

The Empire in Self-Destruction: Inevitable Collapse | Fabian Scheidler

The old Western order looks more brittle, more violent, and more desperate than at any point in recent memory. In this conversation, I speak with German author and playwright Fabian Scheidler about his book "The End of the Megamachine" and the deeper system of militarism, capital, media power, and linear force that he argues is driving ecological collapse, war, and political decay. Fabian lays out his view of a declining American empire, Europe's turn toward militarization, and the way welfare, rights, and diplomacy are being pushed aside in favor of permanent conflict. The discussion also moves through Gaza, Iran, Ukraine, China, and the Gulf states, with a strong focus on the risks that come with a fading hegemon that still has huge power to destroy. In the end, the key point is stark: a failing system can become far more dangerous as it loses control. Links: Fabian Scheidler website: <https://fabianscheidler.com> The End of the Megamachine: <https://www.megamachine.org> Fabian Scheidler on Substack: <https://fabianscheidler.substack.com> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch & Donations: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction and book thesis 00:05:07 The mega machine framework 00:08:06 End of Western hegemony 00:10:49 China and the global shift 00:15:14 Europe Iran and double standards 00:25:53 Colonial extraction and backlash 00:37:46 Nuclear danger and Gulf realignment 00:44:23 Limits of the US war machine 00:48:23 Europe on the warfare path

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody. Today we are joined by Fabian Scheidler, a German author and playwright who recently published a book on this very topic, *The End of the Megamachine: A Brief History of a Failing Civilization.* That's what we want to discuss today. So, Fabian, welcome back. Thanks for having me. Great to have you back, and great to have your new book here and your analysis. You've also been speaking all over Germany and Switzerland in recent months to get the word out about this whole war machinery that, unfortunately, has really gone into overdrive—also in Europe. Can we talk a little bit, maybe first, about the thesis of your book and where Europe stands today?

#Fabian Scheidler

Well, the book *The End of the Megamachine: A Brief History of a Failing Civilization* is about the roots of the power structures that led us into the global crisis we see today—the ecological crisis, the social crisis, and the geopolitical crisis. It's a long story of what I call the four tyrannies: the tyranny of the militarized state; the tyranny of structural violence in the form of, let's say, property relations

and juridical relations; ideological power—and the media, of course. It's a long history, going back into our early past. And then there's the tyranny of linear thinking, which is the belief that in a complex world we can achieve our aims by applying force in a linear way.

So that could be very instructive for Donald Trump—to read this book—because he would understand that linear force will not get him the results he wants in Iran, for example. But this is a long history, and it's also a history of the capitalist world system over the last 500 years: the expansion of capital accumulation in close relation with the military. The capitalist world system would not have been born, would not have emerged, without firearms and without the military. So the military state and the institutions of capital accumulation went hand in hand from day one of the system. And, of course, it's a system that cannot stand still, that has to incorporate territories and people into its machine of accumulation and exploitation. And so that's a motor of war—and has always been a motor of war.

And concerning our current situation, the world system as we've known it for the last 500 years has seen different hegemonies. First of all, we had the Spanish hegemony, which was financed by the banks in Genoa and elsewhere, to pay the return on investment of these wars and the looting of other countries. The second empire, if you will, was the Dutch one, then the British one, and then the American one. And we clearly see the decline of the American empire. So it's the end of a hegemonic cycle, and that's always a very dangerous time because the old hegemon tries to maintain its power by all means—and that means war as well. The situation this time is different, however, because the new hegemon—if you will, if it's a hegemon—is China. And China has a very different story; it has a different history.

It has a different history of foreign policy, which was mainly based on trade and not on colonization. So that gives us a chance to prevent a major war between the U.S. and China, because China does not want that war. Most of those in charge in China do not want this war. However, the U.S. is trying whatever it can to assert its power by the only means it still has, which is its military. Economically, the percentage of global GDP that the U.S. and the G7 hold has declined steadily—it's about half of what it was in the 1980s and 90s. And the BRICS clearly have the upper hand here; they account for almost half of global production. So I think the U.S. cannot stop its decline. But what it's doing now in Iran, of course, is accelerating that decline. And we can go into that further if you like.

#Pascal

We should. Let's go further into this. But is there something more that needs to be said about the way you're framing the situation? I find the title quite intriguing—that you're looking at it as a machine, a mega-machine. Can you explain that concept a bit?

#Fabian Scheidler

Yes. The megamachine is a concept coined by Lewis Mumford, an American historian of technology. It's a metaphor—a metaphor for a system that reduces human beings, and nature in general, to cogs in a machine. Because it has one ultimately irrational goal: the endless accumulation of capital. It has to subordinate everything else—our human relations, our relationship to nature, nature itself—to that end. And of course, a system that works like that cannot maintain itself indefinitely on a finite planet. It's impossible. And we're seeing that now, because we are very close to tipping points in the Earth's system.

It's not only the climate. We see tipping points in the climate system—the Greenland ice sheet, the West Antarctic ice sheet, the Amazon rainforest. If we cross these tipping points, there's no return to the previous state of affairs, and we could drop into a new state of the Earth system, what's called the "Hothouse Earth," an entirely different planet. And it's not only the climate; it's also biodiversity. The capitalist megamachine has already caused the biggest mass extinction of species in the last 65 million years. So this goes beyond even human history, and that's why some have called it the Capitalocene.

You know, there's this notion of the Anthropocene, which says that human beings as such are responsible for the state of affairs. But I think it's a certain social organization—what we call capitalism—that's responsible. And it's much more than an economic system; it's also an ideological system, a military system, a political system. That's what has led us into this planetary crisis. So that's one dimension of this failing civilization, because I think we have institutions that are not compatible with human survival on this planet. The main thing we have to think about is how to change these institutions, right?

#Pascal

Hey, very brief intermission because I was recently banned from YouTube. And although I'm back, this could happen again at any time. So please consider subscribing not only here but also to my mailing list on Substack—that's pascallottaz.substack.com. The link's going to be in the description below. And now, back to the video. Completely agree. Thank you very much. This is also very much a lefty, kind of Marxist interpretation of what is leading and driving foreign policy and the global system, right?

And in a sense, I really want to ask you: why do you think the megamachine is ending now? Because, you know, what you just explained—Karl Marx already said that, what, 150 years ago? He said, "Look, this is exactly how capitalism has to end, because it's the logical endpoint." On the other hand, we had 1989–1990, the collapse of the Soviet Union—hooray, hooray—the Francis Fukuyama "end of history," liberal democracy and market economy. Capitalism is going to reign supreme. The question is over. But the question is not over at all, right?

#Fabian Scheidler

So, it's not over. I don't agree with a certain Marxist view of determinism in human history—I think it's never determined. But for a logical reason, a system that has to turn nature into commodities at an ever-faster pace cannot sustain itself indefinitely on a finite planet. And we also know there is no eternal civilization; there has never been one. So this notion from Francis Fukuyama—the “end of history”—has been nonsense from the start, I think. It was sort of the idea that the U.S. was approaching its unipolar moment. And in that unipolar moment, after the nineties, as an American elite, as somebody who was part of the U.S. establishment, you could think, “Well, that was it.”

We have conquered the world. But it's a very naive vision of history. All empires and all civilizations have a starting point. They rise, they have their inner contradictions, and at a certain point, they decline. The decline is usually faster than the rise. So we don't know how long it will take for the megamachine to unravel. I mean, it's a civilization—it's not the end of the world if the megamachine fails. There will be other forms of human social organization. We don't know which ones, but we know this system is not eternal. I assume it will not survive this century. And we can already see, in the geopolitical upheaval we're witnessing, the germs of something new.

#Pascal

Yeah. If you're talking about civilization, you're talking about more than just the United States, right? I mean, the way Europe is integrated into this megamachine, the way Japan is integrated into it. The global economy is integrated too, but in very different ways. And now we see opposition to that kind of structure of international trade and global power politics, and so on. How are you seeing this unraveling—this ending of the machine—happening now?

#Fabian Scheidler

Well, I think what we see, first of all, is a subsystem that's unraveling—and that subsystem is the era of Western hegemony. The megamachine was run by Western powers; it emerged from the West. The whole notion, the idea that the world is a machine, emerged in the 17th century, when capitalism was already in full development in Europe. So we have almost 500 years of Western dominance in the world system, and that is clearly coming to an end. The Iran war is part of that story. China has very different traditions. It's part of the world system, it's part of capital accumulation, and so on. But first, it has a different foreign policy, and second, its basic—let's say, civilizational—background is different.

They have a different—there has been for centuries a different—relation between the state and capital in China. That's also mirrored in Confucian culture, a philosophy which holds that the state should not let capitalists become too powerful and should not let the military become too powerful. In the West, we have the opposite. Basically, capital owners are more powerful than heads of state because they are internationally organized, while states are territorial. And that was different in

China. So I think what we'll see is a different approach to the relationship between state and capital. And we'll also see a different approach to the ecological question. China has a project for an ecological civilization. There's an endless number of contradictions within China.

I mean, China still has more coal-fired power plants than any other state, and on and on. But at least they have a vision for a transition to something else. And this model is becoming more attractive now with the Iran war, with gas and oil prices soaring, because more and more countries and more and more people will turn to renewable energies. And of course, China is the leading country. So I think there are lots of things happening in this geopolitical crisis and turnaround that we're seeing. That's not necessarily the end of capitalism—it might take much longer. But you see, capitalism needs poor countries and poor people to be exploited; otherwise, you cannot accumulate capital within the system. And if the Global South continues to rise, that will change the whole dynamic of that system.

#Pascal

Yeah, the entire idea of redistribution of wealth is, of course, an antithesis to unbridled capitalism, in which capital flows into ever fewer hands. Right? And with capital comes power. I keep saying, you know, a few ten thousand dollars or a hundred thousand dollars—that's a living. A billion or two or three billion—that's control, that's power, that's the ability to steer an entire army of people to do as you say, by paying them salaries. And there you go—that's a model that's probably in flux again right now.

But maybe instead of focusing so much on the economic side, we could look a bit at what this does to foreign policy and to war—the warfare, the war drive in Europe, the war drive of the United States, the Iran war—but also the silence and complicity of the Europeans in all this. I mean, I was quite flabbergasted again by Germany, which was so, so vocal about the Ukraine war, so vocal about how no state can just attack another one—an unprovoked attack—and that we have to stand with the victim. And now we have almost the opposite. No, it's not exactly the opposite—actually, there are very different reasons behind Russia's full-scale attack, or let's call it a "special military operation" or invasion, whichever, of Ukraine, and now the attack by the United States and Israel against Iran. Completely different.

But what it looks like from the outside, right, with one country attacking another, is exactly the same—kind of very unprovoked. And Germany was very publicly supportive of the United States, even saying things like, "Thank you." In the 12th war, they were saying, "You're doing our dirty work." The chancellor even said so, literally—doing the dirty work. Now they're saying a regime like Iran, a government like Iran, cannot hide behind international law because it has itself broken international law, which is, again, a very nonsensical statement. But where is that coming from, in this context of the megamachine?

#Fabian Scheidler

Well, it's coming from the relationship between the hegemonic force—the U.S.—and its vassals. I mean, German foreign policy has completely subordinated itself to the United States. We see that in the Iran war. Just a couple of days ago, our president—who has no real say in politics, he's just a representative figure, the real power lies with the chancellor—said that the Iran war, the attack by Israel and the U.S., was illegal. And immediately he was attacked by some media outlets and by the government, who said it was outrageous that the president—how can he say such a thing, and so on? It's really a ridiculous stance, because it's so clearly illegal. In the midst of negotiations, the U.S. and Israel bombed Iran, which was no threat to the United States, which didn't attack the United States.

By the way, even the negotiations between the U.S. and Iran were illegal under the U.N. Charter, because the Charter says that even the threat of violence is illegal under international law. And of course, Trump used the threat of violence all the time. So that's a ridiculous stance, and it has a long history. You know, when the war in Gaza started—the assault on Gaza after the 7th of October—it was immediately clear that Israel was violating international law, the Geneva Conventions, and so on, on a daily basis. Four weeks into the devastating campaign, our chancellor then, Olaf Scholz, said, "Israel is following international law. Whoever says something else is a liar."

And then we had our foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, from the Green Party, who said, well, you know, if Hamas is hiding in hospitals or schools, we can bomb them—it's OK. And with that, she basically wiped off the table the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits such behavior. You have to protect civilian infrastructure by all means. So the German government—both the old one and the new one—was opposed to international law in that case from the very start. Then the International Organization of Genocide Scholars said that what is happening there is genocide in Gaza. And Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch had said the same thing before. In Germany, in our government, we have someone who is responsible for the subject of anti-Semitism.

So he's the government spokesperson for these issues, and he said that to speak of a genocide is anti-Semitic. It's outrageous, you know. The most renowned scholar in the field of genocide, Omer Bartov—he's an Israeli Jewish scholar—so he's anti-Semitic in the view of our government? They are so clearly opposed to international law, to human rights, and on and on. And in the case of Ukraine, they always maintain, "Well, we defend international law," and so on. These double standards are so blatant. And in the case of the Iran war again, it's all about subordination to U.S. interests and to Israeli interests. In that way, they're really undermining European interests, which are, of course, to stop these wars, to push for negotiations, and to stop this absurd escalation.

#Pascal

And sorry, this is just a point where I need to mention again how this is now coming home to haunt people in Europe. We need to point out the plight of your countryman, Hussein Dogru, a German national who was sanctioned by the European Union because he's on the Russia sanctions list—but

he's there because he's accused of doing propaganda for Hamas, or rather, for the Palestinian cause, which is ridiculous in and of itself. The point is, he's now on the sanctions list, and just two days ago one of your lower courts upheld that his bank completely cancel his accounts.

He has no more access to any money. In order to pay even for rent, the threat now is that he and his family—his three children and his wife—might not have a home anymore. And the court said this is lawful, this is legal, because the decision was taken by the EU Council. Therefore, anything goes. And this is the subordination through various mechanisms that now comes home to become a horrible repression against individuals inside Germany—German nationals. It's quite insane how this machinery is now kicking and yelling and screaming, starting to get more draconian toward the outside and toward the inside. Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

#Fabian Scheidler

Yes, I think that's a very dangerous path we're on in the European Union now, because the European Union is about to become a totalitarian institution. If you take away basic human rights from people without any hearing, without any due process, and you just strip away human rights—like the right to freely move across the European Union—that right was taken away as well from people like Sandogo or Jacques Baud, who is a Swiss citizen and not able to return to his home country. He's in Belgium. Then you end up back in the Middle Ages. I mean, this is unheard of in modern history since World War II. We haven't seen such things, that within the European Union people are stripped of their basic rights without due process, without even a hearing.

And so I think it's very important to oppose this, because this sets a precedent for the European Union to say, "Well, we don't like the opinion of this person or that person—on Ukraine, on Gaza, on whatever." And as you said, they mix these issues. I mean, it's a sanctions list about Russia and Ukraine, and then they accuse people of taking a certain stance on Gaza. So it's all mixed up. It's just like Louis XIV—you know, the French king in the 18th century—who said, "I don't like that person; let my police get rid of him. Just put him into prison for an indeterminate time." It's like that. We are losing basic democratic institutions right now under this hysteria about Russia. And we also have to think about what the pretext for all this is.

The pretext is that the situation is so dangerous because Russia will invade us in a couple of years—that's what our foreign minister said a couple of years ago. In 2029, Russia will supposedly be able to invade NATO. But if you look at the Russian army, which has struggled for four years to conquer just some eastern Ukrainian villages, the whole idea that this army will march into Riga, Warsaw, Berlin, and Paris in the next few years is just ridiculous. Yet it's being used as a pretext to crack down on our democratic rights and to justify a level of militarization unheard of since World War II. The German government wants to increase the military budget from 50 billion per year to 150 billion per year by 2029—that's mind-boggling. And the whole idea of spending 5% of GDP...

#Fabian Scheidler

For the military, that means we'd have to spend 50% of our federal budget on defense. And that would be the end of the social welfare model the European Union is famous for. And that's what they want. The Financial Times, about a year ago, had a headline that said the EU must trim its welfare state to build a warfare state.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Fabian Scheidler

They're not even hiding it. I mean, the Financial Times is usually more open about these things. Our political leaders are hiding it behind that so-called Russian danger and all the rest of it. It's a pretext to fundamentally change our democracy into a totalitarian system and our social welfare state into predatory capitalism.

#Pascal

But do you also see that as the outcome of this unraveling—this decay of a model that used to work, that used to be able to exploit the entire planet, including slavery, classical colonialism, the killing of large swaths of people in Africa, Asia, and South America? And then the transformation into the neocolonial empires, where the extraction still happens but under the veneer of human rights discourse and whatnot. Whenever somebody comes to power, like Nkrumah in Ghana or Sukarno in Indonesia, who could endanger this extraction model, they're gotten rid of by the U.S.—in cahoots with the UK, the Europeans, the Israelis—in order to exert dominance.

And now it seems that this is not that possible anymore. There are still places where it's happening, but in others—like China, or large parts of Southeast Asia—they're now able to steer things differently. In Cuba, which has been resisting for the last 70 years, and in Iran, which is no longer playing along, this kind of successful resistance is growing. And that, in turn, is leading to a counter-reaction inside the country, and also inside Europe, which is trying—through remilitarization—to regain the ability to use brute force. Is that one of the symptoms of the decay, or is it one of the symptoms of the system itself?

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, I mean, the system was built on a contradiction—or a certain relationship—between the core of capital accumulation and the periphery. The periphery was the large sphere of the colonies. They were colonized for hundreds of years, run initially by joint-stock corporations like the British East India Company. These were militarized corporations—the Dutch East India Company, which was the first one, and the British East India Company. They ruled over countries; they had their own mercenary armies. Whenever there was any resistance to their exploitation, they just killed the

people with their mercenaries. For example, there's one interesting story I tell in my book about the Banda Islands in Indonesia. They had nutmeg, and you could sell nutmeg for an extraordinary price in Amsterdam.

And the Dutch East India Company wanted to have a monopoly, because the secret story of capitalism, of course, is that it only works with monopolies. Otherwise, you can't accumulate enough capital. So look at Google, Amazon, and so on. In those days, it was the Dutch East India Company. They wanted a monopoly. The people in the Banda Islands said no, and then they came with their mercenary army. Within a couple of weeks, out of 15,000 inhabitants of the Banda Islands, only about 1,000 remained. That was one of the many genocides in the history of the joint-stock companies. And at the end of the day, the company had its monopoly, and they sold the nutmeg in Amsterdam. The shareholders didn't know anything about that; they were just lucky to get a huge dividend, buy a Rembrandt or a Frans Hals, and be very cultivated in Amsterdam—which was a very cultivated city.

But on the other side of the world—barbarism, genocide—that's how the system has worked for 500 years. And so Gaza is part of that. I mean, what Israel is doing is classical colonialism: take the land, grab the resources, and leave people to die—or murder them right away. But this system doesn't work that way anymore. Then there was another phase, after most of the countries of the Global South had gotten rid of formal colonialism. The U.S. and other Western nations—France, Britain, and others—started to engage in regime change. Iran in 1953, of course, was the first one. A democratically elected government under Mohammad Mossadegh wanted to use the, uh, the petrol—the oil—for its own development.

And that was against the interests of British Petroleum and the rest of them. So they staged a coup d'état. They brought in the Shah, who ruled with his torture and despotic means, and the reaction to that was, of course, the Iranian Revolution in 1979. So if you create such a system, and if you try to exercise linear power—put your government here and your government there—at the end of the day you'll have a backlash. We saw that in Iran. I'm not sympathetic to the regime in Tehran, but clearly they don't obey orders from the empire. And the same is true for Russia. They had this Maidan coup, where the U.S. was heavily involved to get a pro-Western government, and they have a backlash now.

And the Ukrainian people must pay a very high price for this geopolitical game that the U.S. has been playing. But this, as you said, is working less and less. It's part of the unraveling of the geopolitical hegemony of the West. And if we talk about the Iran war, it's not going at all the way the U.S. and Israel imagined. They wanted regime change—no regime change. It was completely predictable, because with air power alone you normally don't get regime change; you need boots on the ground. But Donald Trump probably couldn't do that, because his constituency was against it. And now the Arab oil states are facing a stark choice, because they're being bombed by Iran and the U.S. is unable to defend them. That's a new situation.

#Pascal

And not only unable to defend them—I mean, the U.S. is willingly, knowingly letting them be bombed. Iran says, “If you bomb our oil fields, we will bomb the oil fields of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and so on.” And then what does the U.S. do? It bombs the oil fields in Iran. So it’s like they’re willingly throwing them under the bus. It’s even worse—they’re doing it on purpose.

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, even worse. And he’s unraveling the empire, because the bases in the Gulf are a main pillar of the U.S. empire, of course. It’s centered around the petrodollar and so on. And what they’re destroying is not only, in the long term, their presence in the Gulf—it’s also the petrodollar system. Because people will look for other means, for other energies. I mean, as I said in the beginning, I think we’ll see a steep increase in the demand for renewable energies. And you can make the argument that empires are linked to certain types of energy. You could say the British Empire was a coal empire, the American Empire was a petrol empire. I don’t know if they want an empire—I doubt it. I doubt they want the same kind of hegemony that the British had and the U.S. had.

But clearly the Chinese system is an electrical system. It’s different, and we see that transition. And yeah, they threw the Arab states under the bus. There’s a lot of confusion in the Arab states because there was this deal, if you will, in the 1970s: the Arab states would sell their oil for dollars, and exclusively for dollars, which was a key pillar of the American empire. And in return, they got security—security against external enemies like Iran, and internal enemies, because the Arab states are monarchies. They are, if you will, dictatorships, and they have populations that are not always in agreement with what their governments do. So the American empire guaranteed security for the monarchs. And that is gone. Nobody believes that anymore.

And now they’ll start thinking about how to get out of that quagmire, because their entire business model is built on stability. They want to be a hub for the rich and the super-rich—stable, but very far away. It’s close, geographically, to the wars in Syria and Gaza and so on. But for the tourists and the super-rich who bought islands in Dubai and elsewhere, there was this idea that they were separate from these genocides and wars. And that’s gone now. The stability and the business model are gone, and they have to reinvent themselves. My prediction is that they’ll pivot to Asia. Yeah—not openly, but they’ve done so before already. China has played an increasingly key role in the Middle East, and that will only accelerate.

#Pascal

Actually, I had a talk on my channel with a Chinese scholar, and he pointed out how close China’s relationship is not just with Iran, but with the Gulf monarchies as well. China has every interest in maintaining close relations with both, and they’re building on that. And actually, that’s probably the closest—the most serious—chance we have of bringing back some form of peace and stability in the

Gulf region, because China could mediate convincingly on both sides to find a modus vivendi, not between Iran and the United States and Israel, but between Iran and the Gulf states in some way, shape, or form. Not connected to security guarantees, but simply to the ability to talk and negotiate with both sides and keep their interests somehow in balance.

That would be a very hopeful future. But it's definitely the case that if you look at West Asia as it is today, both Europe and the United States have brought destruction—destruction over large parts of it. And now they're even coming after the parts that were prosperous under the protectorate, because the protectorate is failing now. It's not failing in the sense that it can't protect; it's failing in the sense that it's saying, "I'm going to break it all."

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, absolutely. That's the key dangerous moment for a declining hegemonic power. Because if they're backed into a corner, if they don't know what to do, they can do crazy things. One thing they can always do is destroy. The Americans and the Israelis have so many means to destroy—not half the world, but all of it—if they want. And that's one of the dangers of the current situation.

#Fabian Scheidler

When Israel understands that it's losing this war—and I think they do understand that, in terms of their objectives—they wanted either regime change or chaos in Iran. They like chaos in neighboring countries because then those countries are weaker, and Israel can be the dominant power. It's easy to pick them off and play them against each other.

#Pascal

You just always pay money to the group that doesn't have enough power and will use violence to get there. That's the spiel we've been seeing for the past 80 years, basically. Absolutely. And they'll do the same in Iran—keep paying money to the insurgents, and once they get power, you pay again to the other side, and you repeat an eternal cycle of violence, which then serves you well because you're the dominant force. It's not even that hard, actually.

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, but in the case of Iran, it doesn't seem to work, at least in the short run. And the dangerous question now is: what does Israel do? They're still getting rockets and missiles from Iran hitting their territory, even hitting nuclear facilities. I mean, one rocket landed very close to a key nuclear site in Israel. Apparently, a building was destroyed—maybe it housed Israeli nuclear scientists.

#Pascal

Only after Israel actually attacked similar facilities in Iran, right? Iran is very careful about always responding proportionally, to say, "No, it's not impunity. You can't bomb us with impunity. You bomb our stuff, we bomb yours. Period. So stop the bombing."

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, absolutely. They do that. They're not the ones who escalate in the sense of being the first to hit a nuclear facility. They only do that if the other side does it. And now the question is whether Israel would consider using a nuclear bomb in that case. They have that option. It was discussed earlier under Golda Meir—the so-called Samson Option. That's what Seymour Hersh revealed in one of his reports on the Israeli nuclear program. I don't think they're that crazy yet. But, you know, if Israel really doesn't see any possibility of achieving its goals, it's not completely out of the question.

#Pascal

You know, that's a dangerous moment. And right now, Iran is threatening that if you do that, then they'll eradicate your two major cities, because they can do that with their conventional weapons. Haifa and Tel Aviv can be targeted—and targeted on a massive scale. Ted Postol pointed that out time and again. They have enough firepower to flatten those cities, including, of course, all the civilian infrastructure, if the other side went that far. But it would be an absolutely apocalyptic scenario on both sides. Absolutely.

#Fabian Scheidler

And I think that's still avoidable. That's still avoidable. But, I mean, the positioning of other states is very crucial. China is working behind the scenes, talking to all sides. Before that war, they had already managed to reengage Saudi Arabia and Iran in diplomatic relations. That was kind of a miracle, and China was the one that brought about that very surprising situation. And now, again, China is talking to all sides. They're condemning the U.S. and Israeli aggressions, but they're also condemning the Iranians for attacking civilian infrastructure in the Gulf states—which, of course, they do because they have very strong relations with the Gulf monarchies.

They depend on their oil, and they're already positioning themselves for the post-war era. If this all settles without Armageddon—which we hope for—then I think we'll see, in the mid and long term, more Chinese influence in the region. You know, you have to remember that China even mediated hostage negotiations between Hamas and Fatah, dealing with the internal divisions within the Palestinian territories. So these are major shifts, and I think they'll play out over the next decade. In the immediate run, though, I think we could see more crazy things happening under the Trump administration—but he's also restricted in terms of budget.

He wants \$200 billion now for the Iran war, and nobody knows why he wants \$200 billion. This war costs at least \$1 billion a day. Does he want to go on for 200 days? I mean, U.S. lawmakers are

asking serious questions, even on the Republican side. So it's not clear whether he'll get that money for an endless war. And he's facing midterm elections, and he's not very popular right now in the United States—of course not with Democrats, but even in the MAGA movement. People like Tucker Carlson and many others are, yeah, yeah... But the problem is that the people who—

#Pascal

Capitol Hill—the people who support the Iran war—they've got both parties. So even if the Democrats get elected, you might see Donald Trump being impeached, yes, but I don't see them actually changing course. At the end of the day, the Israeli lobby was extremely skillful in making sure that, on both sides of the aisle, they have their people in there. So unfortunately, overall, the war drive of the system—I don't see that reducing. But what we could see is, of course, the ability to implement war might be reducing, if your thesis about the failing machine is correct, because what we're seeing is that the U.S. military-industrial complex, despite its enormous wealth and its enormous...

#Pascal

Money laundering that's happening through it—despite all of that—it's apparently not able to produce all the implements of war needed to keep this going indefinitely. So again, is this another one of those signs of the machine breaking down?

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, not necessarily the breaking of the entire machine, but certainly a geopolitical shift, which is a subsystem of it. Because, I mean, the military-industrial complex in the United States is so corrupt. They've developed these extremely expensive weapons—these interceptors. I mean, they work quite well, but they cost between four and twelve million each. So it's very expensive technology, and they're not able to produce many of them, maybe a hundred per year. It's ridiculous. So they're running short of these interceptors.

And the whole industrial base in the United States just isn't there anymore like it was in World War II or right after it. So they're not able to produce weapons at the rate they'd need to maintain their hegemony by military means. For example, I don't think China is willing to take over Taiwan militarily, as the U.S. keeps saying. They might be able to, but I don't think they will. However, they could if the Iran war goes on for another two or three weeks, because the U.S. will run out of interceptors. And if they don't have interceptors, they can't defend their aircraft carriers—and if China wanted to take over Taiwan, that would be the moment.

#Fabian Scheidler

The U.S. couldn't stop them. They couldn't use their aircraft carriers. Even now, in the Iran war—and Iran is a comparatively very weak adversary—they can't really use them, because Iran is firing missiles at those carriers and they have to pull back. And so everybody sees that, even militarily, let alone economically, the U.S. is not able to maintain its position in the global system. And for Europe, of course, this is a moment when they should think very carefully about where they're heading. What they're doing now is saying, "Well, Russia will invade us," which is nonsense—but they're moving toward extreme militarization.

And there are others who say, well, the U.S. is not reliable anymore. So that's another reason to remilitarize. I think what Europe really could do—and what they should do—is become a diplomatic superpower: to have good relations with China, with the Global South, to rebuild those relations, and to maintain some sort of decent relationship with the United States without just following orders. That would be the way forward for Europe. But so far, they haven't made up their minds about where to go, except for the idea that they need a strong military to grab the resources of the Global South.

#Pascal

I don't know. If the European Union—if Europe as a continent, as a collaboration of, you know, the 27 EU states, plus Switzerland and a few others on the periphery—if they just realized that they could actually be neutral countries, neutral and just try to have good relationships with the Russians, the Chinese, the Americans, the Iranians, and just say, "Okay, whatever your political system is, we don't care. We run our own political system over here." Which, again, unfortunately, they keep saying is democratic, but it's becoming less and less so with every passing day.

But let's let that be. We could have such beneficial relationships with everybody, but Europe is running itself into the same corner that the United States is already in—just in an even more discomfiting or precarious situation. It's quite mind-boggling, right, looking at this from the outside, because the train wreck is so clear. And yet this train slowly but steadily moves toward that wall. It's already very, very obvious. And in a sense, it seems that the Europeans are not able to stop it.

#Fabian Scheidler

They're not able to stop it. And I think this militarization will make things much worse, because if you destroy the welfare state, you end up like Great Britain—which is also a country in dire straits, not only since Brexit but even before, because they followed the American model. And like the U.S., which could end up in a civil war with that division, that extreme division between rich and poor. Do we want to go that way? There is a different path forward. And I think if the European Union had a rational foreign policy, the Ukraine war would have ended already.

Right, because it was the European Union that undermined the peace talks that had been going on since Trump took office. The Europeans said, “Well, if there’s a ceasefire, we will send in British and French troops”—that means NATO troops. And to prevent NATO troops on Ukrainian soil, that was the incentive for Russia to start the invasion in the first place. So if you want to prolong the war, you make exactly that proposition: to send in NATO troops. They’re also refusing to put the sanctions on the table as part of a negotiation strategy. So if you say, for example, to Russia, “We could lift these sanctions if you renounce the parts of the Donbas that you have not yet conquered,” that could be a starting point.

That would make it much easier for Zelensky to sign something, and you’d have something to bargain with, because Russia clearly wants these sanctions lifted. They’ve managed to circumvent some of them, but they’re still painful. Yet Europe has blocked all kinds of diplomatic initiatives and sabotaged negotiations to its own detriment. So Europe is going down the drain because it keeps sabotaging negotiations. If we could get a real peace deal—different from just a ceasefire—Russia doesn’t want a ceasefire, because it allows Ukraine to rearm. They want a peace deal. So if we could get a lasting peace deal in Ukraine, we’d need the Europeans on board, because Zelensky couldn’t say no if both the U.S. and the Europeans said, “Go for the peace deal.”

And then we would have a much more stable situation in Ukraine. We could stop this crazy, frantic militarization, because Russia would be settled at the point where they are. And we could start making initiatives with China, Brazil, and other countries to get a new approach to the Middle East. Because if we cut the money to Israel—if we say to Israel, “No money, no arms, nothing until you stop the genocide, until you pull back from the Gaza Strip and from the West Bank, until you stop your illegal wars”—remember, the Iran war was basically an Israeli initiative. Marco Rubio admitted that. So if we stop that flow of arms and money to Israel, we could change the situation in the Middle East. Europe has a lot of leverage here, and they’re doing the opposite.

#Pascal

They are. They are. I mean, Europe is in a very, very sad place for many different reasons. But Fabian, this was quite a fascinating way of looking at it through the lens of your book, **The End of the Megamachine: A Brief History of a Failing Civilization.** For people who want to purchase the book, where’s the best place to get it?

#Fabian Scheidler

Well, you can go to my website, www.megamachine.org, or to fabianscheidler.com—those websites—and you can get it online or wherever you want.

#Pascal

Okay. I'll also put the link to the book in the description box below, and you'll send me a couple more links to your work so people can find you. I'll include those too. Is there anything we forgot to mention?

#Fabian Scheidler

Yeah, you can also go to my Substack—Fabian Scheidler on Substack—and you'll find a piece there on the situation in the Gulf states and the geopolitical consequences of the Iran war.

#Pascal

Everybody, check out Fabian Scheidler on Substack as well. Fabian, thank you very much for your time today.

#Fabian Scheidler

Thanks for having me, Pascal Lottaz.