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# Review of John R. Deni, *Coalition of the unWilling and unAble: European Realignment and the Future of American Geopolitics*. University of Michigan Press, 2021 xxi+250pp.

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This is the accepted version of a book review for *European Security*

The only thing worse than fighting with allies, Winston Churchill once noted, is fighting without them. John Deni begins his new book with Churchill's thought-provoking and intriguing quote (p. xiii). European security continues to confound us. It did so when the Cold War ended. It did so after 9/11, and it did so following Russia's annexation of Crimea. As Deni offers in his argument, European security confounds us deeply at a time of global upheaval. COVID-19 has uncovered and accelerated some existing trends. On the one hand, there is a declining interest and faith in the liberal international order. On the other hand, there is emerging great power competition between the US and rising powers such as Russia and China.

Deni has the specific merit, and courage, to explore the ramifications of these trends. . In so doing, his book is unique. Scholars of European security often shy away from dealing with the 'hard' questions concerning European capabilities, burden-sharing and what Washington should do to address perceived European non-compliance in the defence realm. Deni gets straight to the point: defending American and collective interests in Europe and beyond – what Deni calls 'the way of war' (p.20) – is now under threat. Throughout the 2020s, Washington is not going to be able to count on key European allies in the same way it has done since the end of World War II, and particularly since the end of the Cold War. Based on a reasonably bold neorealist assumption that military strength is based on economic power and population, Deni argues that none of Washington's key European allies is going to be willing and/or

capable of supporting US efforts to deal with the threats of China and Russia. Whilst Deni offers some grounds for optimism, as we shall see below, the book does not really deviate from its key message. Overall, Washington cannot count on the help of key European allies as it has done in the past. Subsequently, Washington ought to manage the re-alignment of the relationship between the US and its key European allies. The European allies that Deni identifies as key are the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Poland. Broadly speaking, Deni pursues a neorealist approach in his analysis. His approach is therefore a parsimonious one. In looking at the five case studies, each being one of Washington's key European allies, the book promises to avoid 'getting bogged down in the weeds of who is up and who is down in each country', focusing instead on analysing the 'macro trends prevalent in each of the five countries' (p. 23).

The book unfolds in the following way. After chapter one, which sets the context for the analysis and summarises the argument, chapter two looks at the UK. Deni argues that Brexit has damaged the UK economy, and it will continue to do so, making Britons worse off. One of the casualties of Brexit, following Deni's approach, is British military capability. This has a negative impact, in turn, upon the special relationship between Washington and London. The ability and willingness of the UK to participate in military operations far beyond the British Isles will gradually diminish over the next decade. In the worst-case scenario, the UK also faces the internal challenge of becoming 'rump Britain' (p. 201) with the possible secession of Scotland and Northern Ireland. Beyond this gloomy prediction, there is enough evidence to believe, according to Deni, that the US will start to consider France as its main partner instead of the UK.

In chapter three, Deni spills quite a bit of ink praising Germany. To substantiate this, he points out that Germany sits in the most privileged position among Washington's key European allies. It is the leading economic power in Europe. It has used its economic strength to claim the leading position in Europe's macro-economic issue areas. It led Europe's response to the sovereign debt crisis and has been a leading player in the EU's response to COVID-19 so far. It is also the most automated country in Europe, third in the world behind South Korea and Singapore.

Nevertheless, Germany is not yet the able and willing partner that Washington urgently needs. There is scope for it to become such, especially as Deni notes that German attitudes toward hard power are changing with the new generation of Germans being more open to Germany's military engagement.

Chapter four's topic is France. The French military has been overstretched. It now faces important challenges of recalibration, recuperation and reinvestment. Whilst France has embarked upon a wide array of economic reforms under the presidency of Emmanuel Macron, the overhaul of the French economy is far from finished. Until that happens, the French military will not be in a position to make sustainable Paris' global and ambitious security agenda. Additional French defence spending will help, but the Franco-American security relationship can only be nurtured by pulling the 'French economy out of its stupor' (p.88).

Chapter five, evocatively titled 'The Fall of Italy' (p.105), takes the reader through the big challenges, both internal and external, which Italy has faced in recent years.

These include the economic recession followed by years of austerity in the early

2010s, the refugee and migration crisis in the middle of the 2010s, worsening demographic challenges, and lastly, COVID-19. Such challenges have taken a toll on Italy's ability to play a major role beyond the Mediterranean. Subsequently, Deni argues that Washington will likely need to place less emphasis on its relationship with Italy as a partner in defending and promoting collective, as well as US, interests.

In chapter six, Deni analyses Poland and offers interesting insights, saying that by some estimates, 'Poland already has one of the most powerful militaries in the world' (p.133). Since Russia's annexation of Crimea, Poland has invested in military platforms, giving a clear indication of the emphasis on territorial defence against a conventional military foe. Yet, there remains a question mark over Poland's ability to sustain the levels of military spending seen since Russia's annexation of Crimea, and in the years to come Washington will ponder Warsaw's possible contribution to the protection of Western interests in North-eastern Europe.

In chapter seven, Deni's attention turns to how Washington can handle its relationship with unable and unwilling European partners in the years to come. Washington's efforts to promote US interests in Europe and beyond are likely to suffer because of this situation. Meanwhile, challenges are urgent. Russia is significantly more capable than it was a decade ago, from a qualitative point of view, as evidenced by Russian operations in Ukraine and Syria. China poses an important challenge as Beijing decides how to employ its growing power as well as to increase the scale of China's influence. Deni offers several policy options for the US to consider. These include the expansion of free trade, the strengthening of the WTO, the extension of national information sharing - including the invitation to Germany to

participate in the five eyes arrangement - and the use of NATO and other intergovernmental organizations as the frameworks for the exercise of hard power abroad, rather than relying on coalitions of the willing. Furthermore, Washington should offer a new burden-sharing bargain to its major European allies, including broader security spending in exchange for meeting defence spending commitments and capability targets. Further policy options for Washington to consider include the reduction of the cost of military procurement and fostering greater European integration in defence cooperation instead of obstructing it.

Deni's book provides a concise overview of key trends, which have taken place in several European countries over the past ten to fifteen years. He succeeds at packing and sending the message that Washington's key European allies have difficulties in generating sufficient hard power capabilities. An impressive knowledge of military capabilities is displayed and particularly evident in the Poland chapter, along with an in depth knowledge of other countries' previous involvement in military missions. All of that, along with largely jargon-free writing, will make this book accessible to a wide audience, including non-specialists. The book does not go as far as developing a new theory to explain trends in European security. In that sense, there is plenty of material to provide a corrective to neorealism, however Deni does not quite move beyond the neorealist assumptions, which permeate his analysis. Books that deal with matters of contemporary importance inevitably face the challenge of relevance. Whether Deni's analysis stands up, especially as the US and its allies deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, remains to be seen. However, his analysis is worth engaging with in the meantime.

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