



Virtual Event | The Ambassador's Series: A Conversation with French Ambassador Philippe Étienne

TRANSCRIPT

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- Partici Ambassador Philippe Étienne, *The Ambassador of France to the United States*
- Walter Russell Mead, *Ravenel B. Curry III Distinguished Fellow, Hudson Institute*

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Walter Russell Mead:

Good morning to friends here in the conference hall and also to those joining us online. My name is Walter Mead and I am the Ravenel B. Curry III Distinguished Fellow here at Hudson Institute. Today, it is really my great pleasure to host my friend and neighbor, France's ambassador to the United States Philippe Etienne for a discussion on Trans-Atlantic relations and French foreign policy. And because France, like the United States, is a global power with global interests and also a power that, like the United States, has a kind of an ideological as well as a realist component in its foreign policy. I think hearing from the French ambassador is particularly instructive and useful for Americans. And the French capability to develop sort of independent insights and fresh vision is one that I think all Americans, whether or not they end up agreeing with these French perspectives, would do very well to take into account.

And Ambassador Etienne is remarkably well qualified to fulfill this important diplomatic and I would say even intellectual role. He's one of France's most experienced and distinguished diplomats. He assumed his current post in September of 2019 and he served in numerous positions within the foreign ministry for Europe and foreign affairs, including the ambassador to Germany, diplomatic advisor to the president, director of the cabinet of the minister of foreign and European affairs, permanent representative of France to the European Union, as well as having served as ambassador to Romania.

So Ambassador Etienne, thank you very much for joining me and for sharing some of your time with us at Hudson Institute. Hudson, by the way, Hudson Institute is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization based in Washington, DC. While Hudson has many research projects and other things I think. And Hudson Institute itself takes no formal position on political issues. It's safe to say that Hudson overall is an Institute that is committed to a strong American role and believes that success, American success in foreign affairs is crucial to world peace, American security and it cannot be achieved without the alliances around the world of whom obviously our oldest alliance with France is one of the most important. So Mr. Ambassador, Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine was one of those rare events in international affairs that one can call genuinely shocking. How has the invasion impacted Europe?

Ambassador Etienne:

Well, thank you, Walter. Thank you very much for your invitation, but also for your introduction both about France and about myself. It was a shock indeed for all of us, but for Europe it means the comeback of war to Europe, the flow of refugees. More than 10% of the population of Ukraine is now in the territory of member states of European Union. It's something which never happened also since World War II. So it's not only a shock, but it's also a historical change, which means it called for historical decisions on our side. And maybe we will discuss this later, but we have taken these decisions. Especially relevant for France in France is right now the chair, the rotating chair of the council of the European Union. But for all of us in Europe it's... And I think around the globe, because it's both of course something happening in Europe, but it is also a global event. So the two dimensions are very important.

Walter Russell Mead:

Given that the war has disrupted supply chains and raised concerns over energy and food supplies, not only in Europe by the way, but in many other countries around the world. And we have, as you say, both

the refugee problems and the security problems. What are the principle concerns of European policy makers at the moment?

Ambassador Etienne:

We have both short-term priorities and longer-term concerning the effects of this war. The short-term priorities were to react and respond urgently and in a coordinated way with our allies and partners, including, and particularly the United States, of course, to the unprovoked invasion and brutal invasion of Ukraine by Russia. So it means both sanctions which had never been seen concerning such a major economy like Russia. And sanctions increasing, we have already adopted five runs of sanctions. It means supporting Ukraine on different levels. Maybe we'll come back to this. For first time in its history as European Union is providing funds for the member states for its member states to send weapons to another country.

It means also welcoming the refugees and providing a very large humanitarian relief to Ukraine inside the borders of Ukraine. It means also of course, handling the very close relation with Ukraine on the political side, our president like the American president, like other heads of state, speaks constantly with President Zelensky, including in terms of seeing how we can accompany his negotiation, which is so, so difficult with the Russians. It means supporting Ukraine from an economic and macroeconomic and financial point of view, we must not forget this. Because it's a war, but it's also a terrible time for the Ukrainian economy, which must said, it's part of the resistance of Ukraine. And on all those levels, France and Europe have been present.

On the longer-term perspective. I thank you for reminding us that the energy and still more, the food dimensions are maybe still more relevant outside Europe than in Europe. Well, the energy dimension is crucial for Europe, both because we have to decide on sanctions against Russia but also because the prices of energy are going upwards like here in the United States or worldwide. But the food dimension is really global and threatening other countries. And it is also politically something we must keep in mind. As you know, we have very much campaigned all around the world to condemn the Russian invasion in the United Nations.

If we want to have the support of the other countries, the other continents, we must also of course take their own concerns into account. And for many of them, this dimension is very important. So France has proposed a plan, a global plan to prevent and also to alleviate the dimensions of this war on the food situation. And these consequences are the direct consequences of the war, of the invasion, not of our sanctions. It is also a very important dimension in our own narrative.

Walter Russell Mead:

Now this is, this is very important, and I think it has been somewhat under-covered maybe in the press that while Europe has a problem with both supply and price, if Russian oil disappears from the market, and the U.S. would have problems with price lower and not so much with supply. There are many other countries in the world that could not pay the higher prices if the price of energy continues to rise. And we could see political instability, direct consequences of this war spreading. Already in Sri Lanka, we see something that almost approaches a social meltdown over rising fuel and food prices. So the crisis of this war may have only just begun to impact. Do you see differences sitting in Washington and obviously

following news here, and in Europe, do you see differences in the interpretations of the war or events on the different sides of the Atlantic? Or are we looking at it more or less the same way?

Ambassador Etienne:

I would say we are looking at it the same way, basically. It's both from the origin, which is clear. It is an unjustified aggression by Russia. It is also a blatant violation of the principles and of the charter of the United Nations. We see now another dimension, which is the massive violation of international humanitarian law and atrocities committed which are more crimes. And maybe you've seen it is a new dimension of our support to Ukraine. We have decided, as France, not only to support the investigation by the International Criminal Court to support politically, financially, and with our expertise, but also to send our investigators to Ukraine to help the Ukrainian justice. So it is a new dimension.

And unfortunately of this support we give to Ukraine after the atrocities we have, which have been discovered after the Russian army left the Northern region, the north of Kyiv. And so I could see, I could quote many other examples where I think we see the situation the same way. Of course, the difference being that it's much closer to us than to the United States. But I think the U.S. sees exactly as we do this war as a major threat to international security and a major violation of our basic principles.

Walter Russell Mead:

One of the responses we've seen has been new conversation about the potential place of Ukraine in the European Union, something that would be a massive step for the EU. I think sometimes people underestimate the difficulties and the cost of integrating a country like Ukraine, even absent the Russian security threat with the EU. And historically, the French have been skeptical, I think, about... And maybe that's unfair, but you can tell me skeptical about the prospects for this. How is that seen now in Paris?

Ambassador Etienne:

Well, thank you for the question. Indeed, I don't think we are skeptical about the idea of enlargement in general, but France has been among the countries we've said historically, I will come by to Ukraine after that, look before accepting new member states, the European Union must be in a capacity to do it. And so we have usually two sets of criteria, are the candidate countries ready? Because to become a member means a lot of things. And is the European and itself ready?

Walter Russell Mead:

Yes.

Ambassador Etienne:

So we have been among those who have said, "Let's not forget the second set of criteria." This is why we have in the last years succeeded in changing the negotiating process once we have decided to open negotiations with what we are doing now with some members in the Western Balkans. This being said, and as we have already said it, this war, this aggression, this invasion is absolutely a game changer of course, it changes the history of our continent. So we have to take seriously the signature by President Zelensky of an official, under the bombs of the Russian army so to say, to request officially the accession

of Ukraine to the European Union. It is something really more than symbolic. We must recall that the European Union and Ukraine are not on a blank page.

We have an association agreement already, which is quite important and substantial and structural. Which covers all fields of relations. And interestingly, it is this association agreement, which more precisely, the fact that under the pressure of Moscow, the former President Yanukovich withdrew his support to the signature of this agreement, which unleash the protest by the Ukrainian people on Maidan on the Maidan Square in Kyiv, if you remember, at the end of 2013, beginning 2014.

So there is already this history of the association of Ukraine to the EU being a close... A very meaningful and delicate part of its evolution and including from point of view, acceleration with Russia, its neighbor. Now, once the French presidency of the European Union has received this request, official request this time, of accession. We have decided, together with the other leaders, we met the met in Versailles, one and a half months ago. Two things, first to transmit, it is the first step of the process, immediately without any delay, the request to the European Commission, which according to our treaties, must assess, must give an assessment of the candidate here.

And the second step will be the commission giving its assessment. And you know that Ursula von der Leyen, the president of European Commission was in Kyiv and discussed this with President Zelensky. And the second thing the leaders decided in Versailles was to say, Ukraine is part of the European family. What does it mean concretely beyond the association agreement and the process of the request for accession? It means very practical things beyond even the support of Ukraine, which I described earlier. I will give you only one example. We have succeeded, which is a technical prowess, in a matter of weeks, to connect Ukraine to the electrical grid of the European Union. Before that Ukraine was connected to the electrical grid of Russia.

So this idea of a Ukraine being part of the European family is both something symbolic, of course and both political, but also very, very practical. And you can be sure that we will follow this considering also, and you must not forget that we have Western Balkan countries, which are not yet member of the European, which have been recognized as having a vocation of being members. Some of them are engaged in enlargement negotiation, accession negotiations. So we have also to exist into account, of course.

Walter Russell Mead:

And again, for Americans who may be following this, for the EU accession it's not just about the additional costs of integrating economies where the per capita income is far below or the level of development is different from that of most of the EU, but also European institutions. If you have 27 members, it's different from a union of six members, if you were to go to 35 members, everything becomes more complicated. Even the number of translators that have to try to give simultaneous translation from Finnish to Romanian. It's a very complex process. So Americans should be aware of just how great a change it is for Europe to be moving in this direction.

Ambassador Etienne:

Yes. Not many people understand that. Thank you for saying that. But at the same time, again, this war is a game changer. So the European and the European integration will have to adapt themselves to this.

Walter Russell Mead:

There also seem to be a lot of big changes taking place in Germany. Germany in its own way, perhaps less rapidly and less fully than some European countries is accepting that something historic is happening to its east. And we see Germany talking about raising defense spending and beginning to change its approach to arming Ukraine and so on. How does that look from Paris, that change?

Ambassador Etienne:

Oh, it looks positive, definitely. It means indeed considering the size and the influence of Germany in Europe, it means more possibilities. And it goes together with other countries evolving, Denmark deciding to hold referendum in June, I think, I'm not sure, about the end of its exemption in terms of participating to the foreign insecurity policies in the European Union. You see the debate in Sweden and Finland concerning their statute of neutrality and their relations with is NATO. A lot of other examples, countries which would never have considered sending weapons to Ukraine and to another country at war, all of this is happening really. And I am often asked whether I was surprised by the very, very significant German decisions.

And being the representative of France and you ask the right question, because I am not the representative of Germany, I have still my history, person history. I was ambassador in Berlin. And I remember that at the end of 2015 when France was attacked by the terrorist groups from Syria in the heart of Paris, we asked for the solidarity of our other member states of the European Union. And I was at that time in Germany. And I remember very well the parliament in Germany met immediately and on the proposition of the German government decided to send military assets to help us against this, the ISIS group which had attacked us.

So I was not surprised in terms of when something really important happens, we European nations, including Germany, in spite of the history and the fact that after World War II they decided not to have another orientation, all Europeans they rally. They rally because when something is essential is at stake collectively or even from one of the countries, the notion of solidarity and adapting to big crisis is there. So no, I was not really completely surprised. But yes, it is a positive move for the whole of the European Union.

Walter Russell Mead:

Great. Well, we can talk forever about Ukraine and the changes in Europe that the war is causing. But again, like the United States, France is a country that thinks about other parts of the world as well as its immediate neighborhood. And I see that Human Rights Watch has described a recent massacre in Mali as the worst atrocity in Mali's decades long armed conflict. With French troops having withdrawn and with, I think, not just Mali but across much of Africa, just rising Jihad violence and one could say even general civil breakdown of a number of countries, how does France look at this problem in an area where, historically, French influence has been critical?

Ambassador Etienne:

Well and maybe I'm not sure the only violence comes from the terrorist groups.

Walter Russell Mead:

No, no, no.

Ambassador Etienne:

Actually, I mean the last incident. But indeed it is the Malian government who called France in 2013, the French Army on the decision of the previous president François Hollande came to rescue Mali while the Jihadist groups had already conquered the northern half of the country. So we stopped this and we helped the Malian Army to liberate its country. But the Jihadist groups, not only ISIS, but also Al-Qaeda, remained there and in the region. So we have decided to withdraw our army from Mali because the new Malian authorities who came after two successive military coups were not interested to have the French Army anymore. And we are there only to help countries which request our help and to help their armies. At the end, the idea is that they will be empowered to do the job themselves.

But we are still engaged. We are not withdrawing from the whole region. On the contrary, we said, "We remain in Sahel, we extend our corporation to the coastal Western African countries. Because you see how these Jihadist groups try to also expand their activities into those coastal countries of Western Africa. And we are more than ever engaged with Africa as a whole, including the African Union, to do more in terms of empowering the African nations and their regional and continent organizations to have, through help of the United Nations and our countries, to be more and more in a position to fight themselves efficiently against those threats, both militarily directly, but also to address the other effects, which are as important.

Just one example, once you have freed a region from the terrorist footprint, if you want them not to come back immediately after you have left yourself, you need to bring back education. You need to bring back, first policy and security, but also to bring back education, schools, healthcare, public services in general. So this is as important as a military aspect. And we will continue to remain very much committed to also this civilian also strategic civilian aspects to help the Sahelian countries.

Walter Russell Mead:

Of course, the Wagner group has been active in Mali as well. And looking maybe at the Middle East where France has had long time interests in countries like Lebanon and Syria. Where we've seen in the last 10 years, sort of heartbreaking levels of violence in some ways worse than anything Ukraine has yet experienced. And the economic and social breakdown in Lebanon is one of the tragedies of our time. Some of that, not all of it, but some of it has reflected Russian power in the region and the expansion of Russian power, particularly since about 2015. Does the conflict in Ukraine and the new economic difficulties of Russia, do you think there are any opportunities or this could have consequences and there might be ways of bringing something a little better out of the situation there?

Ambassador Etienne:

I don't know. Obviously, you have people thinking that Putin will need to bring some of the forces he has in other parts back to the war he has started against Ukraine. I am not sure we have seen an assessment. What we know is a reality is what you say that Syria, the Syrian crisis and the way it has been handled has given a huge opportunity to Russia to come in. And indeed we are, as France, much

engaged here too, like in Sahel or in Ukraine, in close coordination with the U.S., especially as you know, in fighting against the same terrorist groups, but in Levant. In north eastern Syria and Iraq, it remains a challenge, we must not forget this. And since you mentioned Lebanon, especially after the terrible explosion and support of Beirut, to really try to support the Lebanese people and to push its political leadership, especially in view of the next elections which are coming up to introduce the reforms, to make this unique model of coexistence, which is Lebanon and between different groups, again successful.

Walter Russell Mead:

Yep. Now that would be heartening. There's been talk of Putin, bringing troops, not only Russians back from Syria, but bringing Syrian fighters back to Ukraine. This surely would be an escalation that would be deeply unwelcome in Europe to see these fighters in a European country with their records of atrocities and the brutality of that war. Do you think NATO or the EU might have some response to this?

Ambassador Etienne:

We will see. What we have said is that we are really monitoring very closely, the different types of escalations which can happen in Ukraine. Another one we could mention being the use of a chemical, biological weapons. And we've said it would, the latter would draw serious consequences, of course. But to enlarge your last question, I mean, the use of mercenaries is more and more widespread from some regimes. We've seen that in Libya, we've seen that you mentioned, the Wagner in Central African Republic, now in Mali. And it's of course, something which we have to take into account, which is a worrying development of the way to come in crisis and to try to weigh on national crisis situations.

Walter Russell Mead:

Still in the Middle East, the JCPOA, I think of it more and more as the Schrodinger's cat of diplomacy, it's in a black box and some days you think maybe it's alive and some days maybe it's dead. What's France, of course, as a member of the UN security council, is the countries involved in these negotiations and has frequently played a critical role in JCPOA negotiations. Where do you think this stands now?

Ambassador Etienne:

Well, I would say more than frequently since the very beginning, France, since the very first contact with Iran nearly 20 years ago, we have been working without counting our work, our hard work. We, together with in particular with two other European countries, Germany and the United Kingdom, we have worked very hard to get to a settlement preventing Iran to get the nuclear bomb, of course. And this is the reason why when the new administration said it would be ready to consider coming back to compliance if Iran of course comes back compliance because Iran violated itself after the U.S. withdrew from it in 2018.

We have, once the new administration makes this decision, we have worked very, very hard in Jenah to get back to this result. We have reached, after a number of progress in the negotiations, a situation where this decision is not really anymore in our hands, as you know. So we consider that it's the best way to reach the results I mentioned already, which is the strategic goal we have together with the

United States and others, not to have Iran in the possession of the nuclear bomb. But we are waiting, as you said, for the decision, which has to be taken by others.

Walter Russell Mead:

It does seem that the final issue may or may not, because you can never say anything is final in this negotiation, maybe whether or not the IGRC, the revolutionary guard is delisted from the list of foreign terrorists organizations, sanctions are lifted against that group. From a French perspective, and I don't know that the French have a per perspective on it, but would that be an appropriate...

Ambassador Etienne:

It's really not our discussion because we have our own determinations on the issues linked with our relations with Iran. And we know those relations, even for us are not simple. We had our own developments in Europe, as you know, but it's really not our decision and we respect it has to take place. I gave you our assessment on the agreement itself and a positive... We would not have worked that much to get this possible out if we didn't think it would be a positive development in terms of non-proliferation.

Walter Russell Mead:

Yep. Then let's move on geographically, a little farther to the Pacific where France as someone who was visited Tahiti and spent euros Tahiti and discovered that folks in Tahiti actually speak much better French than I do, which is not difficult. France is an Indo-Pacific power. How does France see its role in this increasingly critical region of the world?

Ambassador Etienne:

Well first, thank you for mentioning that we are an Indo-Pacific power, which might have been lost or forgotten in some corners here at some points. But thanks to the French territories in the French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, and New Caledonia, but also the Island of La Reunion in the Indian Ocean. France has the second largest exclusive maritime zone after the United States in the world. So we are quite interested to answer your question in the stability of the region and the security, but also in the respect of the principles of freedom and free maritime circulation and all those principles, which are so important everywhere in the world, but quite a lot in this region, which is so important for the global stability, but also for the global prosperity.

So we see ourselves, first as a country directly interested because we're present in the region, we have forces, we have, of course populations, we have to protect them. Directly interested in these aspects, but also as a European country which is there to attract the attention of the other European countries which have not the same reasons to be directly involved, but which are interested of course, by trade, by the protection of environment, biodiversity as we are. I mentioned environment and biodiversity because there are survival issues for those regions, especially the island states, which are directly threatened in their own survival by the rise in the level of the ocean.

Ambassador Etienne:

So the other European nations have now become aware, and I think France has played a role in this, in such a way that Germany, the Netherlands, and now the European as a whole have adopted after France, their own Indo-Pacific strategies. And this is a base of our consultations with the United States, of course, and means other nations of the region or interested in the region.

Walter Russell Mead:

I see there are elections scheduled for Australia in the next few months. And at least according to the polls, there might well be a change of government in Australia. Do you think Franco-Australian relations might begin to recover?

Ambassador Etienne:

I will not speculate on elections neither in France or in Australia. We, work, of course...

Walter Russell Mead:

Of course you do.

Ambassador Etienne:

We had our own strategic partnership with Australia which was of course upset by what happened last September when they decided to walk out of this, the basic feature of this, which was a submarines contract with a French and an American, by the way, company. So we have to reconstruct this and we need to indeed to have a serious conversations for this. I think that both France and Australia, not only have a evident interest, if you consider for instance, how close... All distances are huge in this but if you look at the map of the Pacific and you see what it means for Australia, for the French territories. And so we need to rebuild this strategic partnership as soon as possible.

Walter Russell Mead:

One looks at something like the potential agreement that might see Chinese forces having a right to be in Solomon Islands as something that would be of almost equal interest to France and Australia equal concern.

Ambassador Etienne:

Yes. You see strategic changes all over the place, all around the globe. But this region in particular is so strategic.

Walter Russell Mead:

Coming back to Franco-American relations, what do you think is... And this might, might be a difficult question to choose from so many, but what do you think is the single biggest misunderstanding Americans have about France or French foreign policy?

Ambassador Etienne:

I would speak from my personal experiences have arrived in the United States. So it's probably a biased perspective because it doesn't assess the globality of your question. But the issue I had to cope with, with the view, not by all Americans, but by part of the American, especially commentators about France is our laïcité, our system of relations between state and religions. And the way we defend the same core values, for instance freedom of belief or not. Freedom of belief or none believe in a religion. Or equality between men and women.

We have the same core values, no doubt but we don't implement these policies to defend those values and to make them respected by everybody in our societies in the same way. So to explain this to American agencies who look at the situation in France through... Which is completely normal, by the way, the reality here in the United States is a challenge. And I would say, this is the biggest challenge in this category.

Walter Russell Mead:

And when you're trying to explain America to the French, as you must sometimes have to do, what do you find is the biggest French misunderstanding about America? Or do they understand us completely?

Ambassador Etienne:

The work of the embassy, not only the ambassador, my colleagues here, of France to the United States is to explain America to at least a part of our country, which is our government.

Walter Russell Mead:

Yes.

Ambassador Etienne:

And also to the many delegations which come to visit us. So I hope we succeed in explaining. But of course I would say that there are a number of aspects which are both positive or maybe more critically which are very specific in the United States. And which I don't know whether we don't understand it, but we try to better understand it, sometimes even to be more effective ourselves, such as the tech for instance, the development of the tech, the innovations. Also, but I cannot say doesn't exist in our societies. We have seen more recently, this polarization inside the society. But again, we have developments in Europe which can be compared. But maybe these development are looked at with questions also. So again, it's our role to try to explain and first to understand.

Walter Russell Mead:

Well, I could ask you questions for hours as you know, as I've done in the past. But I think it would be unfair not to offer our very patient audience an opportunity to... And if you don't have any, I will continue down my list. Tom. And if you would briefly introduce yourselves.

Tom Duesterberg:

I'm Tom Duesterberg, a senior fellow here and work on largely on international economic issues. Mr. Ambassador, you noted several times that the Russian invasion was a game changer, but it's a game changer in more ways than one, I think. Our Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen gave a fairly major forward-looking speech yesterday in which he called for in the words of Bloomberg, challenging China in the moment of choosing on the world order. And she had several suggestions for rethinking the global economic order which was put into place in the 1950s, in the wake of world war II.

Specifically, and most radically perhaps, she called for establishing a series of trade agreements. She called them plurilateral agreements among allies, clearly aimed, I think, at China. But clearly distancing itself from the World Trade Organization. Does France have an early reaction to these suggestions for fairly major changes in the liberal economic order, rules based economic order?

Ambassador Etienne:

We welcomed this administration's decision to come back to a multilateral agenda. And a part of it was, I remember one of the first decisions, was for the U.S. administration, the Biden administration, to accept the choice of the new director general of the world trade organization, as you can remember. So it was for us a positive step because we need the WTO, we understand the difficulties caused by the rule of consensus, of course. But we, in Europe, we tend to think that we need the U.S. as a big, very active insides those multicultural organizations, to fight together for our common interests, both values, in human rights but also in that case for a level playing field where it doesn't exist.

Though, the European Union in matters of trade and international economy has adopted recently, and France, again, has very much pushed in this direction, much more assertive instruments, legal instruments to defend our interests and to promote open trade and international regime, but based really on a real reciprocity. And we think that we should use this opportunity because we see that the United States has been doing this under different administrations, both Republican and Democrat, the same way. So we think we should really be together, but inside this multilateral organizations.

And there is this famous idea and goal of reforming those organizations because those organizations are not perfect, of course. And we recognize this completely. And we recognize also the difficulties, but we must fight inside them to reform them. This is a global trust. And it is the same in other organizations like the World Health Organization to give more peace in view of future pandemics to the, to the multilateral rules and so on. Here we are, now I have not tried the proposals presented by Secretary Yellen and I cannot commend them because they just have been made, according to what you said.

In Europe, we never saw a contradiction between plurilateral or even bilateral economic agreements. I mentioned the association agreement with Ukraine, which has a very important economic component, but also political component and multilateralism, where we see this as complimentary. And we see also in this respect and opportunity to work with this administration, because it seems that we have, on both sides of the Atlantic, the same concern, not only about level playing fields in terms of fair competition, rules, subsidies, and so on. But also about these possible unfair competition situations undermining our own decisions to, especially in the fight against climate change and demanding our own standards, maybe also in social protection, for instance. So we think we have a good... And look at what has been

said and decided when we settled, to a certain extent not completely, the dispute between the EU and the U.S. which had been started by the Trump administration with higher tariffs on steel and aluminum.

We said, "Okay, there is this provisory settlement." And there was a statement to say that we would address together. We would this discussed together on the best ways to address the issues posed by importing steel from third countries, which is not submitted to the same constraints in terms of the protection of the environment and emissions of carbon. So since we have the same concerns and since we have the same goals, I think to come back to your question, that we can use both agreements or conversations or negotiations as the ones we can have inside the trade and technology council, which we have created between the EU and the European Union and the United States and the multi lateral organization which exists and which we must revitalize and transform and reform, of course, in view of our own interests and goals.

Walter Russell Mead:

We have maybe time for one more question. Yes.

Abe Shulsky:

Thank you. I'm Abe Shulsky. I'm a senior fellow here. And I'd like to ask you for your views and your government's views on what kind of structure of European defense might come out of the current crisis. We've seen the speech by Chancellor Schultz and the suggestion that Germany would be playing a much bigger role in the defense arena than it has. And I assume other countries in Europe will also want to be more active right now that they've seen the threat in Ukraine. But that raises the question of whether there has to be a new sort of structure or whether it can be subsumed under the NATO structure. What about the non-NATO members of the EU? And what about the tendency towards more cooperation within the EU on defense matters?

If Europe and the EU is to become sort of more, not independent, but more concerned about being able to defend itself, then it needs a lot more coordination, it would seem to me, among the 27 members because it's only by pooling your efforts that you should be able to achieve this goal. So I was wondering what sort of thought were current now about how the structures of the defense arrangements within the EU and the NATO and so on might have to change.

Ambassador Etienne:

No, thank you for the great question. Well, we have a legal base. We have been for years. For years since the beginning of the 90s, they have been, even then, developed for a European security and defense policies, this is not new. But we had to implement this. We have, in the last years, making great progress. For instance, one of these provisions which did exist which was not implemented was the so called Structured Corporation covered by the acronym PESCO. And we have launched a lot of new corporations in this framework. What is new, and even if it has been prepared before the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, this has been really accelerated and deepened by this development.

And here in this document, you will find the answers to all your questions that the leaders, European leaders have adopted, endorsed at their last summit in March in Brussels, what we call the strategic compass. The strategic compass is the first wide book and defense in security adopted by the European

as such. And you will find there, the modalities are concrete modalities which the European, the EU leaders have decided to adapt and to implement, to take to a new level in developing these EU security and defense policy and identity. Of course, the question is often asked about whether it is compatible with NATO. The answer of course is yes. And in a nutshell, I'm ready to go to more details if you want. But what we say, and I'm deeply convinced it's not only true but it's really important, is that to have a more reliable, stronger, more capable European defense is good, both for the United States and for NATO.

Which means more money. You mentioned, Walter mentioned Germany, but again, it's happening all across Europe. More money for our defense. But much more than that, more willingness and more political will and interest to commit troops when you have to engage. And as France is doing already, but as other countries are starting to do too, and hopefully will be more and more willing to do. It means more organization, it means more industrial and technological capacities. And it means also by the way, a stronger and developed partnership and strategic partnership between the European Union and NATO to organize all of this.

It's interesting to see that all of these goals, capacities, missions, partnership with NATO, industrial and technological base, all of these aspects are to be found in the political declaration adapted by current president by then in Rome, at the end of October, when they met bilaterally to... It was a decisive step after the crisis in our bilateral relations created by the announcement of AUKUS, mid-September. And they have adopted a very substantial statement, and you will find all of these elements in this statement, in this declaration. And I think it has been very useful in terms of the philosophy I described. And again, in this document, which has been adopted you have the concrete answers to the question.

Walter Russell Mead:

Great. Well, listen, thanks to the audience here at Hudson. Thanks to those of you who are watching online and will watch, because this will stay up on our website. And thanks above all to you, Ambassador Etienne for sharing this time. Again, I would like to remind our viewers here and online that many countries around the world send their best and their brightest to Washington as ambassadors. And it's a source of wisdom and experience and insight that those of us in the U.S. who like to follow world affairs and foreign policy need to take as much advantage of as we possibly can. So thank you for sharing your expertise and views today.

Ambassador Etienne:

Thank you very much.

Walter Russell Mead:

Great.

Ambassador Etienne:

Thank you to all of you for your attention. Thank you very much.