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WEBINAR

EMMANUEL MACRON: THE LAST PRESIDENT OF EUROPE

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WRIGHT: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name is Tom Wright and I direct the Center on the United States and Europe here at the Brookings Institution. It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this webinar to launch a terrific new book on the French President Emmanuel Macron entitled, "The Last President of Europe: Emmanuel Macron's Race to Revive France and Save the World."

This book is written by our colleague Bill Drozdiak. Bill is a nonresident senior fellow here at Brookings and a senior advisor for Europe at McLarty Associates. He was previously the president of the American Council on Germany, a journalist for over two decades at the Washington Post, and he got his start in transatlantic relations playing professional basketball in Europe and the United States in the 1970s.

"The Last President of Europe" will be published in a few days. You can buy it online today at your independent bookstores or Amazon or wherever you prefer to purchase. And it will be delivered on the publication date, which I think is April 28th.

Bill has written a truly intimate portrait of President Macron at a profound moment of crisis in Europe and around the world. Today as we sit here, we're just 24 hours away from a crucial European telesummit, in which Macron will play a leading role tomorrow to craft the EU's response to the coronavirus. So, the timing could not be better.

Upon writing the book, Bill had unique access to President Macron. In fact, he met with him several times over the last 18 months and spent countless hours with his advisors in research and reporting in Paris. The final product is a fascinating well-informed account of the French president, which demonstrates his ambition to transform France and Europe, but also highlights the daunting challenges he faces in implementing his plans at home and abroad.

Our team at Brookings had the privilege of hosting President Macron and getting a glimpse of this vision back in the summer of 2015, when he was relatively unknown, yet a particularly powerful and motivated economy minister.

Today's Webinar is part of an ongoing partnership between Brookings and the Robert

Bosch Stiftung, what we call the Brookings Bosch Transatlantic Initiative or BBTI. BBTI is a multi-year project that seeks to reinvigorate transatlantic cooperation on global challenges. Events like this would not be possible without the support and partnership we have with Bosch and we're very grateful to our partners who understand and respect our independence and recognize the value we offer through independent scholarship.

Our stellar panel today includes Bill, author of the book, of course. Our French visiting fellow Celia Belin, our German senior fellow Constanze Stelzenmuller, and our visiting fellow from Italy, Giovanna De Maio. It will be moderated by my colleague Fiona Hill as senior fellow here at Brookings and my predecessor at the Center on the United States and Europe.

So, as a final housekeeping item, please feel free to send your questions to events@brookings.edu or on Twitter using the hashtag BBTI. And with that, -- and Bill, congratulations on the book, and I would like to turn it over to you to give a brief overview, and then Fiona will chair the discussion. Thank you. Sorry, Bill, you need to unmute yourself.

MR. DROZDIAK: All right, thank you. Well, thank you, Tom, for that kind introduction. And my thanks to my Brookings colleagues for participating in this event to mark the launch of my book.

When I embarked on this project two years ago, I thought it would be fascinating to study a leader who had never been elected before to political office, a descendent to the French presidency --

MS. HILL: Bill, they cannot hear you.

MR. DROZDIAK: -- and also --

MS. HILL: Bill, they cannot hear you. Unmute yourself.

MR. DROZDIAK: Can you hear me now? Okay.

So, that when we embarked, he had these herculean ambitions to modernize France, revitalize Europe, and reshape the world order. And I thought it would be fascinating to follow him during the course of the early part of his presidency to see how this would work out.

And I've structured the book in such a way that it serves as a chronicle of his education and power in a way. Starting with his very rapid start as president, in which he pushed through some remarkable reforms, and then ran into the resistance personified by the gilets jaunes, the yellow vests movement, which stunned him with its ferocity and really pushed him into a depression that he isolated

himself in the Elysee. And then showed resilience in coming out of that depression and embarking on a round of town halls called the Great National Debate, which brought him out of this period when some people thought his presidency was in mortal danger.

The second part of the book deals with his efforts to revitalize Europe, trying to push back against the populous nationalists, not just Marine Le Pen in his own country, but also Matteo Salvini and what he represented in Italy, and also Viktor Orban in Hungary.

I go into in some length the difficult relationship he had with Angela Merkel, which started out with great hope that the French -- the German tandem would lead Europe into a bold new initiative to unify the continent, yet it ran into political difficulties. Merkel's difficult relationship with her coalition partners in Berlin, but also skepticism about Macron's ideas. And I recount in the conversations I had with him about how this also made him feel isolated as the last leader in Europe who really had a truly strategic vision for Europe and its difficulties in convincing his European partners to share this.

And then the final section of the book is about his interactions on the world stage with such leaders as Donald Trump, Xi Jinping, and Vladimir Putin, and how he thought it would be important for Europe to unify in order to compete in this resurgent big power rivalry that we are seeing today.

And the final chapter is called "Macron Alone" in which I draw him out in a fascinating discussion about geopolitics and where he thinks the world will be over the next three decades, and why it's important for Europe to unify in order to compete. And this last conversation I had with him took place in September of last year in which he was a very despondent mood. He was saying, in fact, that he felt that Europe was not ready for the next big crisis. He didn't know what it would be, but he felt that this would be something that would test Europe and possibly push it to the breaking point unless the 27 leaders somehow mobilized and came together and found a way to coalesce behind his strategic vision.

And what we see today now with the corona crisis he's had -- his popularity has greatly improved. His ratings have greatly improved because -- as other leaders have seen happen as people rally around their governments to deal with this crisis. And he's spoken to the French people on four occasions talking about this as a test of war. And frankly admitting that his government was not prepared, that France has had a great shortage of masks and protective equipment, as we've seen in our own country here. But also focusing on how he is trying to galvanize the international community for

more action.

In his conversations with President Trump, he pleaded with him to launch a joint project for the G7 group of industrialized democracies. Trump, who has the presidency of the G7 this year, said he's too busy with other things, why don't you organize it for me? So, Macron has found himself, again, after holding the presidency last year, trying to organize G7 summits.

And now, tomorrow, as you point out, there will be a critical meeting of the European Union leaders trying to come up with a trillion dollar plus recovery fund, which would heal the breach between the wealthy northern countries and the poorer more indebted countries of the south. And this is really something that people have talked about in the last few weeks, which could push Europe to the breaking point. And Trump is part of that and Macron was trying to heal this breach and we'll see how it plays out.

But all in all, it's been a fascinating exercise to see how this youthful president, now only 42, has tried to put France and Europe back in the game of big power competition with a lot of -- with a remarkable roller coaster ride of some successes and some failures.

MS. HILL: Well, that's wonderful, Bill. This is Fiona coming in, Fiona Hill, to do the moderation. I really hope that everyone who is listening today will have a chance to read your book, and that it will become soon as an essential item for mailing. As we know these days it's a little bit difficult to order things. And I just also wanted to give a shout out to everybody who's listening and hoping that everyone is staying well and safe at this difficult time, and appreciate you all joining us today.

I think, you know, Bill's book has really shaped a very important picture of someone who is going to be playing an increasingly pivotal role as we look at the ways that Europe is going to get out of the effects of the pandemic. And may, in fact, also play a larger role in shaping perhaps a global response if he's able to pull off some of the interactions that Bill has just discussed.

I'd like to turn over, very quickly, to Celia Belin, our visiting fellow from France. Celia has been following Macron's trajectory very closely as well, and also some of his interactions with the United States as well as other Europeans. I know, Celia, that you'll be able to offer us a fresh perspective from how it looks like from France now in terms of Macron's leadership style, how effective it's proving to be in this time of crisis.

MS. BELIN: Thank you, Fiona. Thank you, Bill, also for this excellent book. I enjoyed it thoroughly and I hope you all will read it and enjoy it. I thought I would offer three quick points and hopefully get you to react as well, Bill, and give your own perspective because you had the unique chance to discuss directly with Emmanuel Macron.

My first point is on leadership style, indeed. Because it seems to me that the book sheds a very interesting light on how Macron is as a president and that we see that particularly -- particular behavior during the time of crisis of COVID as a very unique moment to appreciate it.

And my impression was that Macron had made the conscious decision of behaving presidential immediately after arriving. So, you mention how he gets inspired by de Gaulle, how he took some distance from the press, how he got his nickname, Jupiter, for being maybe too locked up in his Elysee Palace for a long time. And then he had this behavior, it came out of a will to contrast himself from President Sarkozy, who is considered was too susceptible to public opinion, but also to President Hollande of which he was a very close associate and advisor at the Elysee Palace. And he considered that Hollande was too close to the press and also susceptible to public opinion.

So, Macron really tried to take that distance. There was also a strong backlash. You remember after the yellow vest crisis that Macron was judged arrogant and out of touch and tone deaf. And yet it seems that some of these same instincts at the beginning of COVID, you know, he talked about war, he was a wartime president. And once again he seemed to have -- to be like very high up and maybe too far from people's preoccupation. And every time after facing that crisis and facing these criticisms, Macron turns back and sort of had this moment of humility where he recognizes failure, when he says that he will change. And he is doing that again during this COVID crisis that he has mentioned some of his own failure.

And yet, you know, it's hard to know whether this is just pragmatism. Whether this is in a way cynicism on the part of Macron of having these two hats of the president in the Elysee Palace and at some point being able to say I understand you. So, I would love your take on that, and whether or not Macron is capable of change. He's talking about his own change.

My second point deals with Macron during COVID-19. What is the impression, the public opinion? So, it's actually quite hard to make an informed evaluation of what's going on. There is clear

things that have worked for him for his government. We have a strong state. We have a strong public sector. You know, the health system in France functions and a lot -- there was no breakdown of the health system. You had patient transfers in other regions. You had patient transfers to Germany, to other countries.

And yet, you know, dissatisfaction of the French public is here. You have now only 33 percent of French people who say they trust the government in this crisis. It's down 20 points in just a month. So, you have really an unhappy public that feels they've been lied to on masks. They've been lied to on testing. They feel there are some incoherence coming from the president. And yet there's a fragmented opposition. So, I really wonder what will come out of this crisis politically. And whether or not -- this is actually hard to evaluate whether this has weakened Macron or strengthened Macron. I would love your opinion.

And my last point maybe is that I see Macron as looking at this crisis as both mortal danger, but also unique opportunity. So, it's mortal danger for the European Union. He said it repeatedly for the cohesion of the EU. But it's also mortal danger for the international order.

Both President Macron and Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs have talked about the return of nationalism. The competition between U.S. and China. The risk for the world order. But they also see -- both Macron and his government behind him, a unique opportunity to push for European solidarity.

Macron talks about a moment of truth for Europe where everything could change for the better if only you had solidarity between north and south, between hard-hit country and not that hit -- not that hard hit countries. But also an opportunity to push for international cooperation. He's asking for a support package for Africa or for an IPCC for health issues, human and animal health.

So, there's a lot of propositions out there and it's typically Macron. It's hyperactive, sometimes he does not prioritize very well. But yet, it puts forward a whole lot of proposals. And once again, Bill, given that you've seen him up close, which one do you think Macron is most likely to push? Where do you think this is going? And is this an activity that he can really sustain and bear the fruit of? I'll stop here.

MS. HILL: Well, let me just come in after Celia has led on our topic. Because I think

Celia has given us a great roadmap for the discussion. We've also had some questions coming in from part of the audience. A couple of which dovetail with the first points that Celia was making on the domestic front in France. So, I'll put those together for you and then we could maybe perhaps move onto the larger picture that Celia was talking about and bring in Constanze and Giovanna because that will touch on the EU.

And I've made a note of the points that Celia has made here. Because a couple of our audience members have asked questions about France itself. And given what you've said and what Celia has said about the presidential de Gaulle model that Macron has adopted for himself, his ability, perhaps to learn lessons from his failures, and attempt to change. And a part of the question is does he learn these lessons for himself or does he think he can apply them more broadly to France?

And so, we've had a question from Ellen Wasylina, who is the CEO at the Transatlantic Global Advisory. And she asks, Bill, how you see France and reform itself, and also reforming for the EU? And she's asking about what challenges Macron will face in the upcoming presidential elections given all of these issues that we've sketched out about rising nationalism and anti-immigrant and migrant sentiment. And this on top of COVID-19.

And we've had another question from Fuson (phonetic) Tuchman (phonetic), a professor at Galatasaray University in Turkey, who's asking what does the relative silence of Marine Le Pen during COVID-19 seem to indicate?

So, these are all kind of questions about how Macron will be able to apply his leadership style and his ability to learn lessons in this test that he is facing on the domestic front, more broadly to France and the future prospect of reform itself. I mean, this will now all, of course, be tied up to COVID-19. So, perhaps you could us a little bit of your thoughts on that, Bill, and then we'll move on to some of the broader international perspective.

And, thank you, Celia, for such a detailed commentary.

MR. DROZDIAK: Well, just to respond to Celia's points. I think it was interesting during the course of our conversations, I asked him about leadership. He mentioned de Gaulle, of course. And others that I spoke to such as Hubert Vedrine, who had been the chief of staff for Francois Mitterrand told me a very interesting conversation that he had with Macron saying how should I best demonstrate

leadership? And Vedrine said he told him, well, when Mitterrand was facing a lot of criticism and domestic pressure, he disappeared for several days in order to reject the sense that, oh, I'm -- he's disappeared to think big thoughts about the future of the country. And Mitterrand, of course, had this very monarchical aura in the belief that the French loved their president to be a king.

And it was interesting, Macron's response was, how can I do that today? You know, there are social media everywhere. I'm on 24/7. If I try to disappear people will think I've died. So, he feels that it's an entirely different set of challenges.

As Celia mentioned, the lack of trust in government and I think we're seeing that everywhere. Probably with the sole exception of Germany, where they have -- Chancellor Merkel, given her scientific background, has demonstrated a clear and concise understanding about the nature of this virus and the German people feel very comfortable and reassured by her leadership. And the fact that Germany has many fewer fatalities is quite significant.

In the case of France, I think with their -- even with their centralized system, it's remarkable that they've gone through this period of strict lockdowns and most people seem to be abiding by it. Even though they are very rebellious by nature as we've seen with demonstrations against Macron's reform period. How he will come out of this is unclear. He has felt all along that the secret of modernizing France, pushing through these reforms was a precursor to revitalizing Europe. First of all convincing Chancellor Merkel and the German people that France is capable of reforming, and doing what needs to be done in order to show a leadership with Germany for the European Union in the next phase.

And I think this is why the summit tomorrow is split between the wealthy creditor countries in the north led by Germany and the Netherlands, and countries like Spain and Italy in the south, who are pleading for a dramatic recovery fund that will cope with the aftermath of the pandemic is - - could be a turning point in the fate of the European Union.

Macron recognizes this. He knows that this is key to the success of the European Union, and indeed, the success of his presidency because he always told me that he was in a race against time. He felt that there would be a test that would come up to Europe that would be even bigger than the Great Recession period that led to the euro crisis after 2008, 2009. And, of course, at least he never imagined

or never confided in me that it would be the nature of this global pandemic. But the crisis is here. It's testing European unity just like it's testing international cooperation.

And how he performs in the next days and weeks and months I think will be the key to his presidency, because we see populous nationalists on the rise everywhere. Viktor Orban has basically turned his state into an authoritarian regime. The first time a European Union member has turned away from democracy. He's supported by that by the government of Poland. And what happens in France and other countries is rather alarming.

MS. HILL: Thank you, Bill. And perhaps as we go along, we can pick up in on some of these issues. I think you've made it quite clear that it's too soon to say what his chances are in the presidential election. It depends very much on where he is, where we all are with COVID-19. And perhaps the best explanation for the question about why Marine Le Pen is being quite silent at the moment is that she's probably waiting her moment as well to see how this plays out. Anyone can use this use this for political points if Macron is seen to falter. So, as you said this is a huge test of his presidency.

Turning over to Constanze, you said yourself how important this whole relationship is between France and Germany and how Germany was also looking for proof that Macron was really serious about reform. And there's been, you know, quite a lot of discussion about the nature of the relationship between Macron and Chancellor Merkel. Obviously, two very different people, a large age difference, very different styles. And perhaps, Constanze, you can offer your perspective from the viewpoint of Germany on Macron's leadership style and how he's generally doing as well as, you know, how this test of COVID-19 is playing out from Germany's perspective on the European stage.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Sure. Well, thanks again, Bill, for a fascinating book, which I also read with great pleasure. And I hope it gets a great reader response as well.

Let me just, perhaps, begin on the point of the rebellious French, and note that the lockdown conditions in France, Italy, and Spain, are far more severe than they are in Germany. We are much closer to the Swedish model. The Germans are walking and jogging and congregating in parks and being, you know, pulled on their ears by the police, but they have much greater freedoms.

And on the point of everybody loving Merkel, well, let's not forget that we had that at the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015 as well. Because Merkel made the Germans feel good about

themselves and then things went badly for a while and, you know, and that started -- that was the beginning of the AfD and the huge political crisis from which arguably Germany still hasn't quite recovered. Although the AfD, like Marine Le Pen, is currently sitting in a corner and sulking and/or biding its time.

Now, Fiona, on your question. I think that the Macron-Merkel relationship reflects the classic sort of disparities of the Franco-German relationship, which is that France is a presidential democracy, Germany is a parliamentary democracy. France is a centralized country. We're a very federal country. So, Merkel has significant constraints in the way that she makes politics and policy that a French president just doesn't have. She has to -- she has to marshal her coalition partner. She has to marshal the states. She had a significant populist movement in her own country to keep at bay that was going to exploit any opportunity it got. Particularly where they thought, you know, a sort of there was an overexposure to Europe. Sending money to the south. That's the kind of thing that the AfD -- is oxygen to the AfD. So, Merkel had to be very careful on that account.

And then there is another German tradition that is not so much a French one, which is that French chancellors have always traditionally seen themselves as balancers between the different parts of Europe. And particularly, and I think particularly for Merkel, between western Europe and eastern Europe.

And then finally, there were very real policy disagreements. I mean, you know, the German commentariat, to which I belong, was a little bit in love with Macron at the beginning. You know, he kept giving these fabulous policy speeches that we always wished that Merkel would give. The man had a vision. The man had ideas, proposals. And we were sitting there saying, my God, you know, we wish the chancellor would do just one or two of these.

But then you see him saying in an interview, Orbán is the man I have the most interesting exchanges with. He's the one that my thinking most closely aligns with and the Germans were all saying what the actual (inaudible). Or the Russia reset, which people were tearing out their hair over in Berlin. So, there are very genuine policy disagreements.

Now, I agree that this is a make or break moment. And I just want to point out, and that's -- this is my final point, that the -- that Merkel had actually a couple days ago in a televised press

conference made some very interesting remarks on the question of how to deal with this. She said for one, it was unquestionable for her that there would be solidarity and "more solidarity" from Germany, and that that -- this was not just a question of values, but in Germany's national interest.

She made it very clear that she thought that the EU budget should be completely rewritten, and might have to be larger. And the Spanish have put a very interesting proposal -- I mean, very bold proposal on the table for tomorrow's summit, which essentially suggests a 1.5 trillion euro not mutualizations of debt, but mutualization of spending. In other words, a common spending fund. And in that context, just sort of one last quotation from Merkel in that televised address, she said that it was unfair and inappropriate for people to suggest that the southern countries should not receive more transfers because they have in some way, you know, that they were in some way at fault. This was a pandemic, a national catastrophe that had happened to all of us in the same way, that it had nothing to do with moral hazard.

And so, I think that she is likely to be a positively-minded, open-minded broker at tomorrow's summit. I hope she is.

MS. HILL: Thank you so much, Constanze. This is a really great perspective on the German vantagepoint. And, Bill, before I bring you back in, I'd like to turn over to Giovanna De Maio as an observer of one of the southern countries that Constanze has noted here. At least a country that's (inaudible) divided between north and south and of itself, as well, there's been a very different relationship between Italian leaders and President Macron than there has been between President Macron and Chancellor Merkel in spite of all the different styles, and also the complexities that Constanze has laid out.

We know that in Italy there's a very complex coalition arrangement. We've seen Prime Minister Conte himself trying to grapple with this as he's had to deal with the crisis in Italy, which as we all know, along with Spain, has been the hardest hit in Europe by COVID-19. But we've seen in the past members of that coalition government, Di Maio from the Five Star Movement and Salvini from the Lega actually take on Macron directly at different points. Even trying to undermine some of his policies and to try to take advantage of French domestic politics including the yellow vest movement at different points aggravating the relationship. And making it kind of clear that there, you know, is a lot of policy difference, but a lot of personal differences in style between France and Italy and harking back to some of the past

tensions between the two countries.

So, I wonder if Giovanna might give us a quick perspective on how it looks from a more (inaudible) perspective on Macron and how the Italians have been reacting so far, particularly ahead of this meeting that we have tomorrow.

MS. DE MAIO: Thank you, Fiona. And congratulations, Bill, for the book.

I have just a couple of comments on Italy-France relations and then the last questions to Bill on this. So, for sure, the coexistence of populist and nationalist in the coalition government between Five Star and League for the first 14 months starting from March 2018 created sort of difficult relations with the European Union between both these forces had very Eurosceptic views because of opposition to austerity policies, but also different views on how the immigration crisis should have been dealt.

And, therefore, what's fascinating in the relations between Italy and France is that both countries actually share an interest of getting together over, for example, budget issues and immigration crisis. But they struggle finding a common perspective because of both political relationship of these two kind -- two leaders of nationalist and populist movement with Macron, but also some competition dynamics especially in Libya where France and Italy are competing over how to deal with the post-crisis, post-civil war scenario.

And as you mentioned earlier, one of the biggest crisis moment between Italy and France was followed. It was in February 2019 when the Five Star Movement leader that then was the Minister of Economic Development Luigi Di Maio actually went to Paris and met with the leaders of the Yellow Vest Movement directly undermining the leadership of Macron and also -- and Macron actually called back the French ambassador from Rome for consultation. And the Five Star Movement and the Yellow Vests were actually accommodated by a sense of anti-establishment and quest for more democratic participation and joining decision-making.

So, now, and of course, on the other level, the nationalist Salvini was pairing up with Marine Le Pen especially after the EU election in May 2019, and they created a common formation in the European parliament called Identity and Democracy. So, both strengthening this feeling of anti-immigration.

So, in the post-COVID -- after the outbreak of COVID, actually what seemed to me that at

least Italy and France were coming together on a more common position, especially vis-à-vis the Europe summit that's coming up tomorrow, Italy seemed to be very supportive of the French idea of European recovery fund. And moving forward, Italy, of course, would love to be at more on this sharing risk, but also prosperity for moving forward. And I was wondering if Bill could give us a sense of how he sees the relationship which is between Italy and France moving forward in light of this more opportunistic, but more pro-European approach that the CONTEST government, number two, has been putting in place so far.

Thank you.

MS. HILL: Thank you so much, Giovanna. So, Bill, if you'd like to respond to what Constanze and Giovanna have said and then I'm going to bring in a couple of more questions that we've got from the audience.

MR. DROZDIAK: I think what's interesting about the profound differences between Macron and Merkel is his sense of disappointment. He felt that he had an implicit bargain that if he pushed his country, France, to undertake these major economic reforms and prove to Germany that it was capable of doing so, that Merkel would respond with a much more ambitious approach toward uniting Europe.

I think the model he had in mind was what Chancellor Kohl did in pulling his people along toward the European single currency at a time when Germans, 70 percent of the Germans, wanted to keep the deutschmark. And Merkel, of course, who is a very cautious leader who follows in line with public opinion, was reluctant to get ahead of the people. And in their conversations, he told me he insisted that Europe must be treated as a political community and not just as a common market in which wealthy countries can trade and try to get richer.

It's interesting that 20 years ago when I was based in Berlin as a correspondent for the *Washington Post*, people were talking about Germany and the Netherlands as the sick men of Europe because their economies were stagnant. They had antiquated industrial infrastructure, and bloated social welfare systems. And then they had a surge because of the single market, the surge in their exports turned them into the economic powerhouses of today. And now when the argument is made by Spain and Italy saying come on we need some help, Europe has shown some solidarity, the so-called moral hazard argument is invoked. When in Germany and Netherlands, why should we reward bad behavior?

And as Constanze pointed out, this is not bad behavior. Everybody is afflicted by the pandemic. And Macron has tried to say you can't think of Europe simply as a marketplace, and we have to show solidarity.

I mean, and going back to the Euro crisis, with the first bailouts that were funded largely by Germany money, a lot of that money went to bail out German banks. And there's a lot of resentment still today in Greece because all that -- a lot of that money did not find its way to help the plight of the Greek people.

I think where we go from here -- this is why he feels that Europe has to coalesce behind a political community vision for itself. He told me last September that if it doesn't do so, that Europe could disappear, Europe as a political project. And I wasn't the only one he told this to. He gave a speech to French ambassadors in late August saying that Europe could be obliterated. He gave a revealing interview to the *Economist* in -- at that time as well saying Europe was on the precipice unless it moved forward. And I think where he's been very frustrated is that he hasn't been able to convince other leaders of the urgency to transform Europe into a more integrated continent in order that it can deal with the challenges of the 21st century. Not from things like pandemics, but also from the rise of China, the retreat of the United States from a global leadership role, and the increasing belligerency that we're finding in Russia.

And just one point to answer Giovanna's question. I think it's interesting, France was competing for influence in Libya because I believe they were very alarmed by the situation in the Sahel region just south of Libya. And they saw that as an integrated force because Libya has really dissented into anarchy, not just civil war. And this is actually fueling the return of the Islamic state in the Sahel countries, which is a direct threat to France's interests there.

MS. HILL: Thank you very much, Bill, and Constanze, and Giovanna. I'm going to bring in a few more of our audience members. And, Bill, you mentioned the interview with the *Economist*, and in fact, Sophie Pedder, the Paris bureau chief at the *Economist* has sent in a comment and a question as well, which touches on exactly what you just said.

Sophie writes, my view is that Macron has been hugely impressive and articulate in his vision for Europe, and comments on the recent interviews he gave with the *Economist* that you mentioned

as well, and also the *Financial Times*. But she also comments just as you just said, Bill, that he's been rather less impressive in implementing the vision. And in particular, building the alliances that are needed to bring about the changes in Europe that he seeks. And she asks what evidence do you see, particularly during the current COVID-19 crisis, which has obviously aggravated all the divisions that he's able to do this.

Now, there's a couple of other related questions so I'll bring those in as well. We have Andrew Moravcsik, a colleague of ours also from Brookings, professor at Princeton University, who is commenting on the same issue saying that many European insiders feel that when they unpack Macron's proposals, they are either hopelessly vague or simply commit others to projects that benefit France, or at least cost it little.

And some of the examples that Andrew comes up with include common defense procurement, financial transfers from northern creditors to southern debtors, and even aid to Africa. And you, Bill, mentioned, of course, the Sahel and the interests then in Libya. And Andrew Moravcsik asks, what is Macron's France prepared to sacrifice in order to make Europe succeed? This ties into Sophie Pedder's comment as well about how Macron can overcome some of the divisions. That ties in also to what Giovanna was saying as well from the Italian perspective.

And, finally, on this related set of questions, Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, a professor at Kadir Has University in Turkey asks, who are the other leaders, if any, in today's EU from both the big and small states who Macron can work with to move the process of European integration further? And how could a group of this type help to propel Europe's agenda forward? So, these might be good questions to tie together, especially as we look at tomorrow and this meeting and how Macron is going to get any traction with his counterparts.

MR. DROZDIAK: Thank you. Well, just to address Sophie's points. How will he try to implement his vision? I think that he struggled for months trying to get Merkel and other leaders to join him in a much -- in a Eurozone budget seeing that the 19 members of the Eurozone area could coalesce in a way that would help bring about this kind of strategic vision. That did not go anywhere. Now, I think he sees the transformation wrought by the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for Europe to rally around a whole new vision about how it's going to restructure its economy.

So, I think this is what he's spending his time putting together now. But it's -- and trying to get other leaders to see that we can't go back to the world that existed just a few months ago before this crisis. So, Europe is going to have a major economic transformation that will be necessary, that will require a recovery fund of the kind that we're talking about, more than \$1 trillion tomorrow.

And it's going to require a lot more efforts. But as he -- his belief that Europe must come together as a political community is really at the root of his thinking. Because he thinks that otherwise if Europe splits apart into smaller pieces, it will not be able to compete with the big powers in the challenges that we face today.

Now, what is France's contributions? I know there's a lot of cynical commentary about Macron's blizzard of proposals over the last two years to transform Europe and how it helps France. But I think he realizes now with the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU, France is now the major military power on the European continent. And he has offered to share France's nuclear deterrent with other European countries. They've been skeptical about responding to this because they don't want to scare away -- to do anything that would drive the United States away from its security commitments in Europe. But Macron is at least doing the thinking for the future, proposing this and putting it together.

He and Merkel have negotiated the new French-German treaty that was approved last year. And in a very little remarked part of the preamble, it says France will -- if Germany is attacked, France will make all means necessary available to defend Germany. And when I asked him in an interview does this mean that you are extending France's nuclear deterrent to protect Germany? And he just smiled and he just said that's a very interesting observation. You know, he says, but nobody else is picking up on that at the time.

But I think this is where France is going to be -- is willing to be the military -- offer the military leadership for Europe. And, of course, when he says that, people cynically remark, well, that means they want -- he wants other European countries to buy French military products, or to do support their army in places where France has its interests such as West Africa.

MS. HILL: Thank you very much, Bill.

On the issue of the United States, which you've touched upon as well, and I thought maybe we could bring Tom back in on this too. We've had a question about -- from Sanna (phonetic)

Bueling (phonetic), a reporter, Duggan's Neitter (phonetic), who's asking, is COVID-19 the first big crisis in a post-American world? And how will the absence of American global leadership affect power structures? So, that really touches upon the issue that you've just raised at the end of your commentary there.

And I think, you know, perhaps that might push out the discussion a little bit into how Macron has approached his relationship with President Trump and with the United States. Especially in light of what you're saying about France realizing that it's now the major European military power, that it has the force de frappe, its own independent nuclear arsenal. And it might have to play a different role in the future, especially in the absence of the UK, perhaps from broader European military structures. Obviously, you haven't mentioned NATO and about how France perhaps sees its position in NATO at this point.

So, I'd be interested if you could expand out a little bit about this, Bill, picking up on the question we've also had from Sanna Bueling and what you've just said about the perspective on the United States. And perhaps we might also bring Tom in because Tom has been writing quite a lot about this himself with others and articles that some of our audience members might have read recently.

And then we have a final question before we finish up that's much more specific about President Macron himself. And I'd like to bring you back to that before we wrap up.

MR. DROZDIAK: Fine. Well, to answer that question about the post-American era. Macron has believed for some time that it did not begin with the Trump administration the turning away by America from a global leadership role. He really believes that it predates that, goes back to even the end of the George W. Bush era and throughout the Obama administration that he felt that there was a turning away from Europe. And that Europeans must come to realize that at this stage, they can no longer believe that the American people will support coming to their defense in the future. And that if Europe is going to develop as an important global entity, it needs to be able to protect and defend its own security interests.

And this has been echoed by Chancellor Merkel and other leaders. It's time for Europe to take care of its own destiny. But very little has been done because of the reluctance of European taxpayers to fund a major military role. In that sense, France still continues to be, at least sees itself as

projecting a major strategic role in the world. It still has interests out in the Pacific with more than \$1 million citizens living there. And so that they have an aircraft carrier, Charles de Gaulle, that is floating through the Asian Sea.

So, I think this is in what is becoming more and more of a post-American era or at least an era in which there is no dominant power that it's important for Europe to start developing its own capability to defend its interests against -- at a time when China, Russia, and the United States will be competing for their own interests and may, indeed, see ways to exploit Europe for their own power needs.

So, I think this is what needs to be -- this is how one sees needs to interpret Macron's belief in what he talks about as Europe's strategic autonomy, which is a vague term. But I think he really sees it as a way of moving into the post-American era where Europe can no longer depend on the United States and the Atlantic partnership as the basis of its peaceful and prosperous order.

MS. HILL: Bill, before I turn it over to Tom, what about NATO? I mean, France is notorious from the time of de Gaulle about having, you know, something of its own perspective on this. It's pulled out of some of the military command, come back in. There's always been something of an ambiguous relationship probably for all the reasons that you've just outlined. But did President Macron say anything specific to you in any of your interviews?

MR. DROZDIAK: Well, I think -- no, he was reluctant to denigrate NATO. And I think -- well, the interview that he gave to Sophie for the *Economist* in which he used this term that got a lot of circulation that NATO is brain dead I think was a reference to the lack of -- his frustration over the lack of consultation on what to do in Syria. That the United States, the Trump administration, had surprised its allies by withdrawing support for their Kurdish forces in eastern Syria, which left French troops very vulnerable because they had several hundred special forces there. And I think he was angry and frustrated over that. And that showed -- he says, what does NATO mean if there's no consultation over such a serious matter? He says, this could lead to a prospect of war between a NATO ally, Turkey, and Syria. And if Turkey tries to invoke Article 5, does that mean we have to go to war against Syria just because of this decision?

So, he's saying that these are considerations. And whether Article 5 can -- whether people can trust and put their faith in Article 5 anymore is an open question that's been around since I

would say the early '80s. I remember a conference in which Henry Kissinger as secretary of state was saying that when it was asked the question of would the United States use nuclear weapons to -- if Germany is threatened? He said, you know, of course not. And that shocked everybody, but it was basically revealing something that most people suspected was the case.

MS. HILL: Thank you, Bill. I wonder, Tom, if you want to just give a quick comment and then I'll go back to the last question, which is pertaining to Macron himself.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, thanks, Fiona, and thanks, Bill, and everyone. This has been terrific.

You know, I think it's an interesting point to pick up on just what Bill said about the *Economist* interview and NATO because I think, you know, after Trump was elected, France, and then when Macron was elected, you know, had this sort of view of Trump. Obviously, they were worried, but they thought they could be sort of pragmatic and work with him. And I think as time went on, Macron used some of the features of America First like the ambivalence over NATO to make a case as to why Europe needs to do more.

So, in the way he thought that this was, you know, had a positive side effect for Europe. It could be used as a mobilization device. And I don't think he actually believed that Article 5 was completely hollow or wasn't going to work. And thought there were some concerns there, but he thought he could push it in the right direction.

I think what the COVID crisis has done is really illustrate that there is a price for Europe with America First, right? That this is a crisis where you really have no international leadership coming from the United States. You have the president doing many things that are counterproductive or damaging to the overall effort. And so I think he's probably more worried now than he has been it's my guess than at any time in his presidency to date. And this is not sort of a failing of America leadership that could be used to push Europe forward. I mean, that might happen. But the much more likely case is that it really damages European interests.

So, you know, as someone said earlier, the crisis is here now, but we've all said about how will, you know, Trump handle the crisis? That moment is upon us. And I think, you know, that will affect Europe quite dramatically.

The second point and final point, Fiona, is just that I think if you look -- I think we have a little bit of a reprieve, right? Because if you look at this year, international cooperation is really important. It hasn't really happened. And but it's much more important next year, right? So, the really hard decisions for the alliance, for Europe, for the world as a whole, and working together, you know, on a vaccine, on therapies, on coordinating economic recoveries, on helping developing countries that are still very vulnerable, those hit mainly in 2021. Which I think just illustrates this big question about the direction that America will go. And so I imagine that's probably very much in his mind too.

MS. HILL: Thank you, Tom. So, the last question, Bill, for you is from Vivienne Walt, who is the Paris correspondent of Time Magazine. And who's twice done big cover interviews for *Time* on Macron. And so she's bringing it back to the man himself. And she's wondering, Vivienne, what Bill, you think about the one thing that Macron said to her in her latest interview with him? She had asked him why he cannot ever shake his president of the rich title? And Macron brushed it off as a peculiarly French trait. He said to her, we are a country where we like leadership and we want to kill the leaders. She said is this an easy way out for a leader who is consistently regarded as arrogant and too cocky, just brushing this off? Or she asks, is there in your opinion, Bill, something peculiarly French about the drumbeat of criticism against Macron?

MR. DROZDIAK: It's interesting. He was shocked during the Yellow Vest protests. I recount one trip he made to Wien Berlin in which people were carrying effigies of him, stabbing the effigies, decapitating it. And really insulting him in a frightening way. And he came back to the Elysee just dazed and baffled. Why are the people doing this? And I once asked him what has surprised you most in your two years of power and he leaned back in his chair for about 10 seconds and thought about it and he just said, I would say it's the acceleration of violence and polarization in politics. I never anticipated this. He said it's one thing to disagree with my views. It's another thing to decapitate me or threaten to kill the leaders.

I think in his comment to Vivienne during her interview for Time Magazine was probably a reflection of his frustration that it doesn't -- you know, you can't -- you lose both ways. If you try to be a man of the people, people say, oh, you're not presidential enough. If you try to be too regal, you're seen as too distant.

I think it's true that -- and I attribute this to his lack of experience in politics the fact that he was never elected to office before, that he has a tin ear when it comes to trying to understand the people. I mean, Jacques Chirac, I think, was a master at getting out and rubbing shoulders and making people feel good about themselves in a personal sense. Even Mitterrand had a skill at that, but -- as did Charles de Gaulle.

But with Macron, he's much more of a philosopher thinker type. He cherishes his private time. Does a lot of thinking and reading and I think he's, by nature, very distant. I think maybe this was inculcated in him by the period in which he was growing up and fell in love with his drama teacher during his adolescent years. And the difficult relationship that they had in trying to sustain it and that woman, Brigitte, is now his wife. But he once said it was a very difficult stage that made him see the world in a totally different light.

So, I think all of this affects him. But it's hard to be an armchair psychiatrist in trying to see what works. I think his -- what impressed me about it is that he feels there's a -- he's got only a limited period of time. He wanted to push through all of these dramatic reforms in the span of two, two and a half years because in the five-year presidential -- he felt that they had to bear fruit if he is going to be successful in getting reelected to a second term.

And I think he failed to recognize the warning signs and the frustration -- the resistance and reluctance of people to embrace these reforms as he insisted they had to do.

MS. HILL: Well, thank you so much, Bill. I'm sorry that we're all out of time. But I think this has been a very rich conversation. And I think that all of the questions that we've had from our audience also show how interested everyone is in this topic. And your book, *The Last President in Europe*, I think it will give everyone a great overview of a very important person, a protagonist, who is being tested personally just as we all are in this very difficult time. And he may be, indeed, playing one of the more important roles in Europe, and if not, along the global stage in the year ahead.

So, I'd just like to commend you on the book. Actually maybe your timing is better than you think in terms of getting this out because we'll all be watching Macron and his counterparts very closely, not just tomorrow, but for the coming months.

And I'd just like to also thank my colleagues before we all switch off. Tom, as the Center

Director and the great comments that he made, as well as for the introduction. Celia, for offering us the French perspective. Constanze, for the important relationship that France has with Germany. And Giovanna, from the observations from Italy. And to everyone else in the audience as well, to say thank you very much for such great participation. And I'm sorry we obviously couldn't get to all of the questions that came in. We've got a lot of people listening today. But to everyone, thank you, Bill, thank you again. Good luck with the promotion of the book. And to everyone, please stay safe and well. And we look forward at some point, to be able to see people in person. And I hope we all come through this test in the way that we ought to with some ideas for how we'll move forward.

So, thank you very much to everyone.

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