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Fireside Chat with Emmanuel Bonne

Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Advisor and G20-G7 Sherpa for the President of the French Republic

Moderator: Jim Sciutto, Anchor and Chief National Security Correspondent, CNN

Jim Sciutto

So it's a pleasure to be with you. I appreciate the time I actually cut my vacation short to be here for the opportunity to have friendly interrogations like this with folks like yourself.

Emmanuel Bonne

Grateful for this Jim. It's good to be with you on stage. Thank you to Anja and the team for having me at the Forum great opportunity to discuss all these issues you've already heard about.

Jim Sciutto

So I want to press you this came up with the last conversation as well on it on an issue that it's going to probably come up on every panel here today, which is Europe's build up of its own security to meet the threat from Russia, and also to meet this aspiration for a greater balance of contribution a couple of months ago, I went on a I embarked on a very high readiness task force in the Baltic Sea with NATO. And a couple of things struck me one as they noted that those task forces are about twice as big as it used to be as demonstration, of force presence particularly in the East. But it also struck me speaking there were half a dozen countries there was a German flagship, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, Danish and French in this taskforce. There's was it even with the talk of greater contributions, which is not insignificant by no means. The timeline to actually build the forces necessary is of course very long. I mean you talk about building ships, you know that this is a multi year timeline of so I wonder in your view, and particularly, given that France has had a larger military and larger contribution for some time, is NATO is Europe actually growing its forces sufficiently to meet the Russia threat?

Emmanuel Bonne

Look, I think it is time of great challenges. And obviously, sometimes, which are very demanding to all of us. But I think we heard from previous panelsists that we are now are organizing our forces and building our capacities in a very consistent way. It's not between choosing a NATO or choosing the EU, it's very much about how we combine all different capacities, and how we not only build up military, but how we exercise and how we be able to be engaged into high intensity conflicts. So I mean, money matters, obviously on our side will add 415 billion euros you know difference over the next five years. Most allies are reaching the threshold of 2% GDP dedicated to the defense that the rest is so important in rebuilding our industries, funding innovation, being able to dispatch troops wherever they're needed, and taking an example, Romania wanted NATO to dispatch expeditionary

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force in its territory after Russia triggered the war in Ukraine, and we were able to send our soldiers and have our contingent operational in Romania in one week. And this is not a question of money. It is very much a question of, you know, capacity, you have to operate these allies partner etc. So, in a sense, it's a very demanding terminus because we have everything to do at the same time. And that's what we are trying to do.

Jim Sciutto

I went to Estonia on that trip as well and they made the point that the new NATO defence plan for the Baltics is backed up, not just with the words, but for instance, the timeline that a quick reaction force to get there up there if there for instance, were Russian tank shows across the border. I do notice a difference that when I speak to Eastern European leaders, and I'm sure those in the audience have similar experiences speak to Eastern European leaders about the severity of the Russia threat. And then you speak to folks in the central and western Europe and by the way, the Eastern European leaders will often say this, they're saying they don't get how bad it is, and that the threat of Russia attacking a NATO ally, is real. Do you believe that Russia has a genuine threat to NATO allies in in Eastern Europe or that the membership in effect is a impregnable defense?

Emmanuel Bonne

Yeah, I think Russia is a threat and the evidence is what it is doing in Ukraine now and what she's absolutely critical is that Russia be defeated in Ukraine so it not be tempted to attack other European allies and partners, whether they be NATO allies or EU partners, or, you know, other countries like Moldova, which was mentioned earlier, which is under some pressure from Russia. I mean, we're giving the example of what we can do together to get out to be more robust and in a sense, deter further Russia aggressions, that's what is happening in Moldova, I mean Moldova was very sensitive to Russian pressure. And know Maia Sandu has been investing in the candidacy of her country. She has hosted a very important event last June, which was the European Political Community Summit, which was the gathering and the continental scale of all leaders 40 countries participated and decided to cooperate on very concrete issues, etc. So there are many ways we can demonstrate solidarity and deter Russia from aggressing other European partners, but I mean what matters most at the moment that indeed Ukraine wins the war whatever it means but I mean it means that Ukraine has to be on the offensive. It has to be in a position of strength. So at a point, you know, Russia admits defeat and we can build a more solid peace.

Jim Sciutto

When I speak to US officials they say that one lesson Russian has learned from Ukraine is that it has it stands no chance against a NATO ally in effect it fears that conflicts and I wonder if you share that because, for instance, you go to Tallin you won't hear the same thing. Do you believe that Russia fears a conflict with NATO?

Emmanuel Bonne

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Well, I mean, our experience is that Russia and it maybe a paradox has taken precautions not to aggress any NATO ally or or to avoid any, you know, serious mistake targetting NATO territory. That's not per chance. I mean, it's really because indeed probably is a fear an escalation they could not control. I mean, we have learned a lot in the last sixteen months. You remember our concern at the very beginning of the war and this concern remains was not to trigger and a sense the Third World War with direct confrontation with Ukraine, with Russia. So our committment was to support Ukraine with the best of all capacities and avoid escalation. I would say that 16 to 16 months later, we are less impressed or less not concerned but I mean the threat that Putin represents is less pregnant, and we see it as dangerous radical. The situation remains volatile, but we are less afraid that this is a bigger thing from the last 16 months I would say.

Jim Sciutto

I don't want to ask you to speculate on the future thinking Russian. But I do want to ask this because I had a briefing with with the NATO partner ally, maybe a week before the prighozin failed coup and I asked him, do you believe he was threatened internally, and the answer was not clear where that would come from. Of course, the Prighozin marches within 40 miles of Moscow. We know what followed. Does the west, does France does NATO have contingency planning for another coup as they watch closley or a new leader who might be better might be worse.

Emmanuel Bonne

Well I mean to be honest we can only speculate. But obviously, the impression that the leader, the Almighty tsar of all Russias you know who say, the morning he will punish the rebellion that will punish Prighozin and meet with him in the afternoon obviously sends a signal of weakness. And this is our impression that Russia is not as solid today as it was before and obviously I don't know of any leader who loses a war, which gets out of this war you know winning internally. So there are good reasons to believe that indeed Putin's regime is not crumbling but is more fragile today than it was a month ago. But I would not, you know, bet on regime change or a kind of major political shift in Russia. I would bet more on our own forces and our own capacity to have Ukraine win the war and I'm putting Putin on the backfoot, so he will be obliged to acknowledge defeat. Then when it comes to Prighozin, you know, we as French we have seen this is kind of influence developing in countries where we were fighting terrorism are along with the US. Allies EU partners like Mali or Sahel, and first Russian forces dispersed to all those very vulnerable African countries where mercenaries Wagner in particular, and you know, it's a really big lesson in what is happening in Ukraine today, which is that obviously Putin made a huge mistake, but he probably bet on our weakness and we are you know, demonstrated that after Georiga after Syria after all those mercenaries adventure in Africa after Belarus etc. I mean, no, I mean cannot work the way he choose to walk.

Jim Sciutto

There's an impression so to France's position in Europe with the US with regard to Russia and China. There is an impression in Washington, that Macron deliberately puts daylight between French

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positions and US positions to strike altitude as a demonstration of power, but also perhaps at times, difference of opinion not on core issues such as Ukraine but approaches. Is Macron deliberately striking, a parallel path for France with regard to the EU, nato and the US?

Emmanuel Bonne

But I think the starting point for President Macron is building a stronger Europe. I mean his conviction that if we want to remain relevant in today's world and tomorrow's world as French and European et cetera we need to be much more robust. We need to be operational and committed partners to the US and to many other partners, and we need to play our role and we need to play it seriously. So we need to be much more strategic approach to our environment, to the global challenges that we are facing together with the US Take China for example. China is a global challenge. It is a challenge for the US as well for the EU and we need on our side to be more capable, you know to stand our own feet and and be reliable for for for the US as well. So that's what we're trying to do. Build a better European capacity and indeed, there is kind of a strategic awakening in Europe today. We have elaborated a China strategy we have a warehouse strategy, we have an Indo Pacific strategy. We have you know articulated a big plan which is called Repo EU which is about funding innovation and defense industries and much more in Europe. So all these makes us stronger together in Europe but also together with us, so no what the point is about ourselves, what we can do for ourselves, and the capacity we have to really partner with the US and not delegate to about a responsibility to care for for Europe, and that's particularly important because war is back on the continent for the first time that since the end of World War Two, and because you know, Europe crises are getting closer and closer to Europe. We have Ukraine, certainly, but I mean the situations in the Balkans is always a bit volatile. In the Syrian crisis people realize that you could walk from Damascus to Paris or Berlin. You know, things are happening in Africa which have an impact in the Mediterranean region in the south of Europe, so I mean, we need to be more robust. That's what President Macron means.

Jim Sciutto

As you know, partners can disagree on issues when I listened and I wasn't alone in this to the French President's comments when he left China regarding Taiwan, and I know there was a it's not quite walking back perhaps clarification of what exactly he was saying there. But It sounded to me like France or Macron was not so certain that the West wants to get into war with China over Taiwan. Do you believe you've heard President Biden say I think now four times that the US would defend Taiwan militarily. Would Europe. Do you think it would be a mistake for the US to go to war with China over Taiwan?

Emmanuel Bonne

I think the key competence of our China or Taiwan policy it is exactly the same as the US administration. We go by the principle of the One China policy and we've want a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue. So we are exactly on the same foot then pretty much travel China the moment

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when President Xi was meeting the Congress leadership in California. There was bit of volatility along this while we were visiting China. We had a French frigate crossing the Taiwan Strait as we very regularly do every year. We are we are probably the only Europeans to go there so often. So I mean, we are ready. We are ready to take our responsibility to you know to be to be with you in case of crisis. But I would say the point that President Macron made in this interview was about our capacity as Europeans why we engaged into a long protracted, potentially long protracted war in Ukraine to fight on two fronts, but I mean in terms of principle solidarity, and what needs to be done, we we are exactly on the same page. And what what matters most at the moment is not you know contingency. Contingency planning is always important and critical, obviously, but what matters most is to deter China from taking action. And that was very much at the core of the conversation that President Macron had with President Xi in China, and he conveyed very clearly said that I mean, you should not do it and that will have a big crisis that will you know, force us to go for massive sanctions, etc. And probably much more. So I mean, the message was crystal clear and I hope it was well understood.

Jim Sciutto

Macron has made an effort to get China to be a useful player in finding a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine over many months. In your view, is Beijing is Xi Jinping a credible partner in a negotiation that might bring into this war.

Emmanuel Bonne

Well, I'd like China to demonstrate that it is a credible partner in fixing

Jim Sciutto

You don't believe they're demonstrated that?

Emmanuel Bonne

I don't have the evidence yet but I mean China is a permanent member of the Security Council is close to Russia as it's kind of no limits partnership with Russia etcetera. the same time, I would say, their attitude could have been worse. It also could have been much more explicitly engaged in this war. So we are at a point where we need to continue deter from getting more involved in this conflict. And then I don't believe a second part China will provide a solution for for the war in Ukraine. I mean, for the war to stop we only Putin to withdraw, and we need Ukrain basically to beat Russia on the ground and to build kind of a very solid kind of negotiation framework in which we can bring partners from different constituencies from the Global South, including China, but not only China. Certainly. India has a role to play and many others we can have an influence, and we can guarantee a solid piece for Ukraine. That's critically important because we are the experience of the Minsk government. And the violations of the Minsk government by the russians Andrea Yearmark referred to previous negotiation we spent together countless hours trying to have the Russians abide

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by that commitments. So we need something more solid today and probably we need more partners to with us in doing this. China included but not china only.

Jim Sciutto

Just quickly has the West seen any evidence that China has armed Russia in any way? In the war in Ukraine

Emmanuel Bonne

Well yes, there are indications that they are doing things we would prefer them not to do. At the point where we are, when the offensive is beginning in defeat when everything is complicated, What we need most is Chinese abstention. And it we cannot dream of China, you know, acting like a Western country but we need to understand that Ukraine is not only a conflict somewhere in Europe, or you know the consequence of disagreements between Russia and NATO or whatever. And we need them to understand that Ukraine is a conflict of global magnitude that we cannot offer Ukraine to lose for reasons of principle, also for reasons which are very operational. And what is at stake for us in Ukraine is much more than you know Ukraine sovereignty soits very much about the stability of the world. Although security in Europe and our capacity to continue, you know, lead in many instances.

Jim Sciutto

Things that they shouldn't or you wouldn't want them to do to be more specific?

Emmanuel Bonne

Delivery of weapons. Certainly, economic support

Jim Sciutto

They're delivering weapons to Russia for use in Ukraine?

Emmanuel Bonne

Well, kind of military equipments. I mean, as far as we know, some of the delivery massively military capacity to Russia but I mean we didn't know delivery.

Jim Sciutto

I'm gonna ask you a question on the global South, which I think is often too often underreported and ignored. And then I'm going to because I made a promise to a friend in the audience that I was going to go at least for one question and we're limited with time, but I'll come to the audience after the answer to this question. So if you have some thoughts, think about them. Global South you hear a lot of talk about it. And you have genuine substantive programs like the new Global Financing pact, to help develop there. But that is the West writ large, losing the battle as it were in the global south to China to China specifically and perhaps to Russia to some degree.

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Emmanuel Bonne

I think that, you know, that's probably one of the elements which I mean, what are the key issues we're getting with at the moment. We, we experience certain loneliness in defending Ukraine, you know, many African partners, for example, are telling us I mean, you care so much about Ukraine, but what are you doing for the Kivus? Why do you Why didn't you care about you know, some conflict in Africa? What about Sudan today, etc. So I mean, necessity that we do, all what we come to avoid fragmentation, or, you know, further rift between North and South is of critical importance, and we need to demonstrate that again, we have this ability to address those many challenges. Ukraine for global reasons, and not only European or Western regions, but that in the same thing where we remain capable of addressing the priority concerns of many countries in itself and take Africa for example. I mean, you mentioned the financial part that we crafted in June. It's critically important what we need it is a financial shock, we need to the derisk investments in many fragile countries, so they have a chance to catch up with you know the global economy and play your role in the future. So there are huge expectations that we have to demonstrate but we are not concerned only about our own security and future rivalry with China but that we are able to articulate or to propose to our north of four countries and create an alternative what the Chinese are proposing. So whether it be development or energy, innovation, etc. We did something attractive for the global source IE those countries that do not really have a stake in what is happening in Ukraine today.

Jim Sciutto

Especially with the exploration of the, the grain deal which has enormous potential consequences.

Emmanuel Bonne

Yes, certainly. But I mean, the grain deal just to remind you that 60% of Ukraine, grain expense goes through what we call the solidarity lanes which have been organized by the EU, so not to say that we don't need energy ready to be renewed, we need the grain deal to be extended. But I mean, we have built the capacity to continue providing grains to international markets. But I mean, we need to take this very, very seriously and not only grains but also fertilizers and many other key components for for agriculture.

Jim Sciutto

You okay to take a question from the audience? So, okay, fantastic. So thanks, please. Maybe just ID yourself.

Audience question

Hi, Virginia Bonnie from Amazon. One question as a follow up of acknowledging that China is sending weapons to Russia is the EU having to consider secondary sanctions, based on the most recent most recent sanctions package that you put together?

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Emmanuel Bonne

Well, I mean, sanctions are you know, main instrument to contain Russia and deter others from being involved in this conflict, whether it be China or other. We have a problem with sanctions being bypassed by many countries and not only China. You know, the US Europe and certain allies in the Indo Pacific region are implementing sanctions but we have a difficulty like countries like you know, we are which are so close to us, like Turkey, for example, are just, you know, making money today because, you know, Russian money doesn't flow any longer to EU countries. But goes to Turkey and many other countries. So, you know, everybody has a responsibility, including China, but not only China.

Jim Sciutto

Understood. Just one more because it's Steve Clemons

Speaker 4

Thank you so much, Steve Clemons with Semafor. Emanuel I heard President Macron recently say that instead of NATO membership of the Ukraine, the best option is to bundle a bunch of bilateral security assurances to deter Russia that was you nodded but he did say that. How do you make it hard? How do you make that a part deterrent in any compelling way against Russia?

Emmanuel Bonne

No, but look this is not the end all option. This is we have to play all the instruments we have. NATO, the EU and bilateral security guarantees that we can offer to Ukraine the most basic security guarantee that we can give is weaponry I mean advance weapons etc. you're doing this the cruise missiles that we recently sent to Ukraine were mentioned earlier. And we are always trying to do whatever we can it might not be enough but that's what we can give. In Vilnius we gave Ukraine a very clear perspective about its membership in NATO. And we are ready to consider this. I mean, we were very much in support of you know, crediblizing the perspective the Ukraine joins NATO. This has to go also with EU membership at conditions we need to refine together, because you know, what is at stake when it comes to NATO is Article Five. If Ukraine is to join NATO now it means that we collectively add the us as well, we have to be ready to go to Ukraine and fight for Ukraine. Are we ready to do this? I mean, it's still a debate to be concluded. And I don't have the answer but I'm very serious, and President Macron is perfectly clear about the perspective that Ukraine joins NATO. Then meanwhile, what we need to do is to basically provide Ukraine with the capacity to win the war. So I mean, I will say this a sequence joining NATO Now, is not necessarily the best answer, the best answer in the equipment the intelligence and money we are transferring to Ukraine in which makes Ukraine strong and the winner in the end. I mean EU and NATO are suddenly very serious perspective and it is about Ukraine but about many other European countries as well. Think of the Balkans and Moldova as we said.

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Jim Sciutto

Well you have that same question even without the explicit security guarantee regarding military action over Taiwan. In the interest of time, because Niamh is standing, Emmanuel Bonne, thanks so much enjoyed the conversation.