

# RENAUD GIRARD

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## **Jim Bittermann, Senior European Correspondent in Paris for CNN**

Now we turn to Renaud Girard from *Le Figaro*, who is no stranger to these conferences. Renaud, your President has just spent three days in the United States, did he unlock the secrets of American foreign policy?

### **Renaud Girard**

I will speak from a European, a Frenchman's, point of view about how I see U.S. foreign policy over the next two years.

I will speak in French, an old European diplomatic language, especially since there are only four million English-speakers, all of them Irish, in the European Union now that the British are gone. I will express myself in the old European diplomatic language that Frederick the Great of Prussia flawlessly spoke.

How could U.S. foreign policy be characterized? I think we can say that the Americans are reaping the harvest of the divine surprise. Let us reap the providential gift, let us reap the harvest of the divine surprise.

At our last conference, in Abu Dhabi, American influence in Europe was at its lowest ebb. Europeans were fuming over their management of Afghanistan, which they had left calamitously, all the more so since they had involved the Europeans in the Afghan affair.

Europeans remembered the 2008-2009 subprime crisis, which left a mark. They paid a higher price than the Americans, even though they had absolutely nothing to do with the engineering of the crisis, which occurred because the Americans decided to offer social housing through the banks. For a European, the idea was quite absurd. Admittedly, European banks were foolish enough to buy American derivatives, but the consequences were much greater in Europe than in the United States, which did not offer to help Europe offset the damage the American financial system did in Europe.

The Americans echoed what Treasury Secretary Connally said when they unilaterally broke the international financial order that they themselves had created at Bretton Woods. Of course I am talking about Nixon's decision on August 15, 1971 to abolish the convertibility of the dollar. "The dollar," Connally said, "is our currency, but it's your problem." During the financial crisis, the Americans told us, "Wall Street is our financial system and your problem."



Lastly, Europeans remembered the disastrous American invasion of Iraq, which, by the way France and Germany opposed. American political, diplomatic and military influence hit a low point. Germany disobeyed America for the first time by continuing its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project. Joe Biden eventually acquiesced. During his June 2021 Geneva summit with Putin, he gave his blessing to Nord Stream 2.

Last October, things looked pretty bad for American influence in Europe.

And then came the divine surprise. Putin made the biggest strategic blunder in the contemporary history of Russia. That is not the topic of discussion today. The divine surprise, which nobody foresaw, is that the Ukrainians resisted so well. The Americans did not think the Ukrainians were going to hold out, which is why they publicly offered Zelensky asylum in the United States, as they did to General Thieu of South Vietnam.

It was a divine surprise for the Americans, who for once had reliable forces that they had armed and trained, unlike Thieu's South Vietnamese against the Viet Cong, Maliki's Iraqis against ISIS and Asraf Gani's Afghans against the Taliban. They were trained, armed and determined. What a divine surprise!

The Americans realized that they had overestimated Russia's strength and underestimated their own qualities, i.e. the quality of training, the effectiveness of the Javelins they gave the Ukrainians and above all the quality of their cybernetic counter-offensive.

In 2014, the Russians began cyberattacks on the Americans, who in turn launched a major counter-offensive, hacking into all the important computers in Russia, including the Russian general staff's, which allowed them to share Russia's plans with their Ukrainian allies hour-by-hour.

In February and March 2022, the Americans saw that all of Europe was panicking. Sweden and Finland wanted to join NATO as soon as possible. Germany realized it had made a mistake—"We were so naive to rely on Russian gas"—and did an about-face. By the time of the NATO meeting in Madrid, Europe was completely "NATOized".

France's ideas and initiatives on European strategic autonomy and defense were forgotten. The Germans planned 100 billion in investments. There was no question of buying European weapons, only American ones. When Scholz spoke in Prague about European defense, he did not even mention France. He said he wanted to develop a sort of antimissile shield without breathing a word about France and Italy's efforts already underway in this area. European strategic autonomy was completely forgotten.

Now that Europe is vassalized, what will the suzerain's policy be? It will continue selling its weapons. It will shore up the Paris-Berlin-Warsaw-Kyiv axis, which was already in Brzezinski's playbook. When Brzezinski, the great chess player, recommended completely excluding Russia from the European space, he said that the axis had to be created. Today it exists and it is completely under American influence.

When the Poles are rebuked for being American slaves, they say "It is in our interests". Moreover, they are not that enslaved to the Americans because Polish communities in the United States influence American foreign policy.



What will France be able to do in the next few years? Will it still be Asterix's village holding out against the vassalization of Europe? I think France does not have the slightest chance of playing that role. Every European head of state dreams of emulating de Gaulle, in other words demonstrating their independence and seeing the United States bow to their wishes, as when Nixon came to Paris in January 1969. Macron does not have the slightest chance of successfully playing the role of Europe's Asterix for three reasons.

First, he will never manage to convince Europeans. Why? Because his sanctimoniousness has annoyed so many of them. He has lectured the Poles, the Hungarians, the Italians, etc. And they said, "We will not stand for any of this from you."

Second, when Macron said that NATO was brain dead, his European allies disagreed.

Third, Germany no longer respects France because it has not met its own obligations, in particular financial obligations with respect to the euro. Its public finances are in a mind-boggling mess, which means the Germans do not see it as a serious partner. I think we have forgotten that.

I will come back to your question about Macron, who wants to be seen as a key foreign policy figure in the United States. He is intelligent enough for foreign policy. He has ideas, but he has forgotten that a foreign policy cannot succeed unless your own house is in order and you are exemplary. Unfortunately, I think Macron must put his own house in order before rebuilding a credible foreign policy.

### **Jim Bitterman**

Thank you for expanding the panel here to Macron's foreign policy as well as Joe Biden's and creating a couple of new words for my French vocabulary like vassalisation. In any case, I think what you are saying is a bit what Jean-Claude was saying from New York, that basically the Americans have won a number of things with the war in Ukraine, even if they do not particularly like to think of it that way.