

Wagenknecht and the rest need to remember who helped Germany rebuild

By Conrad Black

It is a hackneyed cliché to say about Germany that it was too late unified, took too long to decide whether it was an Eastern or Western-facing country, and could not satisfy its own security concerns without inflicting excessive and unacceptable aggression upon its neighbours. It became the most powerful country in Europe with the unification of the German Empire by Bismarck celebrated at the Palace of Versailles in 1871. But it has not acted responsibly as the most powerful nation in Europe since the child emperor Wilhelm II fired Bismarck as the Imperial Chancellor in 1890. Since then, it has acted with extreme irresponsibility as the most powerful nation in Europe under the Kaiser, 1890-1918, and again under Hitler and the Third Reich, 1933-1945; or it acted responsibly but in a deferential and self-conscious mode under the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933 and under the Federal Republic since 1949.



After the war, America's Eisenhower imposed voluntary amnesia over Germany's monstrous provocations (Photo by M. McNeill/Fox Photos/Getty Images)

It is perfectly in order and far from premature for the Federal Republic now to contemplate stepping into its full and rightful position of leadership in Europe, and it appears to be a reasonable expectation that the likely leading party in next year's general election will be the Christian Democrats and their Bavarian allies and that they will resume with an accentuated consciousness of Germany's position a leading role in the politics of the European Union and of the European members of NATO, at the same time that it institutes economic measures, including a deradicalization of excessive acts of environmental zeal, to relaunch Europe's largest economy, which has been stalled for several years.

It is also noteworthy that the apparently rising stars in the German opposition, the right-populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Sahra Wagenknecht's left-populist BSW, though they are starkly opposed in other respects, are reviving the intermittent historic German interest in Eastern Europe and are contemplating an enhancement of relations with Russia, and in the case of socialists who are heirs of the old East German Communists, a withdrawal from NATO and advocacy of its

disbandment, and an alliance with Russia. Once again, as so often in the past, some Germans are hearing the misleading forest murmurs of the East.

This would be a policy that would be erroneous for three conspicuous reasons. It would be rank ingratitude to the United States, which was chiefly responsible for a liberal and generous occupation policy in western Germany after 1945 and for the early establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949, and for a prompt and respectful entry of West Germany into the Western Alliance in 1955, over the objections of France and the serious reservations of Churchill's government in the United Kingdom. President Eisenhower, who received the surrender of Nazi Germany in the West, and was the chief military governor of Germany, effectively imposed a state of voluntary amnesia over the monstrous provocations that Germany had inflicted upon most of the other NATO allies just 10 to 15 years before.

Second, there is absolutely nothing useful that Russia could do for Germany apart from supplying it with natural gas which Germany could get elsewhere, and any such arrangement would legitimately arouse extreme concern in the much-downtrodden intermediate states including Finland, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine, which would by then be seeking or would have attained NATO membership. Despite Wagenknecht's presumptuous notion that a sharply reoriented German government could unto itself dissolve NATO, the result would be to leave all of the fretful states enumerated in the preceding sentence in a continuing alliance with Western Europe, southern Europe, and North America. No sane German could imagine that their country would be better off in some tandem with Russia than in continued alliance with those whom they would have forsaken. Nor, in this scenario, would Germany's position in the European Union be unconditionally renewed. Russo-German alliances have not been durably

successful, under Frederick the Great, Bismarck, or Hitler.

Finally, German politicians would do well to remember that apart from the fact that the United States was chiefly responsible for the moral rehabilitation of Germany, the protection of Germany against the USSR, and the reunification of Germany, because unlike the Russians, British, and French, the United States has no fear of a united Germany, that if Germany defected from the American alliance, it would invite Washington to contemplate the fact that Russia would be a much more useful ally for the United States than Germany would then have proved to be.

It is certainly time for Germany to act on the consciousness of its own strength, but that should not be construed as an emancipation of Germany from the ironclad geopolitical realities that its strongest and most useful possible ally is the United States, and that no association of Germany and Russia has ever achieved anything except the temporary suppression of the irrepressible peoples of Eastern Europe.

Sensible foreign policy course adjustments for Germany are timely, but the hour will never come for Germany to take leave of its political senses (again).

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