

The Specter of Germany Is Rising. Diana Johnstone

To meet the imaginary Russian threat to Western Europe, Germany will lead an expanded, militarized EU.

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The European Union is girding for a long war against Russia that appears clearly contrary to European economic interests and social stability. A war that is apparently irrational – as many are – has deep emotional roots and claims ideological justification. Such wars are hard to end because they extend outside the range of rationality.

For decades after the Soviet Union entered Berlin and decisively defeated the Third Reich, Soviet leaders worried about the threat of “German revanchism.” Since World War II could be seen as German revenge for being deprived of victory in World War I, couldn’t aggressive German *Drang nach Osten* be revived, especially if it enjoyed Anglo-American support? There had always been a minority in U.S. and U.K. power circles that would have liked to complete Hitler’s war against the Soviet Union.

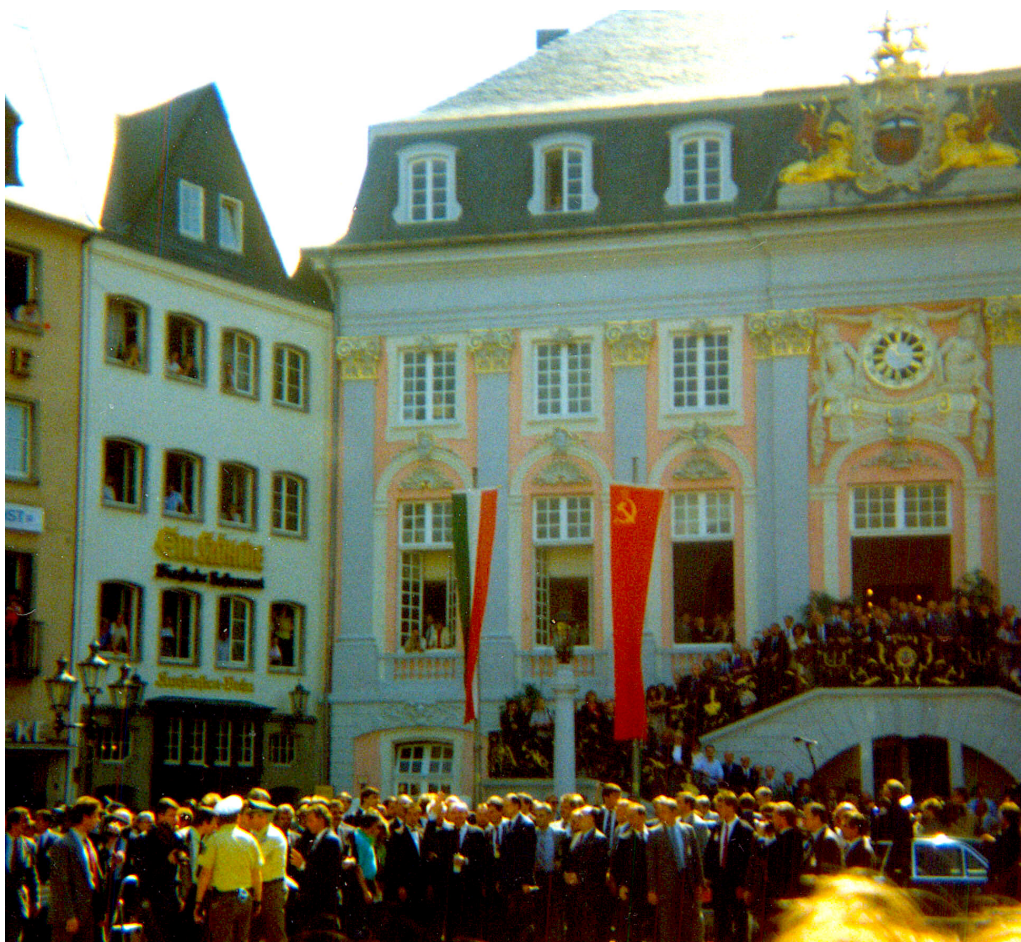
It was not the desire to spread communism, but the need for a buffer zone to stand in the way of such dangers that was the primary motivation for the ongoing Soviet political and military clampdown on the tier of countries from Poland to Bulgaria that the Red Army had wrested from Nazi occupation.

This concern waned considerably in the early 1980s as a young German generation took to the streets in peace demonstrations against the stationing of nuclear “Euromissiles” which could increase the risk of nuclear war on German soil. The movement created the image of a new peaceful Germany. I believe that Mikhail Gorbachev took this transformation seriously.

On June 15, 1989, Gorbachev came to Bonn, which was then the modest capital of a deceptively modest West Germany. Apparently delighted with the warm and friendly welcome, Gorbachev stopped to shake hands with people along the way in that peaceful university town that had been the scene of large peace demonstrations.

I was there and experienced his unusually warm, firm handshake and eager smile. I have no

doubt that Gorbachev sincerely [believed](#) in a “common European home” where East and West Europe could live happily side by side united by some sort of democratic socialism.



Gorbachev on June 13, 1989 in the market-square in Bonn. (Jüppsche/Wikimedia Commons)

Gorbachev died at age 91 two weeks ago, on Aug. 30. His dream of Russia and Germany living happily in their “common European home” had soon been fatally undermined by the Clinton administration’s go-ahead to eastward expansion of NATO. But the day before Gorbachev’s death, leading German politicians in Prague wiped out any hope of such a happy end by proclaiming their leadership of a Europe dedicated to combating the Russian enemy.

These were politicians from the very parties – the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and the Greens – that took the lead in the 1980s peace movement.

German Europe Must Expand Eastward

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is a colorless SPD politician, but his Aug. 29 speech in Prague was inflammatory in its implications. Scholz called for an expanded, militarized European Union under German leadership. He claimed that the Russian operation in Ukraine raised the question of “where the dividing line will be in the future between this free Europe and a neo-imperial autocracy.” We cannot simply watch, he said, “as free countries are wiped off the map and disappear behind walls or iron curtains.”

(Note: the conflict in Ukraine is clearly the unfinished business of the collapse of the Soviet Union, aggravated by malicious outside provocation. As in the Cold War, Moscow’s defensive reactions are interpreted as harbingers of Russian invasion of Europe, and thus a pretext for

arms buildups.)

To meet this imaginary threat, Germany will lead an expanded, militarized EU. First, Scholz told his European audience in the Czech capital, “I am committed to the enlargement of the European Union to include the states of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova and, in the long term, Georgia”. Worrying about Russia moving the dividing line West is a bit odd while planning to incorporate three former Soviet States, one of which (Georgia) is geographically and culturally very remote from Europe but on Russia’s doorstep.

In the “Western Balkans”, Albania and four extremely weak statelets left from former Yugoslavia (North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and widely unrecognized Kosovo) mainly produce emigrants and are far from EU economic and social standards. Kosovo and Bosnia are militarily occupied de facto NATO protectorates. Serbia, more solid than the others, shows no signs of renouncing its beneficial relations with Russia and China, and popular enthusiasm for “Europe” among Serbs has faded.

Adding these member states will achieve “a stronger, more sovereign, geopolitical European Union,” said Scholz. A “more geopolitical Germany” is more like it. As the EU grows eastward, Germany is “in the center” and will do everything to bring them all together. So, in addition to enlargement, Scholz calls for “a gradual shift to majority decisions in common foreign policy” to replace the unanimity required today.

What this means should be obvious to the French. Historically, the French have defended the consensus rule so as not to be dragged into a foreign policy they don’t want. French leaders have exalted the mythical “Franco-German couple” as guarantor of European harmony, mainly to keep German ambitions under control.

But Scholz says he doesn’t want “an EU of exclusive states or directorates,” which implies the final divorce of that “couple.” With an EU of 30 or 36 states, he notes, “fast and pragmatic action is needed.” And he can be sure that German influence on most of these poor, indebted and often corrupt new Member States will produce the needed majority.

France has always hoped for an EU security force separate from NATO in which the French military would play a leading role. But Germany has other ideas. “NATO remains the guarantor of our security,” said Scholz, rejoicing that President Biden is “a convinced transatlanticist.”

“Every improvement, every unification of European defense structures within the EU framework strengthens NATO,” Scholz said. “Together with other EU partners, Germany will therefore ensure that the EU’s planned rapid reaction force is operational in 2025 and will then also provide its core.

This requires a clear command structure. Germany will face up to this responsibility “when we lead the rapid reaction force in 2025,” Scholz said. It has already been decided that Germany will support Lithuania with a rapidly deployable brigade and NATO with further forces in a high state of readiness.

Serving to Lead ... Where?



Robert Habeck speaking at protest before Green Party headquarters, Berlin, Oct. 28, 2020. (Leonhard Lenz/Wikimedia Commons)

In short, Germany's military buildup will give substance to Robert Habeck's notorious statement in Washington last March that: "The stronger Germany serves, the greater its role." The Green's Habeck is Germany's economics minister and the second most powerful figure in Germany's current government.

The remark was well understood in Washington: by serving the U.S.-led Western empire, Germany is strengthening its role as European leader. Just as the U.S. arms, trains and occupies Germany, Germany will provide the same services for smaller EU states, notably to its east.

Since the start of the Russian operation in Ukraine, German politician Ursula von der Leyen has used her position as head of the EU Commission to impose ever more drastic sanctions on Russia, leading to the threat of a serious European energy crisis this winter. Her hostility to Russia seems boundless. In Kiev last April she called for rapid EU membership for Ukraine, notoriously the most corrupt country in Europe and far from meeting EU standards. She proclaimed that "Russia will descend into economic, financial and technological decay, while Ukraine is marching towards a European future." For von der Leyen, Ukraine is "fighting our war." All of this goes far beyond her authority to speak for the EU's 27 Members, but nobody stops her.

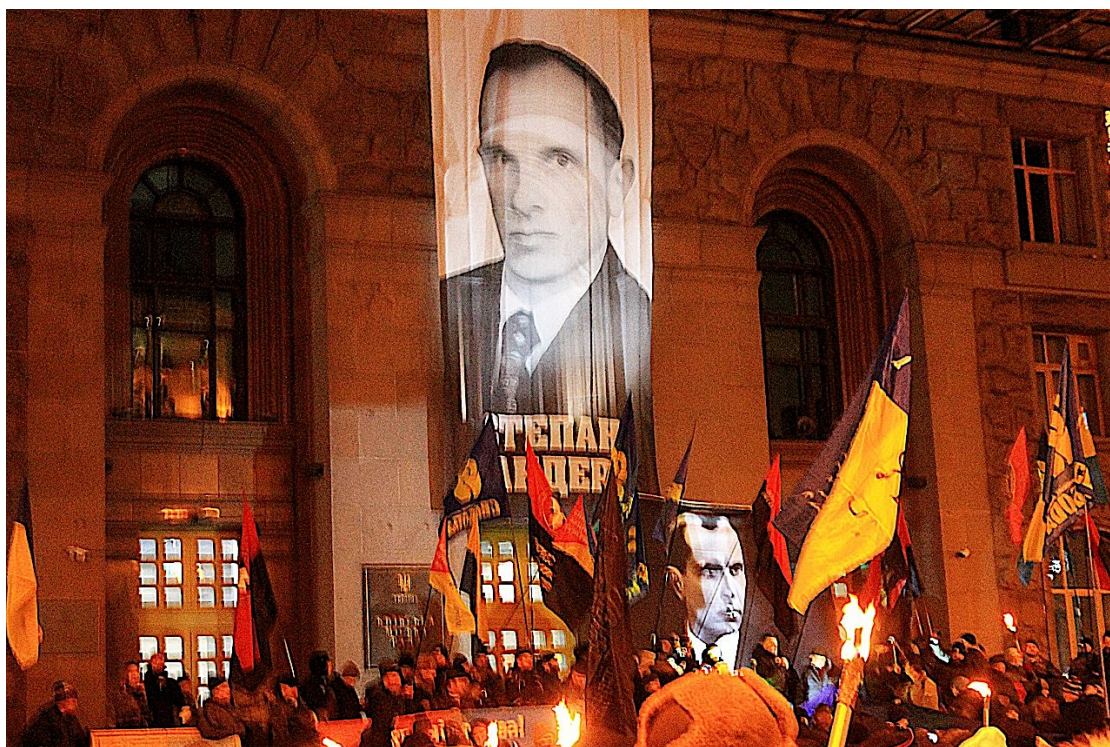
Germany's Green Party foreign minister Annalena Baerbock is every bit as intent on "ruining Russia." Proponent of a "feminist foreign policy", Baerbock expresses policy in personal terms. "If I give the promise to people in Ukraine, we stand with you as long as you need us," she told the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy (NED)-sponsored Forum 2000 in Prague on Aug. 31, speaking in English. "Then I want to deliver no matter what my German voters think, but I want to deliver to the people of Ukraine."

“People will go on the street and say, we cannot pay our energy prices, and I will say, ‘Yes I know so we will help you with social measures. [...] We will stand with Ukraine and this means the sanctions will stay also til winter time even if it gets really tough for politicians.’”

Certainly, support for Ukraine is strong in Germany, but perhaps because of the looming energy shortage, a recent Forsa poll indicates that some 77 percent of Germans would favor diplomatic efforts to end the war – which should be the business of the foreign minister. But Baerbock shows no interest in diplomacy, only in “strategic failure” for Russia – however long it takes.

In the 1980s peace movement, a generation of Germans was distancing itself from that of their parents and vowed to overcome “enemy images” inherited from past wars. Curiously, Baerbock, born in 1980, has referred to her grandfather who fought in the Wehrmacht as somehow having contributed to European unity. Is this the generational pendulum?

The Little Revanchists



Stepan Bandera torchlight parade in Kiev, Jan. 1, 2020. (A1/Wikimedia Commons)

There is reason to surmise that current German Russophobia draws much of its legitimization from the Russophobia of former Nazi allies in smaller European countries.

While German anti-Russian revanchism may have taken a couple of generations to assert itself, there were a number of smaller, more obscure revanchisms that flourished at the end of the European war that were incorporated into United States Cold War operations. Those little revanchisms were not subjected to the denazification gestures or Holocaust guilt imposed on Germany. Rather, they were welcomed by the C.I.A., Radio Free Europe and Congressional committees for their fervent anticommunism. They were strengthened politically in the United States by anticommunist diasporas from Eastern Europe.

Of these, the Ukrainian diaspora was surely the largest, the most intensely political and the

most influential, in both Canada and the American Middle West. Ukrainian fascists who had previously collaborated with Nazi invaders were the most numerous and active, leading the Bloc of Anti-Bolshevik Nations with links to German, British and U.S. Intelligence.

Eastern European Galicia, not to be confused with Spanish Galicia, has been back and forth part of Russia and Poland for centuries. After World War II it was divided between Poland and Ukraine. Ukrainian Galicia is the center of a virulent brand of Ukrainian nationalism, whose principal World War II hero was Stepan Bandera. This nationalism can properly be called “fascist” not simply because of superficial signs – its symbols, salutes or tatoos – but because it has always been fundamentally racist and violent.

Incited by Western powers, Poland, Lithuania and the Habsburg Empire, the key to Ukrainian nationalism was that it was *Western*, and thus superior. Since Ukrainians and Russians stem from the same population, pro-Western Ukrainian ultra-nationalism was built on imaginary myths of racial differences: Ukrainians were the true Western whatever-it-was, whereas Russians were mixed with “Mongols” and thus an inferior race. Banderist Ukrainian nationalists have openly called for elimination of Russians *as such*, as inferior beings.

So long as the Soviet Union existed, Ukrainian racial hatred of Russians had anticommunism as its cover, and Western intelligence agencies could support them on the “pure” ideological grounds of the fight against Bolshevism and Communism. But now that Russia is no longer ruled by communists, the mask has fallen, and the racist nature of Ukrainian ultra-nationalism is visible – for all who want to see it.

However, Western leaders and media are determined not to notice.

Ukraine is not just like any Western country. It is deeply and dramatically divided between Donbass in the East, Russian territories given to Ukraine by the Soviet Union, and the anti-Russian West, where Galicia is located. Russia’s defense of Donbass, wise or unwise, by no means indicates a Russian intention to invade other countries. This false alarm is the pretext for the remilitarization of Germany in alliance with the Anglo-Saxon powers against Russia.

The Yugoslav Prelude



Cutting firewood in Sarajevo during wars that broke up Yugoslavia, 1993. (Christian Maréchal/Wikimedia Commons)

This process began in the 1990s, with the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia was not a member of the Soviet bloc. Precisely for that reason, the country got loans from the West which in the 1970s led to a debt crisis in which the leaders of each of the six federated republics wanted to shove the debt onto others. This favored separatist tendencies in the relatively rich Slovenian and Croatian republics, tendencies enforced by ethnic chauvinism and encouragement from outside powers, especially Germany.

During World War II, German occupation had split the country apart. Serbia, allied to France and Britain in World War I, was subject to a punishing occupation. Idyllic Slovenia was absorbed into the Third Reich, while Germany supported an independent Croatia, ruled by the fascist Ustasha party, which included most of Bosnia, scene of the bloodiest internal fighting. When the war ended, many Croatian Ustasha emigrated to Germany, the United States and Canada, never giving up the hope of reviving secessionist Croatian nationalism.

In Washington in the 1990s, members of Congress got their impressions of Yugoslavia from a single expert: 35-year-old Croatian-American Mira Baratta, assistant to Sen. Bob Dole (Republican presidential candidate in 1996). Baratta's grandfather had been an important Ustasha officer in Bosnia and her father was active in the Croatian diaspora in California. Baratta won over not only Dole but virtually the whole Congress to the Croatian version of Yugoslav conflicts blaming everything on the Serbs.

In Europe, Germans and Austrians, most notably Otto von Habsburg, heir to the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire and member of the European Parliament from Bavaria, succeeded in portraying Serbs as the villains, thus achieving an effective revenge against their historic World War I enemy, Serbia. In the West, it became usual to identify Serbia as "Russia's historic ally", forgetting that in recent history Serbia's closest allies were Britain and especially France.

In September 1991, a leading German Christian Democratic politician and constitutional lawyer explained why Germany should promote the breakup of Yugoslavia by recognizing the Slovenian and Croat secessionist Yugoslav republics. (Former CDU Minister of Defense Rupert Scholz at the 6th Fürstenfeldbrucker Symposium for the Leadership of the German Military and Business, held September 23 – 24, 1991.)

By ending the division of Germany, Rupert Scholz said,

“We have, so to speak, overcome and mastered the most important consequences of the Second World War ... but in other areas we are still dealing with the consequences of the First World War” – which, he noted “started in Serbia.”

“Yugoslavia, as a consequence of the First World War, is a very artificial construction, never compatible with the idea of self-determination,” Rupert Scholz said. He concluded: “In my opinion, Slovenia and Croatia must be immediately recognized internationally. (...) When this recognition has taken place, the Yugoslavian conflict will no longer be a domestic Yugoslav problem, where no international intervention can be permitted.”

And indeed, recognition was followed by massive Western intervention which continues to this day. By taking sides, Germany, the United States and NATO ultimately produced a disastrous result, a half dozen statelets, with many unsettled issues and heavily dependent on Western powers. Bosnia-Herzegovina is under military occupation as well as the dictates of a “High Representative” who happens to be German. It has lost about half its population to emigration.

Only Serbia shows signs of independence, refusing to join in Western sanctions on Russia, despite heavy pressure. For Washington strategists the breakup of Yugoslavia was an exercise in using ethnic divisions to break up larger entities, the USSR and then Russia.

Humanitarian Bombing

Western politicians and media persuaded the public that the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia was a “humanitarian” war, generously waged to “protect the Kosovars” (after multiple assassinations by armed secessionists provoked Serbian authorities into the inevitable repression used as pretext for the bombing).

But the real point of the Kosovo war was that it transformed NATO from a defensive into an aggressive alliance, ready to wage war anywhere, without U.N. mandate, on whatever pretext it chose.

This lesson was clear to the Russians. After the Kosovo war, NATO could no longer credibly claim that it was a purely “defensive” alliance.

As soon as Serbian President Milosevic, to save his country’s infrastructure from NATO destruction, agreed to allow NATO troops to enter Kosovo, the U.S. unceremoniously grabbed a huge swath territory to build the its first big U.S. military base in the Balkans. NATO troops are still there.

Just as the United States rushed to build that base in Kosovo, it was clear what to expect of the U.S. after it succeeded in 2014 to install a government in Kiev eager to join NATO. This

would be the opportunity for the U.S. to take over the Russian naval base in Crimea. Since it was known that the majority of the population in Crimea wanted to return to Russia (as it had from 1783 to 1954), Putin was able to forestall this threat by holding a popular referendum confirming its return.

East European Revanchism Captures the EU

The call by German Chancellor Scholz to enlarge the European Union by up to nine new members recalls the enlargements of 2004 and 2007 that brought in twelve new members, nine of them from the former Soviet bloc, including the three Baltic States once part of the Soviet Union.

That enlargement already shifted the balance eastward and enhanced German influence. In particular, the political elites of Poland and especially the three Baltic States, were heavily under the influence of the United States and Britain, where many had lived in exile during Soviet rule. They brought into EU institutions a new wave of fanatic anticommunism, not always distinguishable from Russophobia.

The European Parliament, obsessed with virtue signaling in regard to human rights, was particularly receptive to the zealous anti-totalitarianism of its new Eastern European members.



European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. (U.N. Photo/Eskinder Debebe)

Revanchism and the Memory Weapon

As an aspect of anti-communist lustration, or purges, Eastern European States sponsored “Memory Institutes” devoted to denouncing the crimes of communism. Of course, such campaigns were used by far-right politicians to cast suspicion on the left in general. As

[explained](#) by European scholar Zoltan Dujisin, “anticommunist memory entrepreneurs” at the head of these institutes succeeded in lifting their public information activities from the national, to the European Union level, using Western bans on Holocaust denial to complain, that while Nazi crimes had been condemned and punished at Nuremberg, communist crimes had not.

The tactic of the anti-communist entrepreneurs was to demand that references to the Holocaust be accompanied by denunciations of the Gulag. This campaign had to deal with a delicate contradiction since it tended to challenge the uniqueness of the Holocaust, a dogma essential to gaining financial and political support from West European memory institutes.

In 2008, the EP adopted a resolution establishing August 23 as “European Day of Remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism” – for the first time adopting what had been a fairly isolated far right equation. A 2009 EP resolution on “European Conscience and Totalitarianism” called for support of national institutes specializing in totalitarian history.

Dujisin explains, “Europe is now haunted by the specter of a new memory. The Holocaust’s singular standing as a negative founding formula of European integration, the culmination of long-standing efforts from prominent Western leaders ... is increasingly challenged by a memory of communism, which disputes its uniqueness.”

East European memory institutes together formed the “Platform of European Memory and Conscience,” which between 2012 and 2016 organized a series of exhibits on “Totalitarianism in Europe: Fascism—Nazism—Communism,” traveling to museums, memorials, foundations, city halls, parliaments, cultural centers, and universities in 15 European countries, supposedly to “improve public awareness and education about the gravest crimes committed by the totalitarian dictatorships.”

Under this influence, the European Parliament on Sept. 19, 2019 adopted a resolution “on the importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe” that went far beyond equating political crimes by proclaiming a distinctly Polish interpretation of history as European Union policy. It goes so far as to proclaim that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is responsible for World War II – and thus Soviet Russia is as guilty of the war as Nazi Germany.

The resolution,

“Stresses that the Second World War, the most devastating war in Europe’s history, was started as an immediate result of the notorious Nazi-Soviet Treaty on Non-Aggression of 23 August 1939, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and its secret protocols, whereby two totalitarian regimes that shared the goal of world conquest divided Europe into two zones of influence;”

It further:

“Recalls that the Nazi and communist regimes carried out mass murders, genocide and deportations and caused a loss of life and freedom in the 20th century on a scale unseen in human history, and recalls the horrific crime of the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi regime; condemns in the strongest terms the acts of aggression, crimes against humanity and mass human rights violations perpetrated by the Nazi,

communist and other totalitarian regimes;”

This of course not only directly contradicts the Russian celebration of the “Great Patriotic War” to defeat the Nazi invasion, it also took issue with the recent efforts of Russian President Vladimir Putin to put the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement in the context of prior refusals of Eastern European states, notably Poland, to ally with Moscow against Hitler.

But the EP resolution:

“Is deeply concerned about the efforts of the current Russian leadership to distort historical facts and whitewash crimes committed by the Soviet totalitarian regime and considers them a dangerous component of the information war waged against democratic Europe that aims to divide Europe, and therefore calls on the Commission to decisively counteract these efforts;”

Thus the importance of Memory for the future, turns out to be an ideological declaration of war against Russia based on interpretations of World War II, especially since the memory entrepreneurs implicitly suggest that the past crimes of communism deserve punishment – like the crimes of Nazism. It is not impossible that this line of thought arouses some tacit satisfaction among certain individuals in Germany.

When Western leaders speak of “economic war against Russia,” or “ruining Russia” by arming and supporting Ukraine, one wonders whether they are consciously preparing World War III, or trying to provide a new ending to World War II. Or will the two merge?

As it shapes up, with NATO openly trying to “overextend” and thus defeat Russia with a war of attrition in Ukraine, it is somewhat as if Britain and the United States, some 80 years later, switched sides and joined German-dominated Europe to wage war against Russia, alongside the heirs to Eastern European anticommunism, some of whom were allied to Nazi Germany.

History may help understand events, but the cult of memory easily becomes the cult of revenge. Revenge is a circle with no end. It uses the past to kill the future. Europe needs clear heads looking to the future, able to understand the present.

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Diana Johnstone was press secretary of the Green Group in the European Parliament from 1989 to 1996. In her latest book, [Circle in the Darkness: Memoirs of a World Watcher](#) (Clarity Press, 2020), she recounts key episodes in the transformation of the German Green Party from a peace to a war party. Her other books include [Fools’ Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions](#) (Pluto/Monthly Review) and in co-authorship with her father, Paul H. Johnstone, [From MAD to Madness: Inside Pentagon Nuclear War Planning](#) (Clarity Press). She can be reached at diana.johnstone@wanadoo.fr

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Featured image: Olaf Scholz, federal chancellor of Germany, meets Volodymyr Zelenskyy, president of

Ukraine, in Kiev, Feb. 14, 2022. (President of Ukraine)

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