

German Militarism Is Back

War propaganda in Europe is running at full throttle. Whether in the mainstream or on social media, anyone calling for more war against Russia is being listened to. How can we possibly get out of this? That is the question my guest today is addressing: the German author and playwright Fabian Scheidler, who recently published a book on this very topic titled "Capable of Peace: How We Can Stop Creating Our Own Enemies." Links: X: <https://x.com/ScheidlerFabian> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/counter.image> Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/fabian_scheidler/ Bluesky: <https://bsky.app/profile/scheidlerfabian.bsky.social> Website: <https://fabianscheidler.com/> "The End of the Megamachine. A Brief History of a Failing Civilisation" book: www.megamachine.org Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Goods Store: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:00:36 The State of War Propaganda in Europe 00:07:54 Why the Left Abandoned Detente 00:16:03 Normalizing War: From Taboo to Policy 00:23:58 The Sabotage of Peace Talks 00:31:16 The EU's Irrational War Path 00:36:45 Western Hegemony and Reality Denial 00:43:07 Public Dissent and the Youth 00:50:39 Conclusion

#Pascal

War propaganda in Europe is running at full throttle. Whether in the mainstream or on social media, anyone calling for more war against Russia is being listened to. How can we possibly get out of this again? That is the question my guest today is addressing — the German author and playwright Fabian Scheidler, who recently published a German-language book titled, if I translate it, *Capable of Peace: How We Can Stop Creating Our Own Enemies.* Mr. Scheidler, welcome. Thanks for having me. Let's talk a little about this. For people who are not directly present, as you are, in Germany or in Europe, how would you describe the current state of affairs — the public discourse around war and peace with Russia?

#Fabian Scheidler

We are seeing in Europe, and in Germany especially, a militarization we haven't seen since World War II. The German government has pledged to triple its defense budget from 42 billion euros per year to 142 billion—or 153, I think that's the right number. So we have a discourse that knows only "us and them." It's black and white, good versus evil. It's like a Harry Potter version of geopolitics. And anyone who questions the narrative that Russia will soon invade NATO countries is considered a Putin sympathizer. And that's despite the fact that even the American intelligence services, in their annual report, say that Russia has no interest in attacking NATO. I mean, it would be utterly suicidal, of course.

But still, our leading politicians—whether it's the Greens, the Conservatives, or the Social Democrats—have set in motion a propaganda machine that tells people, "Well, we have no other option than to rearm in a way unheard of since World War II, because the Russians are coming." And this is utter nonsense, of course, although the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a serious crime. But still, there is no realistic view of our situation. And of course, this is being used to prop up the military-industrial complex at a time when Germany has a lot of problems—economically, a two-year-long recession, the longest in German history. We also see militarization in all parts of society. The German army is going into schools to propagate its war narrative, even into kindergartens. They're everywhere, in public space, while the peace movement is in quite a weak position in this situation.

#Pascal

How prevalent do you think this is across Europe? Because in Germany, this is certainly the case. Do you know about the situation, let's say, in France or Italy? My impression is that Germany is particularly belligerent at the moment, but there are similar tendencies in other European countries.

#Fabian Scheidler

Yes, I think that's true. In Italy, for example, the situation is quite different. If we talk about the war in Gaza—the genocidal campaign of Israel in Gaza—Italian workers have gone on strike against weapons deliveries to Israel. So that's a different situation. In France, for example, there is quite a lot of resistance to militarization. The former government under Prime Minister Bayrou had to be dismissed because it wasn't able to push through parliament a social-cuts bill that would reduce social spending by about 40 billion euros, and it had no majority in parliament. And in Spain, in particular, anti-war movements are quite strong.

And I think they pushed the government of Sánchez, the Social Democrat, to be the only government in the European Union that refused to abide by Donald Trump's demand to raise the military budget to 5% of GDP. Spain said, "Well, 2% is enough for us." And I think that's because there's a lot of opposition—both to the genocidal campaign of Israel in Gaza and to militarization. So the situation is not as desperate as in Germany and other countries, but still, leading politicians, especially in the European Parliament, are extremely belligerent. They're even willing to go down an economically suicidal path. We now have a situation where Ukraine is clearly losing the war.

And that has been clear for years now. I mean, even General Milley, former chief of staff of the American army, said two or three years ago that the West cannot win, that Ukraine cannot win that war. And the chief of the Ukrainian army, Zaluzhny, said the same thing. So for years we've known that Ukraine cannot regain the territories it lost to Russia. But still, the European Union keeps

pushing this narrative that we can win the war if we just put more money into it. Now the Americans have pulled out of giving any money to Ukraine, and the Europeans are supposed to step in—especially Germany—to pay the bill.

And I mean, now they're trying to get hold of the Russian assets in Belgium—about 180 billion. But that would be suicidal for Belgium, because there would be legal cases against Belgium and the European Union to repay that money. Under international law, you can't seize those funds. Still, they're trying to do it, and that would utterly ruin Europe as a place for international investment, because international investors, especially from the Global South, wouldn't consider putting their money in European banks if European governments could seize it whenever they wanted to. So I think they're really, in the European Parliament and in the European Commission, on a warpath for several reasons.

And in a recent article in the **New Left Review**, in Spring 2024, I argued that the idea is, as the **Financial Times** once put it, to turn the European welfare state into a warfare state. I think that's the program we are facing. I mean, they've been trying to destroy the welfare state for decades within the neoliberal framework of the Washington Consensus. They've managed to do so in part, but there's a lot of resistance. And now they have an argument. They say, well, the Russians are coming, we have to put all our money into the military, and we can't afford social welfare anymore. So that's, I mean, the agenda of both the political elites and capital.

#Pascal

Why is the left going along with it? And I'm not speaking necessarily about the Left Party, but rather the SPD—this seems to be the consensus. And also, you know, even in Switzerland, the Social Democratic Party, of which I'm actually a paying member, one of the things I dislike is that they're so willing to go along with this narrative of, like, "Well, the evil Russians need to be resisted." Especially now, in the European context, you can see how this 5% target is hollowing out all the capabilities.

I mean, Mr. Merz even said we have no more money for social welfare, which is always what the liberal right says whenever it's about social welfare. There's always money for tax cuts, there's always money for military spending—and now they seem to have zeroed in on massive spending for the military. That, of course, means the military is going to be the only one—or rather, the whole military environment. It's not just the institution, but the entire environment that will be able to spend money if it serves defense purposes, right? This would lead to massive militarization of all aspects of civil society, wouldn't it?

#Fabian Scheidler

Yes, absolutely. I mean, 5% of GDP, I have to remind everybody, is 50% of the national budget in OECD countries. Typically, the national budget of the central government is about 10% of GDP. So

spending 5% of GDP is 50% of the national budget. That's almost the amount we had under the Kaiser, under the German emperor, before World War I. So it's really unheard of.

#Pascal

It must be added, you know, that in modern European states—and in general, in welfare states—a large part of the national budget is a transfer budget that's pre-allocated. It goes into pensions, it goes into healthcare, it goes into all sorts of things that are already kind of set in stone. So that makes it even worse.

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's an outright attack on the welfare state and on workers and the middle classes, of course. It's a strategy for times of chaos. You know, the capitalist world system is in dire straits, and the West in particular—Western hegemony—is declining. Western capitalism itself is deeply in decline. So they're desperate to find ways to keep the system running and to preserve their privileges, their power, and their wealth. And one way to do that is to create a permanent state of exception. We've seen that in several forms—we had it with the war on terror, of course.

I write about that extensively in my book **Friedenstüchtig**. The war on terror was the model, if you will. And we saw the same thing during the pandemic—a kind of power grab by the elites to channel huge amounts of money into the pockets of shareholders of big companies like Pfizer and so on. And now it's Rheinmetall. So, in times when capitalism is in dire straits, it looks for ways to discredit dissent, to justify repression, and to funnel huge sums into the pockets of the shareholders of big corporations. That's what it's all about. Now, the question is, why have the Social Democrats gone along with that agenda?

I mean, the German Social Democrats, like the Austrian ones, have a very important tradition of détente policies. Under Willy Brandt in Germany, Bruno Kreisky in Austria, and Olof Palme in Sweden, they developed the concept of common security in the 1970s, which was crucial for ending the Cold War peacefully and for achieving German reunification. The concept of common security was created at the height of the Cold War, after the Soviet Union invaded Prague to end the Prague Spring movement, and while the Americans were bombing Vietnam, with four million dead. So these were not nice times either.

But they understood that in the nuclear age, as the former American Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, once said, common security in the nuclear age can only be common security. You can't achieve security against a nuclear power, because in the end we'd all be dead. So they developed this concept, and common security means that the legitimate security interests of all countries must be considered equally. That means, of course, Western Europe has legitimate security interests too.

Israel, for example, has legitimate security interests, as do the US and others. But in the same way, the Russians—or the Soviet Union at the time—also have legitimate security interests. The Palestinians, for example, have legitimate security interests, and the people of Venezuela have legitimate security interests. You have to consider all these security interests at the same time. That was a way to forge nuclear disarmament deals, as they were reached at the time, and to have some sort of détente. The Social Democrats gave up that tradition not only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but even before.

I mean, the first Social Democratic and Green government in 1998 decided to bomb Serbia in an illegal war of aggression against former Yugoslavia in 1999. That was the first step in breaking international law as a German government after World War II. Since then, both the Greens and the Social Democrats have sort of sabotaged their own tradition of common security and détente policies. After the Russian invasion, Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave that famous speech in the German parliament, the Bundestag, speaking of a “turning point,” the **Zeitenwende**, and he announced 100 billion for the military. He hadn’t even spoken to his own party about it, let alone to parliament, but he got away with it.

About half a year ago, we had constitutional amendments in Germany that allowed unlimited spending for the military. There used to be budget restraints and debt ceilings for all kinds of state expenditures, but they were lifted for the military. The Greens even demanded lifting them for the secret services, for the intelligence services. So now we have an unlimited budget for the military, but at the same time, we have austerity for the rest of us. It’s really about destroying the welfare state. The Social Democrats even coined the term “apt for war.” That was our defense minister in the former government, and in the new one as well. The title of my new book is **Apt for Peace**. So it’s a position where we have to challenge that idea—that the past was the only way we could go forward.

#Pascal

This used to be such a huge taboo, you know, in Germany. And I’ve had other discussions with people on this channel. The whole idea that Germany would go to war again was, in and of itself, kind of a pariah idea, right? Only right-wing, ultra-nationalist, neo-Nazi types would still dream of a Germany that would go out and fight. But over the last 20 years, that’s changed—first slowly, you know, toward being able to contribute to humanitarian operations, right?

And now all that precaution is out the window, and the idea is, “No, no, no, no, no—the military, the Bundeswehr, must be strong. And if push comes to shove, we need to be able to go kill Russians.” That’s now not only sayable; that’s actually what you hear in public discourse. That shift that happened over—well, it started slowly but then went fast over the last three to four years—became a sayable thing, and now it’s the good tone. How do you explain that to yourself? Is it Russophobia? Is it revengeism? What is it?

#Fabian Scheidler

I mean, there have always been German militarists, but they had a problem—and that was World War II and the Holocaust. So Germany was forced to exercise some sort of restraint when it came to the military. There were also very strong peace movements in Germany. In the 1980s, for example, hundreds of thousands of people were in the streets protesting against nuclear rearmament. At the same time, there were interests within the military-industrial complex to break this kind of German deadlock, from their perspective, to boost the military and once again become the strongest military power in Europe—which, of course, other European countries didn't want.

I mean, in the process of reunification, it was very important, of course, for the Russians, because they lost 20 million people in World War II. They didn't want Germany to remilitarize. They didn't want NATO to expand. But also Western European countries like France and Britain didn't want Germany to become this super-militaristic power. But now they seem to accept that, which is really quite frightening. And the discourse has changed because the elites have taken the opportunity of the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a pretext for what Naomi Klein has called the shock strategy in her book **The Shock Doctrine**.

And in that moment, when people can be misled and manipulated by fear—by this fearmongering that the Russians will destroy every one of us—they're told it's a war against so-called Western values. Which is an interesting term, because it was the Western world, the Western capitalist world, that has been responsible for 500 years of colonial expansion, slavery, genocides, ecocides, the greatest wars in human history. So that's the tradition of the West. But still, we talk about Western values, which is quite a ridiculous idea. And in the East, that's a longstanding narrative.

In the East are the barbarians. In the war against terror, it was the barbarians in the Arab world and the Muslim world who were portrayed as barbarians. And our media, of course, played a crucial role in this narrative—to portray us as the virtuous forces in world history and the Muslim world as barbarians. Now this narrative has simply shifted to Russia. So Russia again is the great bear in the East that is going to eat us all. It's all about war propaganda. And they use this indeed illegal invasion, which has a long history before it. It didn't come out of the blue, of course—the Russian invasion. It had a lot to do with NATO expansion and Western expansion in general, and the feeling in Russia that their security interests were threatened. But still, this was used to push through an agenda of extreme militarization that had been prepared for decades.

#Pascal

So do you think this preparation started back in 1999 with Serbia, with Yugoslavia? I mean, on the one hand, yes, 1999—it was right when Schröder came in, when the Social Democrats came to power, right? But then in 2003, there was the Iraq War, and Germany didn't go along with it, nor did the French. They said, "No, we're not going to do this." That's why it was a coalition of the willing

and not a NATO operation. So where do you think it began that the Social Democrats really kind of abandoned that, let's say, Cold War mentality of "no war with us"?

#Fabian Scheidler

Yes, I think there are different factions and different forces in the Social Democratic Party. Even today, there's a minority that opposes the kind of warmongering we see now. But they're silenced by the press and even demonized as friends of Vladimir Putin, and so on. Of course, in the early 2000s, there was a lot of friction—not so much in the Green Party, but more in the Social Democratic Party, which had that longstanding tradition of détente policies. And in 2003, there were elections coming up, and Schröder knew that the German population was very much against that war. We had a huge demonstration in Berlin—500,000 people in the streets against the Iraq War.

That was a huge movement, and it influenced his decisions, of course, because he wanted to be reelected—and so did the Greens. So they decided not to go along with the war, but they still supported it, because many of the American operations were planned and coordinated on U.S. military bases in Germany. We have lots of them. And that was, of course, completely illegal. That's why German governments, even today, have refused to call the Iraq War an illegal war—which it, of course, was. Because once they conceded that the war was illegal, it would have meant that allowing the U.S. military to operate from German territory was also illegal.

#Pascal

Right, right. There's still a lot of history and soul-searching that needs to be done, but first we need to get out of this warmongering moment we're in right now, which to me is really unprecedented. In my lifetime, I haven't seen this much pro-war, pro-military, pro—"let's go and fight them" kind of rhetoric. So, you wrote that book—something like **Peace Apt** or **Peace Ready**—how do we do that? How do we get out of this spiral of doom that seems to be swirling around us?

#Fabian Scheidler

Well, the first thing we have to do is engage in diplomacy. The European Union, including the French, German, and British governments, has sabotaged all kinds of diplomatic efforts. That started earlier—already in early 2022, just after the Russian invasion. There were serious negotiations in Istanbul and elsewhere, and they came up with a ten-point plan that was also proposed by Ukraine. They were close to reaching a deal that included neutrality for Ukraine, which, of course, Henry Kissinger and many other U.S. strategists had proposed long ago, because that is, of course, the only solution for Ukraine.

At that time, the withdrawal of Russian troops to the front line was on the table before the invasion. And then Boris Johnson intervened on April 9, 2022, probably on behalf of the Americans, and said, "You shouldn't sign anything. You have no support from our side." So the Ukrainians didn't sign it.

This narrative, by the way, is often challenged because people say it was the massacres in Bucha that made negotiations impossible. But even Zelensky himself told television when he was in Bucha that they wanted to negotiate and still continue to negotiate.

And we have a lot of witnesses, by the way—even the head of Zelensky's party in parliament at that time and the chief negotiator for Ukraine in Istanbul said, “Well, the West intervened. They didn't want the war to end.” The Turkish foreign minister said the same thing. There were forces in the West that wanted the war to continue to weaken Russia. Those were the words of the foreign minister. So I retell this story because it proves that it is possible to negotiate with the Russian government. And it's also very instructive to see what the Russians want: they want neutrality for Ukraine; they don't want NATO forces there. Now, what has the European Union done?

#Pascal

I just want to underscore again: the Russians' demand is not that all of Ukraine needs to be theirs or that Ukraine needs to be, you know, swallowed up. That's not the demand. The demand is that Ukraine—excluding the parts where their troops are—needs to be neutral. That's the demand. It needs to be neutral. It just must not be a threat.

#Fabian Scheidler

Absolutely. I mean, that's what people like George Kennan, who invented the containment strategy, were saying. He was a Cold Warrior. And people like William Burns, who's now CIA director, have said for decades—Chuck Matlock, the last U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, keeps saying so even now at the age of 95. Absolutely. I mean, these were people who knew Russia. They were in Russia. William Burns was ambassador, I think, in Russia. He knew Moscow. And he knew, and he said it loudly, that these were the red lines. And this is really the lesson from the times of common security: you have to respect Russia—the legitimate security interests of other countries, especially if they are nuclear powers.

So if you accept that we shouldn't allow Mexico to become a member of a Russian or Chinese military alliance and have nuclear weapons on its soil next to the U.S. border, I think it would be a very bad idea—and everyone would agree that the U.S. wouldn't accept that. At the same time, you can't have Ukraine enter NATO. I mean, you have to have the same rules for everyone. Now, neutrality has been a key demand of Russia. But the negotiating position of Ukraine has significantly weakened, also because the West intervened back then and destroyed the negotiations. And now Ukraine will not get back the territory it lost—neither Crimea nor the Donbass.

That's for sure, because the Russian military has so much of the power—in terms of manpower, in terms of the productivity of the arms industry, and so on. But the Europeans still refuse to recognize this reality. And they're now torpedoing all kinds of proposals—for example, from the Trump administration—to reach any kind of deal. So what can we do about it? We have to force our

governments to engage in diplomacy, or at least not to sabotage diplomacy, as the European Union does all the time. For example, in the spring, when there were talks about a ceasefire, the European Union and the British government said, "Once there's a ceasefire, we will send NATO troops into Ukraine."

This is, of course, an incentive for Russia to keep on fighting, because that was the idea in the first place—to stop NATO from expanding into Ukraine. So that's a way to torpedo any negotiations. And now they're trying to seize, as I said, the Russian assets in Belgium, which is, of course, against international law. And if they do, as the Belgian prime minister rightfully said, this is another way to stop Russia from negotiating if they see that their assets are seized. So we have to force our governments to engage in diplomacy instead of blocking diplomacy and increasing spending for war.

I mean, that's crucial. Still, for example, in Germany, the military budget hasn't yet reached 150 billion euros per year. We can still stop that. There could potentially be a lot of resistance within civil society, because the vast majority of people in European countries have a strong interest in maintaining the welfare state and stopping this kind of policy of militarization. And so I think there's potential for alliances in civil society—not only the traditional peace movement, but also those who defend workers' rights and so on. So there's a lot of potential. Yes.

#Pascal

Sorry, I just want to add actually two questions. One is: do you think there will come a point when other EU nations start to feel a bit uneasy about this? Because, you know, you can demonize the Russians as much as you want and so on, but at some level—in France, in Italy, in Poland, and so on—there must be a memory, right? I mean, there were those times when Germany militarized, and it didn't end well. So at what point do you think that will happen?

That other EU states might say, like, "Easy, easy, Germany—maybe not that fast." And secondly, what I don't understand is, while the Germans and Europeans in general have this very strong goal of how the war needs to end—it must end with all of Ukraine back to Ukraine, including Crimea, and Vladimir Putin in The Hague—they say that very strongly, but none of them says how. The best idea the militarists have is long-range missiles to do pinprick attacks, but nobody has a logical chain of how you would roll that back militarily. None of them. So how do you make sense of this?

#Fabian Scheidler

I mean, European elites have really lost their minds. They've lost touch with reality. And of course, they want to maintain the old narrative that Ukraine will win that war—which is complete nonsense, because they've invested so much political capital, indeed all their political capital, and most of their money into this. "As long as it takes," yeah. "As long as it takes" will probably mean as long as it

takes for Europe to go down—to go down the drain. That's what's happening. Europe is on a path of utter self-destruction. Economically, it's going down quickly. Diplomatically, it has become utterly ridiculous for several reasons.

First of all, most European countries, and Germany especially, have supported the genocide in Gaza. So the double standards are blatant when they claim they're defending international law in Ukraine while supporting a genocide in Gaza. Other countries like Britain and France have backed the Israelis as well. Internationally, they're becoming more and more isolated diplomatically. And they're also increasing the risk of war. If you maintain that confrontation, and if you accelerate it with Russia, you risk a nuclear war. It's a very serious situation, and the Russian nuclear doctrine is very clear.

If the existence of their state is threatened, they could use nuclear weapons first. That's their military doctrine. So we shouldn't do that. I mean, whatever you think about Russia and Vladimir Putin, we should look for survival in that situation—and the only path to survival is diplomacy. And the European elites, the political elites, are not in a position... if you look at what the European Parliament is voting for, I mean, it sounds like, "Yes, let's go to World War III." There are about 700 members of Parliament, and something like 650 of them are voting for these kinds of things—including the Greens, the Social Democrats, and parts of the Left, though not all of the Left, we have to say.

So in parliaments, in the European Parliament, resistance is quite feeble. At the same time, as you mentioned, I think there are forces in other European countries where resistance is on the rise. We see that in Belgium, for example. It's a small country, but they're afraid their existence is being sacrificed. I mean, the European Union is willing to sacrifice Belgium, because if the Russian assets are seized by the EU to create loans for Ukraine and so on, Russia will probably go to court against Belgium—and they'll probably win, because it's against international law to seize these assets.

And that would mean Belgium would be responsible for 180 billion to pay back to the Russians. That would be the end of the country. And that's very interesting. I think in many European countries, people are watching this very carefully—the fact that the European Union is willing to sacrifice one of its members for the folly of their unreal war scenarios. But I think it really depends on peace movements, because we can't trust the political elites anymore. They're tied up with the military-industrial complex—not all of them, but many. So it depends on whether civil society can mobilize against this folly.

#Pascal

Yeah, civil society mobilization would be one thing. The other thing—and that's the way Mr. Karaganov in Russia argues—is that the problem is the Europeans are not really afraid. They're not scared. So, in a sense, Europe reminds me at the moment of a chihuahua standing in front of a

huge—well, what would be a good one? Let's say a bear. But between the chihuahua and the bear, there's this glass door. The chihuahua knows the bear is locked out, right? So it can go and bark, be really loud and noisy.

But it knows it's protected, even though it can see everything on the other side. But if the glass door were lifted, that's when things would really set in. So, I mean, what is it right now that makes the Europeans so sure of themselves—that they can use all that rhetoric when, clearly, without the Americans, they have no military... they have no military defense against this? I mean, nothing. It would be a very, very uneven game if it came to that, right? What is that glass door that gives them so much security?

#Fabian Scheidler

I mean, I think they've been sitting in a glass house for a long time. The European elites—just like the American elites until recently—have refused to recognize and acknowledge that the era of their hegemony in the world system is coming to an end. In fact, it's already ending, and they don't want to accept that. They want to stay the masters. And of course, the Americans were the masters of the masters, and the European governments—most of them—have been their poodles for a long time. But, you know, the BRICS, in terms of GDP, are much stronger than the NATO or G7 countries in terms of population and so on. So they're losing their hegemony, and they don't want to accept that. And they're also losing the war in Ukraine, which has been a proxy war from the beginning.

As, by the way, Boris Johnson had acknowledged—he said several times, "Well, this is a proxy war." Still, in the German media, you can't say that; it's called a Putin narrative, although it was Boris Johnson who said it. So they cannot accept their decline, and that's a very dangerous situation. If you have a declining hegemon—the U.S.—and declining poodles, if you will, in the European Union, and they don't want to see reality, the chihuahua still thinks it's a bear or a bulldog. They'll act in a completely irrational way. And that's what they're doing. That's why we have to stop this folly and work on the basis of reality. The reality is, as you said, that the Europeans have very little in terms of military, but also in terms of their economy, to go to war with Russia. And it's a nuclear power.

All these ideas that we can go to war with Russia are utterly suicidal, whatever the conventional forces are. It's ridiculous. That's why all this rearmament is completely absurd—because once we go to war with Russia, nuclear war is very likely, and we'll all be dead, including our political elites. And that's why it's so frightening that the German chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has recently said he's not afraid of a war with Russia. Now, what does that mean? What kind of state of mind is this man in, that he's not afraid of war with Russia? This is a very dangerous state of mind within the European elites. They don't know what war really is. They don't know what it means to go to war with Russia. And they're willing to stay in their fantasy land of European and Western supremacy—and to sacrifice the world for that. It's a very dangerous situation.

#Pascal

Sorry to say that, but the country has been in that place before, and they gave it a name. They called it Barbarossa, right? They thought they could win, and it didn't happen, right? It's just—I'm sorry, I don't want to go that far. I mean, it's just very frustrating to see that after 80 years, that whole spirit of "never again" seems to mean something completely different to the people in power now. Yes, absolutely.

#Fabian Scheidler

I think a few years ago I wouldn't have believed that Germany and Europe could be in this shape now. I mean, we have a situation a bit like before World War I, where we have completely irresponsible political elites in Europe who risk all kinds of adventures, even a major war. But it's a different situation because we're in a nuclear age today. And that would mean not just another World War I, but probably the end of humankind. The people in power now don't have the faintest idea about that.

The people who created the détente policies in the social democratic parties in the '70s had lived through World War II. Willy Brandt was a socialist, an anti-fascist. He risked his life to combat fascism, and he survived. And that's why he knew what history means. That's why he knew what war means. And today, people don't have— as Günter Anders, the German philosopher, remarked 50 or 60 years ago— the political elites don't have the imagination to understand the possible consequences of their actions.

#Pascal

Is there... is there, though, a slight shift in recent months? Because one thing I noticed is that one of Germany's most prominent voices, the philosopher Richard David Precht—he's a very welcome guest on all these talk shows—has started to say that we need to recognize certain Russian viewpoints and that we need to negotiate. He's, of course, being trashed by everybody else, especially on X. But that surprised me, because before, that wasn't a position that would even be aired very much. So, is there a slight shift happening?

#Fabian Scheidler

No, I don't see that slight shift. There was some kind of opposition from the beginning. I mean, Sahra Wagenknecht, who was, when the war started, still part of the Left Party, Die Linke, was very prominent and appeared on some talk shows. The standard procedure of our media is that if you have one person calling for peace and negotiations, you put four people—four warmongers—in front of her to demonize her. And that's what happened, of course. And with Richard David Precht, it's quite the same story. So it's important to have these voices. But still, according to polls, public opinion has been shaped by propaganda over the last few years.

But there's some glimmer of hope, because the German government wants to reintroduce compulsory military service, and young people disagree. I mean, even if they don't have very strong opinions about how to end the war in Ukraine, they know they don't want to die in a war with Russia. They don't want to serve—most of them. So, on Saturday, there will be a strike of German students and pupils at school, in the tradition of the climate strikes. I hope this kind of resistance will move forward, because if the young generation says no to this kind of militarization, we have a chance to change course.

#Pascal

For the off chance that young people are listening to this program—because I know the demographics are rather the opposite—but in case somebody is listening, it's quite simple: if someone asks you to take a rifle and go kill somebody else, just say no. Just say no, because it's so perverse, isn't it? All these old people on the talk shows sit there and talk about the necessity to defend, and about the young generation stepping up to their responsibility. And they will never, ever even go close to the front, right? Again, it's a perversion—but it's one that's going on right now.

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, you know, I think Ursula von der Leyen, the head of the European Commission, was recently asked if her relatives would go to war in the case of a conflict with Russia. She hesitated, and then she said no. And the same, by the way, is true for the voters of the Green Party, which has become one of the most belligerent parties in Europe. It was a party founded on peace, ecology, and anti-capitalism—and it's quite the opposite today. Most Green voters want rearmament, more weapons deliveries to Ukraine, want the war to go on, and so on. But it's also the party whose voters are least willing to serve in the military.

Very interesting. So, as you said, it's like the bourgeoisie and the academic circles in Germany are quite pro-war and pro-militarization, but they don't want their children to go to war. It's a completely cynical situation. And Erich Maria Remarque, the author of **Im Westen Nichts Neues**—I don't know, the English title, one of the most famous anti-war books written after World War I—there's a famous scene where soldiers on both sides are sitting there saying, "Well, what are these wars about? I mean, if the Russian Tsar and the German Kaiser have a problem, they can get pistols and kill themselves."

But what do we have to do with that? We should stay out of it. And as you said, the whole idea that people obey when those at the top say, "Just take a rifle and shoot your neighbor," is absurd. It took hundreds of years of discipline through schooling, militarization, and propaganda to convince people they have to obey in such a situation. I've written about that extensively in my book **The End of the Mega Machine**. This kind of refusal to obey is crucial for peace. And when you look at the Vietnam War—this is my last point—it was that crucial tipping moment when soldiers refused to serve.

#Pascal

Just refuse. I mean, you don't have to be a diehard pacifist—just refuse to be sent to war. And, you know, just as a side note, when it comes to the First World War, it was even more bizarre than now, because the German Kaiser and the Russians were—well, they were cousins! Together with the King of Britain, right? They were all grandchildren of Queen Victoria. But, okay, Europeans—including, I think, all the way to Russia—have a habit of making stupid choices, which are then borne by normal working-class people. Hans and Paul go and kill Ivan and Gregory, right? It's horrible.

#Fabian Scheidler

Yes, absolutely. I think the situation we're in is that Europeans were used for 500 years throughout the expansion of the Western capitalist world system. But they were the ones calling the shots. They could colonize other countries as they wished, they could send their own people to war as they wished. But those times are over, and they don't want to accept that. They don't want to accept the end of Western hegemony, and they don't even want to accept the fact that we are, at least formally, democratic societies where people can say no to war. Right?

#Pascal

That's why they have to work on undermining the very democracies they claim to be defending. But that's a whole different issue. Fabian, for people who want to follow you—where's the best place to find your books and your writings, and where do you publish them? Yes.

#Fabian Scheidler

Go to fabianscheidler.com. You'll find a lot of articles and videos there. I also write for Le Monde Diplomatique and other newspapers in many languages, so there's plenty of material. You can also follow me on X, Bluesky, Facebook, and so on.

#Pascal

I'll put the links to your profiles in the description of this video below. Fabian Scheidler, thank you very much for your time today.

#Fabian Scheidler

Thanks for having me.