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## *Europe Is Sleepwalking Into Another World War*

More than 100 years after World War I, Europe's leaders are sleepwalking toward a new all-out war. In 1914, the European governments believed that the war would last three weeks; it lasted four years and resulted in more than 20 million deaths. The same nonchalance is visible with the war in Ukraine. The dominant view is that the aggressor should be left broken and humbled. Then, the defeated power was Germany. Some dissenting voices, such as John Maynard Keynes, felt that the humbling of Germany would be a disaster. Their warnings went unheeded. Twenty-one years later, Europe was back at war, which lasted six years and killed 70 million people. History neither repeats itself nor seems to teach us anything, but it does illustrate similarities and differences.

The hundred years before 1914 offered Europe relative peace. What wars took place were of a short-lived nature. The reason for this was the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), which brought together the victors and the vanquished from the Napoleonic wars to create a lasting peace. The chair of the conference was Klemens von Metternich, who made sure that the defeated power (France) paid for its actions with territorial losses but that it signed the treaty along with Austria, England, Prussia, and Russia to secure peace with dignity.

### **Negotiation or Total Defeat**

While the Napoleonic wars took place between European powers, today's war is between a European (Russia) and a non-European (United States) power. It is a proxy war, with

both sides using a third country (Ukraine) to achieve geostrategic goals that go well beyond the country in question and the continent to which it belongs. Russia is at war with Ukraine because it is a war with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which is commanded by the United States. NATO has been at the service of U.S. geostrategic interests. Once a steadfast champion of the self-determination of peoples, Russia is now illegally sacrificing these same principles to assert its own security concerns, after failing to have them recognized through peaceful means, and out of an undisguised imperial nostalgia. For its part, since the end of the first cold war, the U.S. has striven to deepen Russia's defeat, a defeat which in fact was probably more self-inflicted than brought about by any superiority on the part of its opponent.

From NATO's perspective, the goal of the war in Ukraine is to inflict an unconditional defeat on Russia, preferably one that leads to regime change in Moscow. The duration of the war depends on that goal. Where is Russia's incentive to end the war when British Prime Minister Boris Johnson permits himself to [say](#) that sanctions against Russia will continue, no matter what Russia's position is now? Would it be sufficient for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be ousted (as was the case with Napoleon in 1815), or is the truth of the matter that the NATO countries insist on the ousting of Russia itself so that China's expansion can be halted? There was also regime change in the 1918 humbling of Germany, but it all ended up leading to Hitler and an even more devastating war. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's political greatness could be construed as being either in recognition of the brave patriot who defends his country from the invader to the last drop of blood or in recognition of the brave patriot who, faced with the imminence of so many innocent deaths and the asymmetry in military strength, successfully enlists the support of his allies to negotiate fiercely to secure a dignified peace. The fact that the former construction is now the prevalent one probably has little to do with President Zelenskyy's personal preferences.

### **Where Is Europe?**

During the two world wars of the 20th century, Europe was the self-proclaimed center of the world. That is why we call the two wars *world* wars. About 4 million of *Europe's* troops were in fact African and Asian. Many thousands of non-European deaths were the

price paid by the inhabitants of remote colonies of the countries involved, sacrificed in a war that did not concern them.

Now, Europe is but a small corner of the world, which the war in Ukraine will render even smaller. For centuries, Europe was merely the western tip of Eurasia, the huge landmass that stretched from China to the Iberian Peninsula and witnessed the exchange of knowledge, products, scientific innovations, and cultures. Much of what was later attributed to European exceptionalism (from the scientific revolution of the 16th century to the industrial revolution in the 19th century) cannot be understood, nor would it have been possible, without those centuries-old exchanges. The war in Ukraine—especially if it goes on for too long—runs the risk not only of amputating one of Europe’s historic powers (Russia), but also of isolating it from the rest of the world, notably from China.

The world is far bigger than what you get to see through European or North American lenses. Seeing through these lenses, Europeans have never felt so strong, so close to their larger partner, so sure of standing on the right side of history, with the whole planet being run by the rules of the “liberal order,” a world finally feeling strong enough to go forth sometime soon and conquer—or at least neutralize—China, after having destroyed China’s main partner, Russia.

Seeing through non-European lenses, on the other hand, Europe and the U.S. stand haughtily all but alone, probably capable of winning one battle, but on their way to certain defeat in the war of history. More than half of the world’s population lives in countries that have decided not to join the sanctions against Russia. Many of the United Nations member states that voted (rightly) against the illegal invasion of Ukraine did so based on their historical experience, which consisted of being invaded, not by Russia, but rather by the U.S., England, France, or Israel. Their decision was not dictated by ignorance, but by precaution. How can they trust countries that created SWIFT—a financial transfer system aimed at protecting economic transactions against political interference—only to end up removing from that system a country on political grounds? Countries that arrogate to themselves the power to confiscate the financial and gold reserves of sovereign nations like Afghanistan, Venezuela, and now Russia? Countries that trumpet freedom of expression as a sacrosanct universal value, but resort to censorship the moment they are exposed by it? Countries that are supposed to cherish democracy and yet have no qualms

about staging a coup whenever an election goes against their interests? Countries in whose eyes the “dictator” Nicolás Maduro becomes a trading partner overnight because the circumstances have changed? The world is no longer a place of innocence—if it ever was.

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