrote : "Power can be defined as a capacity – capacity to do ; capacity to have done ; capacity to prevent from doing ; capacity to refuse to do." SUR, Serge, "*Relations internationales*", Paris, 2000, éd. Montchrestien, p. 229.

[14] *Le Monde*, November 7 2019, "*Macron juge l'Europe au 'bord du précipice'* and *"l'OTAN en état de 'mort cérébrale'*. In an interview to "The Economist" the French President expressed alarm at the fragility of Europe, the misalignment between European and US policy and the emergence of China as a power

[15] Initiatives have however been taken to change mindsets, such as *La Fabrique Défense* which factors in a European dimension (January 17 and 18 2019, Paris).