

# HUBERT VÉDRINE

Founder of Hubert Védrine Conseil, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of France

## Ali Aslan, International TV Presenter and Journalist

I want to bring in Hubert Védrine, the former Foreign Minister, for a second and ask him about the view from Paris but also some of the lessons that we as Europeans have learned since February 24. What are some of the major lessons, some of the major points you have observed?

## Hubert Védrine

This round table is supposed to be about reflecting on the future, but it is difficult to think about the postwar period because no resolution of the war is in sight. A stalemate is the most likely scenario. I do not believe in short-term negotiations, much less a "settlement". So it is not the postwar period that should concern us here, but an unresolved war, a quagmire. Moreover, I believe that Putin's aberrant decision takes us back to the beginning of the Cold War, which lasted more than four decades. At the time, the West was realistic and capable of negotiating while standing up for its interests. The West eventually prevailed. At this point, we are not at the same stage of the SALT, START and other agreements. We are before that stage, at the beginning. Therefore, in my opinion, we must look back and study the 1950s to understand the current situation.

The future of Europe is intertwined with the future of NATO. The immediate consequence of Putin's attack is that, at everybody's request, NATO has reabsorbed the entire European defense project. This means that, for some time, we will no longer have any political basis for "French-style" ideas on autonomy in European defense matters. On the other hand, it seems to me that Europe has an obligation to reach a consensus on technological matters to restore a certain degree of self-sufficiency and reduce excessive dependency, which the pandemic, the shut-off of Russian gas and the blockade of grain exports threw into high relief. However, this is not about defense nor security. Let us remember that the number one challenge for the United States is China. Europeans tend to forget this. Just listen to what Biden, Blinken and Joint Chief of Staff General Milley say. It does not sound that much different from what Macron sometimes says, and occasionally Scholz. For now, decades of discussions on European defense must be set aside. It is guaranteed by NATO as much today as when the Alliance was forged in 1949 after the Europeans asked the United States to protect them. One day, the Europeans, even the Poles, will come to the realization that it is unwise to think that the United States will protect us forever. When that day comes, we will have to step up and assert ourselves as Europeans. We are not there yet! Right now, the most urgent priority is to block Putin and keep him from winning. This brings us back to the stalemate I mentioned earlier.



I believe that we have not only an opportunity but an obligation to reduce excessive dependence on defense technology in every area. Meanwhile, it is important to think about what Western policy has been since the USSR collapsed 30 years ago, and not just in the last months or years. This analysis has not been done, in my view. Anyone in the West who tries to is cast as being complacent about Putin, which is clearly not the case. A West that shies away from assessing its policies in the 1990s is a West to be worried about. What military circles call “feedback” is essential. Several policies have followed one another since the early 1990s. Yeltsin, Putin I, Putin II, Medvedev, Putin III and Putin IV must not be lumped together. Everyone understands. Right now it is impossible to discuss these ideas in the debates swirling around Europe. So we must refer to what the Americans say, especially the Cold War veterans who spent their lives fighting the USSR and can analyze the situation in order to think about the future. While I agree that it is indispensable to undertake an analysis of what the West has done with regard to Russia, China and the Middle East after believing it had triumphed, now is certainly not the right time to do so.

As for the future, it seems to me that what Macron or Scholz say is sometimes consistent with what the White House thinks.

**Ali Aslan**

Thank you so much. Obviously, the French-German axis is extremely important here in guaranteeing the unified front.