

All Quiet on the Western Front

Lambsdorff, A.G. (2021).

Wenn elefanten kämpfen:
Deutschlands rolle in den kalten
kriegen des 21. Jahrhunderts.
Berlin: Propyläen Verlag.



DOMINIK PIETZCKER¹

Prof. Dr.

Public Relations and Communication's Management, Macromedia University of Applied Sciences

TWO DECADES OF ACCELERATED change have completely altered the world and our concerns about it. Ecological issues have gained undeniable importance for our survival. World hunger is a potential reality again. The rise of East Asia, particularly China and India, have redefined geostrategic reality by challenging the conditions of the Pax Americana in the Pacific. Russia, considered once again as the political antagonist of Western democracy, is of growing diplomatic and decreasing economic importance. Digitization is the new driving force of civilization, completely

overturning organizational, political, and economic limitations of the past.

A new equilibrium, with new alliances and forms of international cooperation, is necessary to identify and face these unprecedented global challenges. Power, hegemony, liberal pluralism, and consumerism ought to be reconsidered under the light of a new global or “terrestrial” perspective (Bruno Latour).² This scenario, our new reality, might have been a promising starting point for a book on liberal ideas and political practices in a changing world.



¹ Since 2012, Dominik Pietzcker, Dr. phil., is a fulltime professor at Macromedia University of Applied Sciences, Hamburg and Berlin Campuses and a member of the Media Faculty. He studied comparative German literature, philosophy and history at the University of Freiburg/Br., Trinity College Dublin and in Vienna. From 1996-2010, he worked as a creative director for political public institutions (E.U., the German Government's Federal Press Department) and taught at Universität der Künste (UdK) Berlin, Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft (HTW) Berlin and Technische Universität (TU) Dresden. Since 2014, he is an honorary juror at the Foundation of German Entrepreneurs (Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft, SDW). Since 2017 he holds lectures at universities in China, at Zhejiang University City College (Hangzhou) and Tongji University (Shanghai). He publishes regularly on intercultural, Sino-German, and socio-economic topics.

² In his essay “Down to Earth” (2018), French philosopher Bruno Latour argues for the necessity of a new era of international cooperation. Ecological challenges in the age of Anthropocene demand, to follow Latour, require not a common or “global”, but a planetarian or “terrestrial” political approach. Latour stresses the responsibility of human beings, of *all of us*, not only for ourselves but particularly for the earth as long as our lifestyle and actions have ecological consequences.

Readers who look for fresh ideas in Alexander Graf Lambsdorff's latest book, however, are to be thoroughly disappointed. Lambsdorff, a member of the German Bundestag and expert in foreign affairs, reiterates Europe and Germany's political options in the 21st century.

Liberal political ideas have lost all their former charms. They are neither courageous, liberating, nor inspiring anymore.

Unsurprisingly, Lambsdorff defends Western wealth, values, and privileges. For him, they together form a role model of universal meaning. In Chapter 9, the "European way of life", as Lambsdorff puts it, offers a very convenient although totally unrealistic option: that it is possible for the West to carry on in the same way as before (pp. 269–294). The "good Europeans", as already Nietzsche recognized, are those who claim all privileges for themselves and leave the problems to others. Former European colonies and nations whose frontiers were defined by European diplomats, ignorant to all ethnic, geographic and historical singularities, might have a very different view of the "European way of life" than Lambsdorff (pp. 97–148). To keep economic privileges without taking political responsibility is unfeasible, indeed.

In Chapter 9, Lambsdorff, board member of the influential pro-American organization *Atlantik-Brücke*, is well aware of the fact that only American hegemony can guarantee Europe's position as an economic powerhouse without true strategic sovereignty (pp. 279–282). The Atlantic alliance, led by the US, is for Lambsdorff the last legitimate political heritage of the 20th century. Undeniably, the US has been a shield

for Western European democracies against authoritarian and totalitarian aggressors since 1916. But is there, here and now, not an option for Europe in the 21st century to stand as the third player between America and China (so-called "Chimerica" by historian Niall Ferguson)?

European unity (although increasingly utopian) bears at least the potential of European sovereignty in its own right. But political liberalism, the ideology of individual freedom and responsibility, apparently has its limitations in *Realpolitik*. In Chapter 9, Lambsdorff is far from even considering a strategic change in European policies (p. 282). Yet, what is true sovereignty if not the willingness to take political risks? The whole idea of political and societal progress is based on the necessity to embrace change. To quote Italian novelist Giuseppe Tommasi di Lampedusa (*The Leopard*): "Everything must change for everything to remain the same."

Reading Lambsdorff's book leaves the unpleasant impression that even Western liberalism might have lost its ability to free the human mind of the ideas, patterns, and prejudices of the past. The liberal "European way of life", which Lambsdorff is endlessly endorsing, embodies the inner contradictions of a system and its representatives that desire both a good life and a clear conscience. Lambsdorff's book is written by a shortsighted liberal reactionary who has little to add to the rapidly changing world and its necessary struggle for a new global order. If Europe has nothing more to offer than the political recipes of the Cold War era, it might have become too old for its own future. Liberal political ideas have lost all their former charms. They are neither courageous, liberating, nor inspiring anymore. "Riding the tiger" is a much more poignant metaphor of European politics than "Fighting elephants".