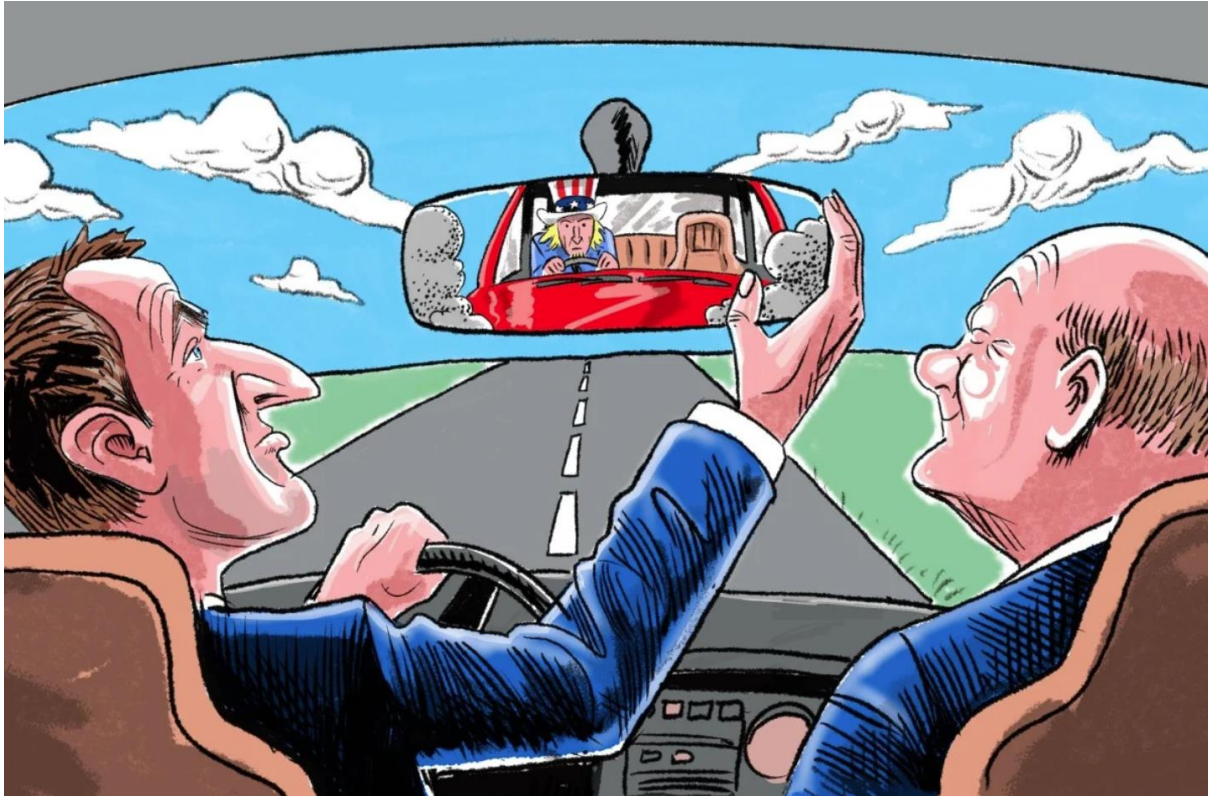


Terry Su

Is Europe seeking to accelerate its move away from US influence?

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<https://www.scmp.com/opinion/world-opinion/article/3265078/europe-seeking-accelerate-its-move-away-us-influence>



I have long maintained that Europe is [moving to distance itself](#) from the United States on the world stage, in spite of all the signs of transatlantic solidarity. However, I had not expected it to evolve as quickly as we have seen in the past few weeks.

First came the formal diplomatic recognition of a Palestinian state by [Ireland, Norway and Spain](#) last month. These announcements are significant, given the historical burden of Europe's collective sense of guilt over what happened to the Jewish people in Europe under the regime of Nazi Germany.

One could argue that the symbolically important move of recognising a Palestinian state arises from Ireland, Norway and Spain's collective conscience no longer allowing them to ignore the horrendously disproportionate number of Palestinian civilian casualties – mostly women and children – in Gaza, inflicted by the Israeli armed forces. This was despite Tel Aviv's insistence that the collateral damage is no worse than that caused by the Allied bombing of Dresden or the US' use of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.

Josep Borrell, the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, said at [the Munich Security Conference](#) in February that accusations of double standards against the West "is something that we need to address, and not only with nice words". By choosing to recognise a Palestinian state, Ireland, Norway and Spain have gone beyond "nice words" and taken

action to remedy the situation despite restrained opposition from Washington, which maintains that recognition should only come through negotiations rather than unilateral action.

The reaction from Israel was much less restrained. Foreign Minister Israel Katz vented his fury on X – formerly known as Twitter – by posting videos addressed to the leaders of Ireland, Norway and Spain saying “ Hamas thanks you for your service ”. Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares decried the video as “ scandalous and execrable ”.

This incident has only heightened the ramifications for the US-EU relationship as a result of the decisions to recognise a Palestinian state. The most notable is the increased schism between Washington and its European allies at a time when the United States is most in need of European solidarity. At the same time, Israel remains indispensable to the US in terms of its geopolitical strategy and perhaps more importantly [its domestic politics](#).

What took me most by surprise, however, was French President Emmanuel Macron’s three-day [state visit to Germany](#) last week and his efforts to sway his hosts towards his stated desire for greater European strategic autonomy from the US. In this light, it’s possible to see the recognition of a Palestinian state by Ireland, Norway and Spain – three second-tier European countries – as a prelude to a push for greater European independence from the Franco-German axis.

Macron’s state visit was the first by a French president in 24 years. His trip hit its peak when he arrived in Dresden, where he gave an emotionally charged speech to tens of thousands of young people, many of whom travelled from neighbouring countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic. Switching between French and German, Macron made an impassioned call for European unity, saying “ We must rediscover our strength and commitment to defend Europe everywhere. ”

Watching videos of young people being interviewed after Macron’s speech, and how inspired they said they were by it, brought to mind an image of the philosopher Georg Hegel. With his draft manual of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in hand after the Battle of Jena in 1806, Hegel said he felt thrilled by the sight of [Emperor Napoleon](#) heroically entering Jena on horseback and called him “ the soul of the world ”.

I also thought of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, another renowned philosopher from the Germanic regions of Europe. After the Battle of Jena, Fichte gave a series of speeches titled “ Addresses to the German Nation ” and was credited as having paved the intellectual way to Germany’s eventual unification in the latter part of the century.

Anecdotes and analogies aside, Macron seemed to stoke passions not only among his young European audience in Dresden but also his peers in Berlin. In their joint opinion piece for the Financial Times, Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz wrote that the European Union had to make dramatic efforts to [improve its competitiveness](#) or risk seeing its way of life undermined. “ Our Europe is mortal, and we must rise to the challenge ”, they wrote.

Other noteworthy recent events were joint meetings of their respective cabinets and their agreement to jointly develop military weapons. In addition, former German chancellor Angela Merkel attended the state banquet in honour of Macron and his wife Brigitte.

One could rightly point to Macron having one eye on the upcoming [European parliamentary elections](#) later this week. Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine could also partly account for this highly publicised visit. Whatever the reason, it is unlikely that Washington looked kindly on it.

So what might the US do in response? Probably very little, if anything, judging by US President Joe Biden's leadership style and his administration's focus on establishing an alliance of like-minded nations in its competition with China and Russia. However, the US cannot afford to lose Europe, so if Washington believes Macron is pushing too hard to chip away at the US' dominant influence in Europe, it may well be forced to respond.

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