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**A Time Bomb: Ukraine in the EU,  
but not in NATO****A Time Bomb: Ukraine in the EU, but not in NATO****Abstract:**

*The war between Ukraine and Russia has implications beyond its borders, affecting the power struggle between the US and China, as well as NATO and the EU. Global dynamics in the West, East and South also condition countries and international organisations. NATO and EU assistance to Ukraine is relevant, considering Ukraine's aspiration to join both organisations. Uncertainty over the outcome of the US election and its impact on the international system adds complexity to the foresight. This document offers answers to questions such as: How does the US view the future of NATO? Is the EU autonomous in deciding its own future? How can Ukraine fit into NATO and the EU in the future? Against this backdrop, the EU must consider two crucial issues: engaging in negotiations to stop the war and exploring hypothetical scenarios for defence planning. The most dangerous scenario for the EU must be anticipated: a Ukraine in the Union and outside the Alliance may be a ticking time bomb.*

**Keywords:**

*Ukraine, NATO, EU, European Neighbourhood Policy, CFSP, CSDP.*

**\*NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Documents** are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE) or the Ministry of Defence.

## Bomba de relojería: Ucrania en la UE, pero no en la OTAN

### Resumen:

La guerra entre Ucrania y Rusia tiene implicaciones más allá de sus fronteras, afecta a la pugna de poder entre Estados Unidos y China, también a la OTAN y a la UE. Las dinámicas globales en el oeste, el este y el sur, asimismo, condicionan a los países y a las organizaciones internacionales. La asistencia de la OTAN y la UE a Ucrania es relevante, considerando la aspiración ucraniana de unirse a ambas organizaciones. La incertidumbre sobre el resultado de las elecciones estadounidenses y su impacto en el sistema internacional añade complejidad a la prospectiva. Se ofrecen respuestas a cuestiones como: ¿en qué términos se plantea el futuro de la OTAN desde EE. UU.?, ¿es autónoma la UE para decidir su propio futuro?, ¿cuál puede ser el encaje futuro de Ucrania en la OTAN y en la UE? Ante este panorama, la UE debería considerar dos asuntos cruciales: participar en las negociaciones para detener la guerra y explorar escenarios hipotéticos para el planeamiento de defensa. Se debe prevenir ante el escenario más peligroso para la UE: una Ucrania en la Unión y fuera de la Alianza podría ser una bomba de relojería.

### Palabras clave:

Ucrania, OTAN, UE, política de vecindad europea, PESC, PDSC.

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The clock is ticking on the US elections in November 2024; the resolution of the war in Ukraine and the nation's fitting in international organisations is pending.

The war in Europe exerts an influence on the internal dynamics of NATO and the European Union (EU), as well as on the interplay between these organisations. Additionally, the US has declared that it is concerned by developments in Ukraine and the EU.

In 1998, Zbigniew Brzezinski, renowned political scientist of geostrategy and geopolitics, asked: "Should the eastern borders of the EU coincide with the eastern border of NATO? [...] Perhaps also of Ukraine?"<sup>1</sup>.

Ukraine and the rest of the states seek their survival, as do NATO and the EU.

The US has achieved its strategic and geopolitical interest in Europe<sup>2</sup> and Eurasia since the start of the 20th century; no hegemon is in sight in the coming decades. Some are considering reconfiguring NATO and thereby, European security. Others consider the possibility of expanding NATO and EU to countries such as Ukraine. Some Americans and Europeans call for sending Western troops to Ukraine if necessary.

It is argued that the EU should be a participating actor in future negotiations on the resolution of the Ukraine-Russia war, as it may depend on avoiding the most dangerous scenario for the EU, a Ukraine in the Union but outside the Alliance.

## The regional and global context

In 1994, Ukraine agreed to hand over its nuclear weapons to the Russian Federation (Budapest Memorandum). Russia pledged to respect Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the US and the UK were the guarantors of the agreement<sup>3</sup>.

In November 2013, following a visit by the Ukrainian president to Moscow, Ukraine withdrew from the Association Agreement previously agreed with the EU. On 22 February

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<sup>1</sup> BRZEZINSKI, Z. *El gran tablero mundial*. Paidós, Barcelona, 1998, p. 58. (Own translation).

<sup>2</sup> LOGAN, J. y SHIFFRISON, J. "A Post-American Europe. It's Time for Washington to Europeanize NATO and Give Up Responsibility for the Continent's Security", *Foreign Affairs*. 2024. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/post-american-europe-justin-logan-joshua-shifrinson>.

All links in the document are active at the time of publication.

<sup>3</sup> DEZCALLAR, J. *El fin de una era. Ucrania: la guerra que lo acelera todo*. La esfera de los libros, Madrid, 2024, pp. 19-29.

2014, President Yanukovich, a Dombash Ukrainian, resigned from power in Kyiv. The pro-Russian president gave in to the demands of the Euromaidan; according to the Russian narrative, a coup d'état encouraged by the West, including the US. Russia reacted by destabilising Ukraine, annexing Crimea and successfully supporting the pro-Russian nationalist insurgency in Donetsk and Luhansk and, unsuccessfully, in Kharkiv and Odessa.

The subsequent Minsk agreements failed to stop the conflict. Neither the EU nor the guarantors of the Budapest Memorandum, the US and UK, took part in the negotiations. The agreement was sponsored by France and Germany together with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The documents were signed by the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine.

The signatory countries soon made divergent readings and both sides reinforced their nationalist arguments in preparation for a future decisive outcome. In Ukraine, an agile "cultural selection"<sup>4</sup> operated on history, religion and language, affecting Russian speakers and the Hungarian and Romanian minorities; *army, language and faith* were the pillars of the new Ukraine. In Russia as well, militarism, nationalism and orthodox traditionalism merged.

The EU imposed economic sanctions on Russia, in coordination with the US and the rest of the G7. In 2019, addenda to the Ukrainian Constitution were adopted to mark the goal of EU and NATO membership.

After the uprisings in Belarus (2020), the disorderly withdrawal of Americans and Europeans from Afghanistan (2021), and the intervention with Russian troops in Kazakhstan (January 2022), Putin once again reacted against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. He made a rational, geopolitically motivated decision; perhaps based on a misleading risk-benefit calculation<sup>5</sup>.

The Union had to overcome certain taboos regarding the military instrument. The application of the *European Peace Facility* was innovative when enabled the funding of lethal weapons for Ukraine and in October the Union launched the EU Military Assistance

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<sup>4</sup> WENDT, A. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 326, cited in BAQUÉS, J. *¿Cómo funciona el mundo? Una perspectiva desde la geopolítica*. Lo Banch, Valencia, 2023, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> GILPIN, R. *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1981, cited in BAQUÉS, J. *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

Mission in Ukraine (EUMAM)<sup>6</sup> to train Ukrainian military personnel in EU territory, but within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy.

Neither the 2015 US National Security Strategy (NSS) (Obama) nor that of 2017 (Trump) considered Russia to be a major risk for the Americans, although perhaps it was for their European partners. Moreover, the US needed to focus on the Pacific, a strategic priority that remains valid in 2024.

Today, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership<sup>7</sup> looks like a self-fulfilling prophecy of the most dangerous scenario identified by Brzezinski in 1998: "a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps Iran, an 'antihegemonic' coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances [...] China would likely be the leader and Russia the follower"<sup>8</sup>. China and Russia intend to continue "transforming the global governance architecture and world order"<sup>9</sup>.

Washington's global competition with Beijing affects its interests and the logic that should govern the world. What happens in the Russia-Ukraine war affects the narratives for engaging countries in the global south and is a benchmark for what might happen with Taiwan.

John Ikenberry, a liberal institutionalist scholar, sees the world as undergoing a historical inflection, a reconfiguration around three groupings: the West (the United States and Europe), the East (China and Russia) and the global South (Brazil, India and others)<sup>10</sup>. They are not monolithic blocs, nor specific political entities; they are groupings whose states behave according to their interests depending on the issue at hand, in a flexible manner. The West and the East seek to attract the South and the war narrative is part of the competition. According to this liberal scholar, democracies have a certain advantage

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<sup>6</sup> European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM). [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-military-assistance-mission-ukraine-eumam\\_en?s=410260](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-military-assistance-mission-ukraine-eumam_en?s=410260)

<sup>7</sup> PARDO DE SANTAYANA, J. M. "The Revisionist Powers and the Global South", in *Panorama Estratégico 2024*. IEEE, Madrid. 2024, pp. 97-101. [https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links/p/a/panorama\\_estrat\\_gico\\_2024.pdf](https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links/p/a/panorama_estrat_gico_2024.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> BRZEZINSKI, Z. *Op. cit.*, p. 63. (Own translation).

<sup>9</sup> *Joint statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the international relations entering a new era and the global sustainable development*, 4 Feb. 2022. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

<sup>10</sup> IKENBERRY, G. J. «Three Worlds: the West, East and South and the competition to shape global order», *International Affairs*, 100(1). 2024, pp. 121-138. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad284>

over autocracies<sup>11</sup>. In Russia, "the war is justified by a historical narrative of aggression by the United States and western Europe. It is a war fuelled by grievances about the encroachment of NATO and American hegemony"<sup>12</sup>.

A weaker Russia may bring less to the Sino-Russian partnership; Russian attrition at the expense of Ukrainian sacrifice, *bloodletting* in the words of neo-realist scholar John Mearsheimer<sup>13</sup>, might be partially consistent with the geo-strategy outlined by Brzezinski for the Eurasian chessboard.

Already in 2016, Henry Kissinger wondered whether there would still be an Atlantic community in the near future and how it would be defined<sup>14</sup>, in reference to US-EU-NATO relations. The Trump presidency, *illiberal*<sup>15</sup> according to some, posed a challenge to the Alliance's European allies and to the Union.

### The US-EU security pact questioned

President Trump (2017-2020) does not appear to have been especially interested in maintaining the liberal global order<sup>16</sup>. During his presidency, the need to renew the European security pact with the US became apparent. In Kissinger's words: "To give a more specific meaning to the 'Atlantic community'<sup>17</sup>.

With regard to NATO, Trump focused on denouncing the unfair or inequitable sharing of defence investment by each ally in favour of collective defence (*fair burden sharing*). The discussion on fair burden sharing has existed almost since the Washington Treaty<sup>18</sup>. The speech was aimed at allies, but also at the domestic US audience, including the tax-

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<sup>11</sup> See the United Nations deliberations on the resolution on humanitarian aid in Ukraine; the result on 24 March 2024 in the General Assembly was 38 abstentions, 5 votes against and 140 in favour.

<https://news.un.org/es/story/2022/03/1506132>

<sup>12</sup> IKENBERRY, G. J. *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> MEARSHEIMER, J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York & London: Norton Co. cited in BAQUÉS, J. *Op. cit.*, 2001, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> KISSINGER, H. *Orden mundial. Reflexiones sobre el carácter de los países y el curso de la historia*. Debate, 3rd ed. Barcelona, 2016, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> POSEN, B. "The rise of illiberal hegemony: Trump's surprising grand strategy", *Foreign Affairs*, 97(2). 2018, pp. 20–27. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/rise-illiberal-hegemony>

<sup>16</sup> PORTERO, F. "The foundations of U.S. foreign action", in *Panorama Estratégico 2024*. pp. 67-90. IEEE, Madrid, 2024, p. 83. [https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links/p/a/panorama\\_estrat\\_gico\\_2024.pdf](https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links/p/a/panorama_estrat_gico_2024.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> KISSINGER, H. *Op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> OLSON, M. and ZECKHAUSER, R. "An Economic Theory of Alliances", *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 48(3). 1966, pp. 266–279. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1927082>

paying middle classes who have been disadvantaged by globalisation and corporate relocation.

For revisionists of US commitments in the Alliance, the US should clearly gain more than other countries in the Atlantic equation, reap the best profit-to-investment ratio. The benefits of a US-led NATO are of a different nature, ranging from the strategic to the more tangible, such as the proceeds of arms sales to NATO allies. It is also true that said allies benefit from the deterrent effect provided by US investment in their armed forces, but it should also be noted that US forces are not exclusively or preferentially dedicated to defence in Europe<sup>19</sup>.

The debate in the Alliance again touched on the dilemma between absolute gains (everyone wins) and relative gains (some should win more than others)<sup>20</sup>. NATO's leadership in Brussels was able to “survive Trump”<sup>21</sup> by partially accommodating its demands on *free-riders*. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has been essentially pushing two ideas to mitigate the negative attitude of some Americans: more defence investment by European allies and a global NATO that can help the US in its clashes with China.

These two main lines of the Alliance's staff continued to be boosted during Biden's presidency (2021-2024) and have reached the Washington Summit in July 2024. In December 2023, the Democrats succeeded in passing legislation requiring any president to submit a possible decision to leave NATO to a two-thirds majority of the Senate for approval<sup>22</sup>.

President Biden's presidency has eased tensions, but this does not mean that the dilemmas have disappeared: How does the US view NATO'S future? Is the EU autonomous in deciding its own future? How will Ukraine fit into NATO and the EU in the future?

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<sup>19</sup> ENGELBREKT, K. “Beyond Burdensharing and European Strategic Autonomy: Rebuilding Transatlantic Security After the Ukraine War”, *European Foreign Affairs Review* 27, no. 3. 383–400. 2022, p. 387. <https://fhs.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1698547&dswid=-2849>

<sup>20</sup> GRIECO, J. “Anarchy and the limits of cooperation: a realist critique of the newest liberal institutionalism.” *International Organization* 42(3), 1998, pp. 485-507. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027715>

<sup>21</sup> SCHUETTE, L. A. “Why NATO survived Trump: the neglected role of Secretary-General Stoltenberg”, *International Affairs* 97: 6. 2021, pp. 1863-1881. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaab167>

<sup>22</sup> WOLF, Z. *Congress acted to protect NATO. But it might not be enough to stop Trump*. 2024. <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/13/politics/congress-trump-nato-what-matters/index.html>

With regard to the first question, two perspectives have been posited in the US, a “more European NATO”<sup>23</sup> or a “post-American Europe”<sup>24</sup>. A “more European NATO” not only requires more investment from the Old Continent, but also a reduced US presence. In the event of widespread conflict in Europe with Russia, the first response should be from European countries and the Americans should only be called in as a last resort, thus allowing them to focus on their struggle with China.

There is a significant difference between referring to a European pillar<sup>25</sup> or an EU pillar within the Alliance; the latter is more novel and debatable. A new security “concordat”<sup>26</sup> between Europeans and Americans would have to address how to harmonise the existence of *an EU pillar* within NATO and respect for each organisation's decision-making autonomy. This is one of the current principles governing cooperation between organisations that should be reconfigured. It would not be easy to get the US, Türkiye or the UK to accommodate the EU -with some autonomy- in the Alliance's committee discussions, not even as an observer with the right to speak but without a vote.

Ideas of a “post-American Europe” go beyond a simply more European NATO. It is often accompanied by the argument that responsibility for security on the continent should be handed over to the Europeans and that it is time to “reap the rewards”<sup>27</sup> of what was invested. This trend may even serve as justification for the US leaving NATO and entering into bilateral security agreements with European countries.

For the time being, it is suggested that European allies should provide sufficient conventional capabilities to deter and confront the Russian threat, although in the short term the Americans would have to continue supporting them with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities; and undoubtedly even in the medium term with satellite capabilities related to missile defence. If taken forward, this idea would have a major impact on the NATO Defence Planning Process (*NDPP*)<sup>28</sup> that establishes the

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<sup>23</sup> BERGMANN, M. “A More European NATO”, *Foreign Affairs*. 2024. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/more-european-nato>

<sup>24</sup> LOGAN, J. and SHIFFRISON, J. *Op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> ROMERO, A. *Reflections on European defense and its identities. NATO and EU, competition or cooperation?* 2024, p. 19. [https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2024/DIEEEA50\\_2024\\_ABEROM\\_OTAN-UE.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2024/DIEEEA50_2024_ABEROM_OTAN-UE.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> BISCOP, S. “EU and NATO Strategy: A Compass, a Concept, and a Concordat”, *Security Policy Brief*, March (141), 8. 2021. <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/eu-and-nato-strategy-a-compass-a-concept-and-a-concordat/>

<sup>27</sup> LOGAN, J. and SHIFFRISON, J. *Op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> CASTILLA, J. C. “Little Red Riding Hood asks about defense planning. Some answers and the NATO case”, *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*, (18), 209-242. 2022, pp. 229-234. <https://revista.ieee.es/article/view/4021>



conventional capabilities required in the Alliance and assigns targets to countries; it is conducted on the basis of criteria that would have to be changed. Additionally, the US should no longer expect Europeans to preferentially purchase its material.

The NATO Summit in Washington (July 2024) did not address the need for a Europe with a nuclear deterrent other than the US. While US troops on the continent could be reduced, continuing to rely on its nuclear deterrent as a last resort requires a minimal US troop presence in Eastern Europe as a *tripwire*. Otherwise, nuclear proliferation in Poland and even Germany could be an alternative.

Ideas linked to a “post-American Europe” hold that European politicians should take responsibility for the high cost of Ukraine's NATO membership. There is no mention of possible US interest in this accession, and these ideas are gaining ground in US politics.

### **Ukraine in the Washington Summit**

Some Americans go so far as to propose that the EU should be sending troops to Ukrainian soil<sup>29</sup>, a proposal that is presented somewhat more generically when referring to Europe, but specifying that, in any case, it should not be NATO as such<sup>30</sup>. Obviously, Zelensky prefers the Allied umbrella; even more so in the summer of 2024, when Ukraine has also invaded Russian territory at Kursk. Perhaps this is a bargaining chip to be included in a new peace plan to be presented to the Americans<sup>31</sup>.

The US exerts an influence on the Alliance and, reciprocally<sup>32</sup>, the organisation's management and staff strive to condition the behaviour of its members. At the Washington Summit<sup>33</sup>, the Alliance sought to anticipate an uncertain future ahead of the November presidential elections in the United States. Regarding Ukraine, several aspects are worth mentioning: allied membership; long-term financial and operational support,

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<sup>29</sup> CROWTHER, A. and MATISEK, J. “Time to Send EU Forces to Ukraine”, *Center for European Policy Analysis* (CEPA). Washington 2024. <https://cepa.org/article/time-to-send-eu-forces-to-ukraine/>

<sup>30</sup> CROWTHER, A., MATISEK, J. and O'BRIEN, P. “Europe —but Not NATO— Should Send Troops to Ukraine To Halt Russia's Advance, Kyiv Needs More Boots on the Ground”, *Foreign Affairs*, 2024. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/europe-not-nato-should-send-troops-ukraine>

<sup>31</sup> GOZZY, L. “Ukraine to present 'victory plan' to US - Zelensky”, *BBC*. 27/8/2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crrlnl2vqe2o>

<sup>32</sup> BAQUÉS, J. *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>33</sup> Official statement at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_227678.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm)

and how this will materialise through the training of Ukrainian troops; and demands on the defence industry.

The Vilnius Summit (2023) had ruled out implementing an Action Plan for Ukrainian membership, given the previous intensive cooperation<sup>34</sup>. Washington 2024 did not bring any new developments in terms of Alliance membership which would allow Zelensky to envisage a date for joining.

The allies pledged long-term funding for the provision of military equipment, assistance and training to Kyiv's forces. A minimum of \$40 billion in aid was guaranteed for the following year. This figure will be reconsidered once the 2025 US election results are out, but in some way, the US will be obliged to take its place in NATO.

The allied initiative resembles the EU's European Peace Facility. It is expected that existing contributions from EU allies will be coordinated and accounted for in the Alliance's proposal. Stoltenberg proposed that all allies contribute in proportion to their GDP to defend Ukraine, again using the concept of *fair burden sharing* that is so prevalent in Washington. Arguments on responsibility for the situation in Ukraine and the relative gains to be made in this case would affect allied cohesion and the discourse on solidarity.

Another noteworthy element is the establishment of *NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine* (NSATU) to coordinate the delivery of equipment and training to the Ukrainians; Berlin prevented it from being called a "mission"<sup>35</sup>. It remained to be seen how it will be coordinated with the EU and its European Union Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) in support of Ukraine which was launched in 2022.

The Alliance recognised the need to boost industrial capabilities in the area of defence to support Ukraine. While cooperation is possible, it cannot be ignored that the defence industry is a source of rivalry between the US and EU nations<sup>36</sup>. The latter seek to increase joint defence production and procurement, including exports, according to the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) of March 2024.

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<sup>34</sup> ARTEAGA, F. and Simón, L. *La OTAN tras la Cumbre de Vilna*. Real Instituto Elcano, 2023. <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/la-otan-tras-la-cumbre-de-vilna/>

<sup>35</sup> MONGRENIER, J. S. *À propos du sommet de Washington: plaidoyer pour l'OTAN*. 2024. <https://desk-russie.eu/2024/07/21/a-propos-du-sommet-de-washington-plaidoyer-pour-lotan.html>

<sup>36</sup> CASTILLA, J. C. *From Public Defence Policy to Defence Planning. About enhancing the EU processes and complementarity with NATO*. (PhD thesis) 2024, pp. 293-294. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14468/22970>

## The EU: Autonomous in deciding its future?

Trump viewed the EU as a trade rival, preferring to deal bilaterally with European states. *Divide et impera*. Biden was more conciliatory than his predecessor towards EU allies and partners.

In any case, it does not appear that the EU is autonomous in deciding its geopolitical future, and it is clear that the US is involved and exerts an influence. The ideas of Brzezinski, Kissinger and Ikenberry bear this out. The US sees itself as a co-decisioner on future affairs regarding Ukraine and the EU, and by extension perhaps Georgia and Moldova - in short, on the European Neighbourhood Policy.

It is interesting that Brzezinski raised the issues of NATO and the EU's eastern borders and Ukraine's membership as issues relating to US foreign policy. A realist would say that everyone - state or organisation - decides what they can. Kissinger argues that "Europe's political evolution should essentially be decided by Europeans. But its Atlantic partners have an important stake in the matter". For the realist, allowing Europe to decide its own geopolitics would place the US at risk of becoming an "offshore island of Eurasia"<sup>37</sup>.

Ikenberry refers to the fact that "Ukraine is not a member of NATO, but it is a member of Europe". It seems that this geographical (physical and social) determinism is sufficient to support the sentence that follows the previous one: "[...] the leaders and people of Ukraine see the war as an existential struggle for freedom and democracy—and the right to affiliate with the European Union and the West more broadly"<sup>38</sup>. With this generic reference to "the West", the scholar does not make it clear whether he is referring to NATO, although he is deterministic about the EU.

The context of US influence, *a priori*, only assures Ukraine's inclusion in the EU, but not in NATO. It would be up to the Union to deal with the internal political, economic and social consequences, and external security ones, and the necessary reforms.

Internally, the political reforms possibly required would include modifying the criteria for qualified majority voting in the EU Council (55% of member states and 65% of the population). More difficult would be the bureaucratic management of tensions between nationalistic sentiments such as those of Hungary and Ukraine, and the relocation of

<sup>37</sup> KISSINGER, H. *Op. cit.* 2016, pp.102-103.

<sup>38</sup> IKENBERRY, G. J. *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

power eastwards to the detriment of the Franco-German axis (Polish and Ukrainian representation in the European parliament would equal that of Germany).

In addition to reconstruction costs, the economic consequences would include the impact on the Common Agricultural Policy, not only for Polish farmers, but also for farmers in other countries who would lose out on subsidies. Social cohesion may also be affected. Ultimately, there would be political and socio-economic challenges to be faced.

The diplomat Jorge Dezcallar points out that the Union would have to change the rule on unanimity for common foreign policy decisions<sup>39</sup>. This is compounded by the fact that the EU does not have a defence force capable of dealing independently with a significant threat on the continent, even a conventional one. Although the combined arsenals of member states would be sufficient to deter Russia, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, for now, only seeks to be capable of conducting non-executive missions (training) from within the Union itself. Above all, it has not yet been decided whether there will be a common defence. In the past, the French have considered and discarded it (Preven Plan, 1954).

In 2024, President Macron has reiterated the possibility of deploying Western forces to Ukraine if necessary<sup>40</sup>. Restraint and coordination with other countries is imperative when intervening with troops; moreover, European history counsels benevolence towards the vanquished.

The EU today cannot take a unanimous decision, nor does it have the capacity to deploy such troops; it would be a national decision, and countries that chose to do so would not do so in isolation against Russia. Not only would it be necessary to coordinate between France, Germany and Poland, but the US and UK would also have to be included, as all are affected by the issue. In this case, it would be strange if such an ad hoc coalition did not end up dragging NATO and the EU into a conventional war with the risk of nuclear escalation, hence the need for restraint. Be that as it may, the West seeks Russia's defeat; yet benevolence towards the vanquished will have to be kept in mind, as in Vienna

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<sup>39</sup> DEZCALLAR, J. *Op. cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>40</sup> RFI. "Macron vuelve a evocar la posibilidad de enviar tropas occidentales a Ucrania". 2/5/2024.

<https://www.rfi.fr/es/europa/20240502-macron-vuelve-a-evocar-la-posibilidad-de-enviar-tropas-occidentales-a-ucrania>

(1815) after the defeat of France and in contrast to Versailles (1919) after the defeat of Germany, leaving open the possibility of building bridges after the war.

The history of the conflict is yet to be written and there are several possible scenarios regarding Ukraine's future place in European security.

### **Ukraine's institutional fit within NATO and the EU. Scenarios**

The Americans are divided on Ukraine's possible accession to NATO. Some point to imaginative formulas that would even allow for the incorporation of a Ukraine with incomplete territorial integrity<sup>41</sup>. In the past, Norway and West Germany (a divided nation) were included, despite the danger of conflict with the USSR. It may be in the Ukrainians' interest for their country, even if divided, to join NATO. It may serve as a bargaining chip for when they decide to engage in dialogue, or in the event that a new Trump presidency forces to do so.

On the other hand, other Americans oppose it, as the US would gain nothing and the cost of bringing Ukraine into the Alliance would outweigh the benefits<sup>42</sup>. For them, Ukraine is a matter for Europeans, not NATO. Interestingly, for some Americans, NATO is about European security, but at other times it may even be global, as in Afghanistan or Iraq, perhaps even in Taiwan.

The war has accelerated Ukraine's path towards EU membership. It was nominated as a candidate in June 2022, and in December 2023 it was resolved to open negotiations<sup>43</sup>. Regarding the evolution of the war, Dezcallar points out that all scenarios are open: either a Russian or Ukrainian victory, depending on how either side defines it; a negotiated end; a Korean-style armistice; a protracted war; a coup in the Kremlin; an extension of the conflict; and even a nuclear holocaust. Russia's use of victimhood does not stop it from attempting to intimidate the West<sup>44</sup>, even with the nuclear threat.

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<sup>41</sup> SAROTTE, M. E. "A Better Path for Ukraine and NATO. What Kyiv Could Do Now for a Place in the Alliance", *Foreign Affairs*. 2024. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/better-path-ukraine-and-nato>

<sup>42</sup> LOGAN J. and SHIFRINSON J. *Op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/politica/eastern-partnership/ukraine/>

<sup>44</sup> GONZÁLEZ FÉRRIZ, R. *El nacionalismo ruso siempre ha querido asustar a Occidente*, interview with Serhii Plokyh, 2022. <https://www.politicaexterior.com/articulo/el-nacionalismo-ruso-siempre-ha-querido-asustar-a-occidente/>

Based on the assumption that NATO will continue to rely on the United States as an ally during the next US presidency (Harris or Trump), four scenarios may be envisaged for the institutional fit of the Ukraine of the future. Certain considerations are provided below, mainly from the perspective of EU interests, with an emphasis on security.

a) Ukraine in NATO and the EU. It appears to be the path laid down by the global West. It would be a worst-case scenario for the current Russian regime. “A humiliated and vindictive Russia would be highly dangerous for European stability”<sup>45</sup>. If this happens, it is in the best interest of Europeans that membership of the Alliance precedes accession to the Union, as was the case with the Baltic states in 2004, thus avoiding any window of vulnerability.

b) Ukraine neither in NATO nor in the EU. It is the worst-case scenario for Ukraine and the best-case scenario for a Russia anchored in the global East. It would appear as though the Americans and the EU had abandoned Ukraine, and it would affect the credibility of the global West with other partners or allies such as Asian nations. From a security perspective, it would not specifically pose an imminent increase in danger for the EU, as the Alliance umbrella would continue to be available to curb Russian ambitions in the Baltics or other eastern EU countries.

c) Ukraine in NATO but not in the EU. The Alliance would provide a sufficient security guarantee for Ukraine. As a result of possible negotiations with the EU, Ukraine could continue to enjoy an improved ad hoc partnership without limits in trade and economy, as well as social areas, including agriculture and energy. In 1972 and 1994, Norway refused EU membership; in this it differs from Ukraine. However, in economic and social terms, it could become a similar case to the Scandinavians; even extending to inclusion within the Schengen area. Security would be guaranteed by NATO, and although the EU has modest military capabilities, it could still use them to assist Ukraine, as it would operate outside EU territory under the Common Foreign Security Policy. This scenario (Ukraine's ad hoc association with the EU) does not seem to be the EU's most desired option so far, but would pragmatically serve its interests. It should not be ruled out in a negotiation.

d) Ukraine not in NATO but in the EU. This is the most dangerous scenario for the EU. The EU should not be condemned to constant vigilance on its own in the coming decades, in the face of an irreconcilable Russia which could unleash a new wave of

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<sup>45</sup> DEZCALLAR, J. *Op. cit.*, p. 205.

attacks on Ukraine. Therefore the US, through NATO, must be a part of the future solution for Ukraine.

This scenario (NATO no, EU yes) is similar to the one put forward by some proponents of a “post-American Europe”. To a certain degree, this would be similar to the case of Finland after its accession to the EU in 1995 and before joining the Alliance in 2023. Ukraine would not have the Alliance defence guarantee and neither would it have the modest contribution of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, being EU territory. As a security guarantee today, Article 5 of the Alliance is not comparable to Article 42.7 of the EU.

The challenges of internal cohesion in the EU outlined above would present vulnerabilities, new opportunities for Russia to continue attempting to break up the Union by acting on nationalist sentiments.

In some ways, Trumpist commercial interests could end up converging with Putin's political interests as regards the EU. *Divide et impera*. If Ukraine's non-NATO membership is coupled with the possible antagonism of Trumpism, which sees the EU as a trade rival, the time bomb could be triggered by anti-EU Russians or Americans.

Defence planning is of strategic importance, and although it is not yet consolidated in the Union as a single process, it is imperative that the European External Action Service, and specifically its Security and Defence Policy Department (SECDEFPOL), should set out policy guidelines to provide for post-ceasefire planning scenarios in Ukraine<sup>46</sup>. The options should also consider the future of the EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine, either as currently deployed outside Ukraine or inside the country, possibly under a security framework agreed with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)<sup>47</sup>.

## Conclusions

The war between Ukraine and Russia is exerting an influence on the power struggle between the US and China, the world is unsteadily reshaping itself while a certain durable

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<sup>46</sup> CASTILLA, J. C. *Op. cit.*, 2024, p. 259.

<sup>47</sup> FERNÁNDEZ SOLA, N. “When the War Ended. Pragmatic Proposals to Rescue European Union Relations with the Russian Federation”, *Electronic Journal of International Studies*, 43. 2022, pp. 1-39.

balance of power is re-established. Within this framework, the dynamics of groupings in the global West, East and South also condition countries and international organisations such as NATO and the EU that assist Ukraine. This is coupled with Ukraine's aspiration to join both organisations.

The outcome of the US election adds an element of uncertainty to the international system and what it may imply for relations within NATO and with the EU.

The future of the struggle between the West and the global East is unwritten, the unknowns extend to the future of the NATO-EU relationship, the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war remains to be seen, and the shape of Ukraine's institutional fit in NATO and even in the EU has not yet been settled.

The US does not want to dissociate itself from decisions affecting EU geopolitics and consequently, its neighbourhood policy. While the redefinition of the transatlantic alliance must at some point be approached, being a matter for NATO and the EU, currently, the Americans should not be left out of the solution for Ukraine and Russia. The US has not been oblivious to the causes, nor should it - for the time being - leave the European Union alone in the face of a vanquished yet vengeful Russia. When intervening with troops, restraint must prevail, as well as coordination in such an extreme case; and, finally, benevolence towards the vanquished.

Two precautions are necessary. Firstly, the EU should secure its presence as interlocutor at a possible negotiating table. France, Germany and perhaps Poland would not be enough, the EU should be present as such - it has the legal personality to do so - with opportunity and recognition of the interlocutors, its actorness will be at stake.

Secondly, the EU should include hypothetical scenarios in its defence planning initiatives, including the most dangerous scenario for the EU from a security perspective: a Ukraine outside NATO but in the EU - certainly a ticking time bomb that could be triggered by several parties.

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