

# Current Concerns

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## What Putin really wants in Ukraine Russia seeks to stop NATO's expansion, not to annex territory

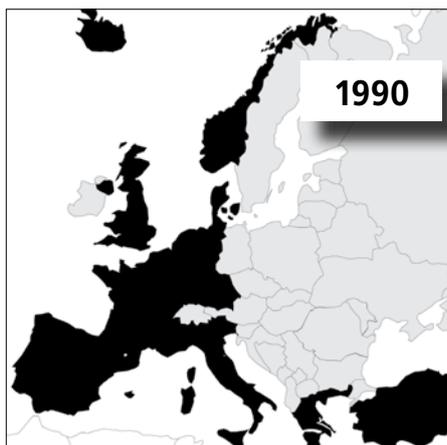
by Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Carnegie Moscow Centre\*



Dmitri Trenin  
(picture Svetlana  
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As 2021 came to a close, Russia presented the United States with a list of demands that it said were necessary to stave off the possibility of a large-scale military conflict in Ukraine. In a draft treaty delivered to a US diplomat in Moscow, the Russian government asked for a formal halt to NATO's eastern enlargement, a permanent freeze on further expansion of the alliance's military infrastructure (such as bases and weapons systems) in the former Soviet territory, an end to Western military assistance to Ukraine, and a ban on intermediate-range missiles in Europe. The message was unmistakable: if these threats cannot be addressed diplomatically, the Kremlin will have to resort to military action.

These concerns were familiar to Western policymakers, who for years have responded by arguing that Moscow does not have a veto over NATO's decisions and that it has no grounds to demand that the West stop sending weapons to Ukraine. Until recently, Moscow grudgingly acceded to those terms. Now, however, it appears determined to follow through with countermeasures if it doesn't get its way. That determination was reflected in how it presented the proposed treaty with the United States and a separate agreement with NATO. The tone of both missives was sharp. The West



The expansion of the NATO area from 1990 to 2020. (Graphic Current Concerns)

was given just a month to respond, which circumvented the possibility of prolonged and inconclusive talks. And both drafts were published almost immediately after their delivery, a move that was intended to prevent Washington from leaking and spinning the proposal.

If Russian President Vladimir Putin is acting as if he has the upper hand in this standoff, that's because he does. According to US intelligence services, Russia has nearly 100,000 troops and a great deal of heavy weaponry stationed on the Ukrainian border. The United States and other NATO countries have condemned Russia's moves but simultaneously suggested that they will not defend Ukraine, which is not a NATO member, and have limited their threats of retaliation to sanctions.

But Moscow's demands are probably an opening bid, not an ultimatum. For all its insistence on a formal treaty with the United States, the Russian government no doubt understands that thanks to polarisation and gridlock, ratification of any treaty in the US Senate will be all but impossible. An executive agreement – essentially an accord between two governments which does not have to be ratified and thus does not have the status of a law – may therefore be a more realistic alternative. It is also likely that under such an agreement, Russia would assume reciprocal commitments addressing some US concerns so as to create what it calls a “balance of interest.”

Specifically, the Kremlin could be satisfied if the US government agreed to a formal long-term moratorium on expanding NATO and a commitment not to station intermediate-range missiles in Europe. It might also be assuaged by a separate accord between Russia and NATO that would restrict military forces and activity where their territories meet, from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Of course, it is an open question whether the Biden administration is willing to engage seriously with Russia. Opposition to any deal will be high in the United States because of domestic political polarisation and the fact that striking a deal with Putin opens the Biden administration to criticism that it is caving to an autocrat. Opposition will also be high in Europe, where leaders will feel that a negotiated settlement between Washington and Moscow leaves them on the side lines.

These are all serious issues. But it's crucial to note that Putin has presided over four waves of NATO enlargement and has had to accept Washington's withdrawal from treaties governing anti-ballistic missiles, intermediate-range nuclear forces, and unarmed observation aircraft. For him, Ukraine is the last stand. The Russian commander-in-chief is supported by his security and military establishments and, despite the Russian public's fear of a war, faces no domestic opposition to his

\* Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, has been with the center since its inception. He also chairs the research council and the *Foreign and Security Policy Program*. He retired from the Russian Army in 1993. From 1993–1997, Trenin held a post as a senior research fellow at the Institute of Europe in Moscow. In 1993, he was a senior research fellow at the *NATO Defense College* in Rome. He served in the Soviet and Russian armed forces from 1972 to 1993, including experience working as a liaison officer in the external relations branch of the Group of Soviet Forces (stationed in Potsdam) and as a staff member of the delegation to the US-Soviet nuclear arms talks in Geneva from 1985 to 1991. He also taught at the *War Studies Department* of the *Military Institute* from 1986 to 1993.

## "What Putin really wants in Ukraine"

continued from page 1

foreign policy. Most importantly, he cannot afford to be seen bluffing. Biden was right not to reject Russia's demands out of hand and to favor engagement instead.

### Putin's redlines

There is significant asymmetry in the importance the West and Russia ascribe to Ukraine. The West did extend the prospect of NATO membership to the country in 2008, but without a formal timetable for admittance. After 2014 – when Russia took over Crimea from Ukraine and began supporting pro-Russian militants in the country's Donbas region – it became difficult to see how the US government would allow Ukraine to join NATO. After all, there would be little public support in the United States for deploying troops to fight for Ukraine. Washington is saddled with a promise to Kyiv that both sides know it cannot keep. Russia, by contrast, treats Ukraine as a vital national security interest and has professed its readiness to use military force if that interest is threatened. This openness to committing troops and geographic proximity to Ukraine give Moscow an advantage over the United States and its allies.

This does not mean a Russian invasion of Ukraine is imminent. Despite the Western media's predilection for depicting Putin as reckless, he is in fact cautious and calculating, particularly when it comes to the use of force. Putin is not risk-averse – operations in Chechnya, Crimea, and Syria are proof of that – but in his mind, the benefit must outweigh the cost. He won't invade Ukraine simply because of its leaders' Western orientations.

That said, there are some scenarios that could prod the Kremlin to dispatch troops to Ukraine. In 2018, Putin publicly declared that a Ukrainian attempt to regain territory in the Donbas region by force would unleash a military response. There is historical precedence for this: in 2008, Russia responded militarily to a Georgian attack on the breakaway republic of South Ossetia. Another Russian redline is Ukraine's accession to NATO or the placement of Western military bases and long-range weapons systems on its territory. Putin will never yield on this point. For now, however, there is almost no support from the United States and other NATO members for letting Ukraine join the alliance. In early December 2021, US State Department officials told Ukraine that NATO membership for that country is unlikely to be approved in the next decade.

If NATO were to build up its forces in the eastern member states, that could fur-

ther militarise the new dividing line in Europe running along the western borders of Russia and Belarus. Russia could be provoked into placing more short-range missiles in Kaliningrad – the non-contiguous, westernmost part of Russia that is sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania. A closer military alliance with Belarus could put even more pressure on Ukraine. Moscow could also recognise the self-proclaimed "people's republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk and integrate them into a new geopolitical entity with Russia and Belarus.

The geopolitical implications of these developments could reverberate beyond Europe. To counter more drastic Western economic and financial sanctions, either in anticipation of a Russian incursion into Ukraine or as a consequence of it, Moscow may need to lean on Beijing, which also finds itself under increasing US pressure. Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping are already discussing financial mechanisms to protect their countries from US sanctions. In that case, Putin's scheduled visit to China for the Winter Olympics in February 2022 might turn out to be more than a courtesy call. The United States could then see the current Chinese-Russian entente turning into a tighter alliance. Economic, technological, financial, and military cooperation between the two powers would reach new levels.

### Blame Game

Putin's threat to resort to force comes from his frustration with a stalled diplomatic process. The Kremlin's effort to entice Ukrainian President *Volodymyr Zelensky* to strike a deal on Donbas – which seemed promising as recently as late 2019 – came to naught. Zelensky, who won the presidency in a landslide running as a peace candidate, is an exceptionally erratic leader. His decision to use armed drones in Donbas in 2021 ratcheted up tensions with Moscow at a time when Ukraine could not afford to provoke its neighbour.

It's not just Ukrainian leadership that Moscow sees as problematic. France and Germany have dubbed efforts to strike a diplomatic resolution to the Russia-Ukraine stalemate. The Europeans, who were the guarantors of the Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015 that were supposed to bring peace to the region, had little success pushing the Ukrainians to strike a deal. German President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier*, then foreign minister, could not even get Kyiv to accept a compromise that would have allowed for elections in the Donbas region. Last November, the Russians went so far as to publish private diplomatic correspondence be-

tween their foreign minister, *Sergei Lavrov*, and his French and German counterparts to demonstrate how the Western powers fully sided with Ukrainian government's stance.

And although the focus in the West has been on the Russian troop build-up near the Ukrainian border, this came as NATO countries expanded their military activities in the Black Sea region and in Ukraine. In June, a British destroyer sailed through territorial waters of Crimea, which London does not recognise as belonging to Russia, provoking the Russians to fire in its direction. In November, a US strategic bomber flew within 13 miles of the Russian border in the Black Sea region, infuriating Putin. As tensions rose, Western military advisers, instructors, arms, and ammunition poured into Ukraine. Russians also suspect that a training centre the United Kingdom is constructing in Ukraine is in fact a foreign military base. Putin is particularly adamant that deploying US missiles in Ukraine that can reach Moscow in five to seven minutes cannot and will not be tolerated.

For Russia, the escalating military threats were unmistakable. In his articles and speeches, Putin may emphasise the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, but what he cares most about is preventing NATO expansion in Ukraine. Consider what he said in March 2014 after sending forces into Crimea in response to the overthrow of Ukraine's president, *Viktor Yanukovich*. "I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors," he said of the famous Russian naval base in Crimea. "Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to have them come and visit us, be our guests, rather than the other way round."

Putin's actions suggest that his true goal is not to conquer Ukraine and absorb it into Russia but to change the post-Cold War setup in Europe's east. That setup left Russia as a rule-taker without much say in European security, which was cantered on NATO. If he manages to keep NATO out of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, and US intermediate-range missiles out of Europe, he thinks he could repair part of the damage Russia's security sustained after the Cold War ended. Not coincidentally, that could serve as a useful record to run on in 2024, when Putin would be up for re-election. •

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2021-12-28/what-putin-really-wants-ukraine> of 28 December 2021

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## New Year without perspective

### War and sanctions destroy livelihoods in the Middle East

by Karin Leukefeld, Damascus



Karin Leukefeld  
(picture of)

“Oh, we booked a table at the *Four Seasons Hotel* tonight,” Hanan laughs, clapping her hands. “All of us here will be there with our families, celebrating the New Year really well.” The worker squints his eyes and

his colleagues grin mischievously and then burst into loud laughter. “Did you believe that? We were pulling your leg there!”

Hanan and his colleagues work in a small family hotel in the centre of Damascus. They are Kurds from Afrin and, like their fathers, work in Damascus. They still have their houses and gardens in Afrin. They used to be doing well, with the olive harvest that brought a lot of money into their family coffers every autumn. But since 2018, Afrin has been under the control of Turkey and fighters who ten years ago tried to take control of Homs and Aleppo, then stormed Damascus and toppled the government of *Bashar al-Assad*. The fighting dragged on for years, with millions of people fleeing the war. Regional and international actors from the EU, US-led NATO took sides with the insurgents, while Russia, Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah supported the Syrian government army.

#### War criminal Tony Blair knighted

Former British PM *Tony Blair* has been Knighted by Queen *Elisabeth*. Given his aggression vis-a-vis the innocent people of Iraq, this is highly offensive. In view of Blair's disregard for international law and basic morality, he should instead be prosecuted by a British court of justice. This would demonstrate to Iraqis and right-minded people worldwide that his role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq constituted a crime against humanity.

*Denis J. Halliday,*  
UN Assistant Secretary-General  
(resigned in protest)  
(Iraq: 1997/98)

*Hans-C. von Sponeck,*  
UN Assistant Secretary-General  
(resigned in protest)  
(Iraq: 1998-2000)

A UK petition ([www.change.org](http://www.change.org)) for Tony Blair to be removed from his knighthood has now received over 1.1 million signatures. (Editor's note)



Samir brings freshly picked jasmine to the breakfast table. (Picture Karin Leukefeld)

#### Lost homeland

The jihadist fighting units were defeated and had to withdraw from Ghouta east of Damascus, from Homs, from Aleppo and Deraa. Now they live in the homes of Hanan and his colleagues and have driven out the Kurds. “They are really bad people”, Hanan says in a rough voice. Twenty-five per cent of the population in Afrin and in the villages are still Kurds, he says, but the fighters treat them with contempt and violence: “They beat our people, they drive them out of their houses, they steal everything.” No one knows when they will leave Afrin again. “My father always wanted to go back to Afrin to be buried there”, says Hanan. “He couldn't return and died in Aleppo. Who knows if I will see Afrin again before I die?”

Hanan and his colleagues are poor and live in small cramped houses at the top of Mount Qasioun, Damascus' local mountain. His colleague *Samir* had to vacate his brother's room when he returned with his family from Turkey, where his hopes of finding work had been dashed. From his small salary, Samir spent the summer building a new room on top of his brother's house to have a roof over his head in winter. “It wasn't enough for the windows anymore”, Samir says, shrugging his shoulders. “They are too expensive. I have to pay three months' salary for them.” So, he says, he taped the windows with plastic, which keeps out the worst of the cold. “But where we live, the wind blows from all sides, and right now in winter it's really cold,” the worker mutters, as if to apol-

ogise for not being able to offer his family something better.

#### No electricity, no spare parts

It is 31 December 2021, and it is cold in Damascus. There is no electricity in the family hotel, mothers sit in the lobby with their children in dim light. New guests climb the stairs to reach the reception on the first floor. Hanan and his colleagues shoulder the luggage and carry it on their shoulders to the guest rooms.

“Here in the hotel we have two hours of electricity and four hours of no electricity,” explains *Nabil*, who works at the reception. The generator is rarely turned on because they have to save heating oil. Outside Damascus, the situation is even worse, he adds: “Here in Jdeideh, we have one hour of electricity and five hours without electricity.” This winter, the electricity supply is particularly bad, the Minister of Electricity explained a few days ago, says Nabil. There is a lack of oil and gas to run the electricity plants. In addition, three power plants are out of order because repairs have to be made for which spare parts are still missing. The population will have to live with the poor electricity supply for a few more months, he said. But then things should really get better.

Nabil is one of those who have had to rigorously cut back their diet to include meat and dairy products, but who somehow still manage to make ends meet in the harsh economic crisis. His brothers have

continued on page 4

**"New Year without perspective"**

continued from page 3

relatives abroad who send money every month. Nabil and his wife receive a modest pension, he also works at the reception of the small family hotel. The younger son is doing his military service, the older one works as an IT engineer. From his monthly salary, the young man pays into the fund of a housing cooperative that is building a housing complex outside Damascus. If all goes well, Nabil's son will be able to furnish the flat in three years and then think about getting married. For many young men, this prospect is a long way off.

**Saying goodbye on New Year**

For many families, New Year means saying goodbye to their children. Well-educated and language-skilled young people leave Syria, Iraq, Lebanon or Iran to work or study in Europe, the USA, Australia or Canada. What is left behind are parents who have worked all their lives to give their children a better future. The fact that this future is now not in their own country is associated with high costs for the families and a heavy blow for everyone.

One of the young men who will leave Syria at the beginning of 2022 is *Akram* (name changed). He completed his medical studies in Damascus and wants to qualify as a heart surgeon. Because he does not currently have this opportunity in Syria, he applied in Germany and was accepted. He passed the language test, and soon, like many young people from Syria, Iraq, Iran and other countries, he will be working in a German clinic for a below-average monthly salary. "Compared to what the boy would get here, it's a lot of money," says Akram's father, proudly showing the boy's certificates. Today, 75,000 Syrian pounds are equivalent to 30 US dollars according to the official Syrian exchange rate and are neither enough for rent nor to pay for the high energy or food costs. Akram sees no prospects for himself in Syria.

In Beirut, the parents of *Laila* (name changed) are also preparing to leave. Their 17-year-old daughter will go to study in the USA, where she will live with relatives. "She can continue to eat tabouleh and hummus," says her uncle, who supports his niece's education financially with his brothers. "She will feel at home, only without the problems and insecurities we have to deal with every day in Lebanon." Of course, tears would flow as he said goodbye on New Year's Day, because parents and daughter would probably not be able to see each other again for years. "But she is independent, speaks three languages fluently and will quickly get used to the new life," says the uncle. "She will go her own way. There are no prospects for her in Lebanon."

**EU and US sanctions  
destroy national economies**

Ten years of war and destruction have severely damaged the economies of Syria

and its neighbouring countries. The US occupation of Syria's oil and gas resources, wheat fields and cotton cultivation block the country's access to its own resources. The situation is exacerbated by the unilaterally imposed EU and US sanctions, which, like the war, is leading to an exodus of tens of thousands of skilled workers.

The unilateral EU sanctions have been tightened annually since 2011 and complement the so-called "Caesar Law" of the US administration, which came into force in 2020. According to this law, not only Syrian but all companies, states and organisations that trade with Syria can be punished. A report by the *US Agency for International Development (USAID)* in July 2021 stated that US sanctions in Syria had "triggered a staggering economic crisis". The trade blocked by the Caesar sanctions has led to an increase in illicit trade, corruption and black markets. •

(Translation Current Concerns)



*The workers Abu Rashid, Hanan and Samir (from left to right) work in a family hotel in Damascus. (Picture Karin Leukefeld)*

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# Safety and peace in Europe

## What is Germany's role in this?

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

*Do we have to understand the coalition agreement of the new German government and previous statements by the new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, elected on 8 December, to mean that there is to be no independent German foreign and security policy in future? That would not be a good thing, especially not for relations with Russia. Because of its history, Germany has a special responsibility for peace in Europe and peaceful relations with Russia. The fact that an SPD chancellor did not take part in the war of aggression against international law by the USA and its "coalition of the willing" against Iraq in 2003 was important and absolutely right – and it was easy to cope with being called "old Europe" by US Neocons. Now new decisions are imminent. Independent German peace policy accents are wanted. And it would be even better if other European governments did the same. Also, in no longer participating in the hybrid warfare that has been going on for years.*

After Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, and Gerhard Schröder, Olaf Scholz is the fourth German Chancellor of the SPD. Willy Brandt, Chancellor from 1969 to 1974, was the most prominent advocate and politician of a new German "Ostpolitik" since the mid-1960s: recognition of the borders in Central and Eastern Europe created after 1945, renunciation of violence and intensified relations with the states of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, above all with the Soviet Union itself, with which the first of the treaties with Eastern bloc states was concluded in 1970. Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1971, Brandt formulated the famous sentence ten years later:

*"Peace is not everything, but everything is nothing without peace."*

Helmut Schmidt, Chancellor from 1974 to 1982, supported Germany's new Ostpolitik, but was also – against strong opposition in his own party – one of the initiators of the *NATO Double-Track Decision* of December 1979: negotiations with the Soviet Union on the withdrawal of Soviet medium-range nuclear missiles from Eastern Europe, but also the threat of the deployment of US medium-range nuclear missiles in the European NATO states, especially in Germany, if the negotiations failed.

Gerhard Schröder, chancellor from 1998 to 2005, took part in NATO's war of aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was against in-

ternational law, but refused to support the US war against Iraq in 2003, which also violated international law. Instead, together with the then French President Jacques Chirac – who also rejected the Iraq war – he sought closer cooperation with the then Russian President Vladimir Putin, also in questions of international security.

### The German SPD and peace politics

Thus, the German *Social Democratic Party* (SPD) has an ambivalent history of its peace and security policy after the Second World War. Repeatedly it has set independent accents, out of the awareness that peace and security in Europe could not be secured by rigidly following the line of US foreign policy. This independence was in Germany's interest – after all, until the end of the first Cold War, Germany knew very well that in case of a hot war, Germany would be the main theatre of war and that the outcome of such a war would be the total destruction of the country.

### Towards a new world order framework

In December 2021, 16 years after the last SPD Chancellor, the newly elected Chancellor Olaf Scholz took office. In these years, the world has changed. The US claim to be able to usher in an "end of history" as the "only world power" after the end of the first Cold War and to permanently shape the world according to its own ideas has been countered by other powers, not only Russia

and China. But this transition towards a multipolar world has not yet found a universally accepted new regulatory framework guaranteeing equality, security, and peace for all the states of the world – as was already formulated in the fundamental passages of the *United Nations Charter* of June 1945.

Security and peace are no longer guaranteed in Europe either. The destruction of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s was already associated with bloody wars, the wounds of which still refuse to heal today. Back then, there was no one who could counter the arrogance of NATO power.

This has changed now, but Europe has not yet become safer and more peaceful in result. The most obvious example of this is the situation in Ukraine today. Since 2014, some 15,000 lives have been lost to the war there in eastern Ukraine. The answer to the question of who is responsible for these deaths is complex. What is certain is that the violent coup d'état in Ukraine in the winter of 2013/2014, supported by the NATO states and the EU, and the accompanying discrimination and violence against the Russia-oriented part of the population are a main root of this war. The aim of this coup was to destroy the historically grown ties of the country and its population to Russia.

### What can be expected from the new German chancellor?

Thus, the new German government would also have every reason to take the above-

continued on page 6

### Kishore Mahbubani: America's fatal NATO eastward expansion

"After the end of the Cold War, American leaders betrayed the explicit and implicit promises that they made to the Russian leaders. America had promised Russia that, after the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact, America would not expand NATO eastward to threaten.

What geopolitical calculations played out in American minds as they made this fatal decision to expand NATO? Did they believe that since Russia was weak and struggling in the 1990s (with an imploding economy and a financial crisis that brought great suffering to the Russian people) America could once and for all time eliminate Russia as a potential competitor? Since most Americans are openhearted and generous by nature, it seems hard to believe that America had a sinister plot to permanently eliminate Russia as a geopolitical competi-

tor. Nonetheless, America's disregard for Russia's interests in the 1990s and 2000s looks to have been the result of a concerted plan. Regardless of whether there was a "conscious" American plan to weaken Russia after the end of the Cold War, it would be useful for Americans and Russians to have a frank discussion face-to-face of their respective perceptions of what happened. All the difficult episodes that bedevilled relations between the two countries should be surfaced: the expansion of NATO, the American sponsorship of colour revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, the invasion of Iraq, the interventions in Libya and Syria."

*From: Kishore Mahbubani. Has China Won?: The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy, 2020 Hachette Book Group, New York, p. 201f*

**"Safety and peace in Europe"**

continued from page 5

quoted sentence of SPD Chancellor Brandt from 1981 serious again, to adopt it, and to once again set its own accents. Will the new government do this?

The question cannot yet be answered with certainty. The new Chancellor's first major public address, the New Year's Address on 31 December 2021, did not offer an answer. Most of the speech dealt with COVID-19, followed by remarks on German climate policy and the German minimum wage, and only on the last page of the six-page speech text are there a few words on security and peace. And what is to be read there sounds like stereotypes – as if agreed within NATO and the EU, and as if the issue of security and peace were of no interest to anyone. The new SPD Chancellor wants to "continue to work on the success of the European Union" and his "goal is a sovereign, strong Europe". This is followed immediately in the next sentence but one: "In addition, transatlantic cooperation is indispensable for security in Europe." And then: "With a view to Ukraine, we are currently facing new challenges. The inviolability of borders is an important asset – and non-negotiable."

**Heavy accusations against the Russian President ...**

During the German election campaign, Olaf Scholz had formulated heavy accusations against the Russian President: "Putin is someone who is responsible for the fact that many people in Russia are threatened with their lives." – And sang the praises of *Alexei Nawalny*: "[...] this man is very, very courageous."

**... but also signals that do not want to stand in the way of de-escalation**

But the Swiss website *infosperber* also wrote on 24 December 2021: "From Berlin rumour has it that Olaf Scholz is no longer so happy about how he described Russia here." Indeed, there are also other news from Germany than those mentioned above. For example, the "Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung" of 14 December 2021 said that the new German government had spoken out against arms deliveries to Ukraine. The newspaper "Bild" reported on 4 January that Olaf Scholz did not want to leave relations with Russia to his Green Foreign Minister, but to make them a "top priority" and was looking for a "qualitative new beginning" in these relations.

However, one must also add that the reality content of such reports is difficult to verify for outsiders and that party politics, speculation and rumours accompany the political business and are very quickly charged by the media.

In any case, the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" was right when it wrote on 12 December 2021: "The new chancellor is already burdened with the responsibility of preventing a new war in Eastern Europe in his first days in office." The question is how.

**Former Inspector General of the Bundeswehr makes constructive proposals**

*Harald Kujat*, former Inspector General of the German Armed Forces (2000-2002) and then Chairman of the *NATO Military Committee* until 2005 and thus the highest-ranking NATO general, expressed his views on the current situation in Eastern Europe and possible steps towards de-escalation in an interview with *Deutsche Wirtschaftsnachrichten* on 24 December 2021. *Harald Kujat* cannot be regarded as a mouthpiece for the Russian government. You notice that too in the interview. Nevertheless, he said:

*"A joint effort to reconcile interests is the only way out of a years-long impasse, at the end of which stands a conflict that nobody wants. NATO, including the United States, should show more understanding of the Russian-Ukrainian history and respect Russia's security interests, as long as they do not endanger one's own security and international stability. In order to resolve disagreements, the rules and procedures agreed in the NATO-Russia Basic Treaty should be applied. NATO should declare that for the foreseeable future it does not intend either membership for Ukraine or the stationing of NATO troops in Ukraine."*

**For a neutral Ukraine**

*"Ukraine should commit to initiate shortly the overdue constitutional reform – as agreed in the Minsk Agreement – and to grant greater autonomy to the Russian minority within the framework of a federal state. Furthermore, Ukraine should state that it intends to become neither an outpost of NATO nor of Russia, but sees itself as a bridge between the two. It should declare a consolidated neutrality, like Finland, as its goal [...]."*

*Russia should declare that it does not intend to attack Ukraine or otherwise violate its territorial integrity. Russia should commit not to deploy regular troops in eastern Ukraine and to stop supporting the separatists as soon as the Ukrainian constitutional reform with the ensuing structural and constitutional reforms is implemented.*

*NATO and Russia should declare that they will resume the cooperation to which they committed themselves in the Basic Treaty and renew their intention to 'develop a strong, stable and lasting partnership based on common interest, reciprocity and transparency'."*

**Germany's Basic Law commands an active peace policy**

Whether all this can ultimately be agreed by treaty is completely open at the moment. But it is a constructive proposal. In the end, there may be other arrangements all parties can live well with. But what else remains except the search for a consensual solution? A further escalation of the conflict, more and more Western sanctions and, in the worst case, even war?

*It would be downright fatal if the current government in Ukraine were to be supported by Germany (or others) in escalating the war against the population in the Donbas, many of whom are also Russian citizens.*

Also, the new German government cannot and must not hide behind anyone, be they called EU, NATO or USA. The new German government is also bound by the German Basic Law. It must actively bring this to life. This Basic Law is a constitution of peace. The preamble already states that the German people, "conscious of their responsibility before God and man, [are] inspired by the determination to promote world peace". Article 25 stipulates that the "general rules of international law [...] shall be an integral part of federal law". "They shall take precedence over the laws and directly create rights and duties for the inhabitants of the federal territory." And Article 26 stipulates: "Acts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations, especially to prepare for a war of aggression, shall be unconstitutional. They shall be criminalised."

This certainly corresponds to the will of the majority of Germans. It is the task of every German government to translate this into concrete policy. ●

The other point of view

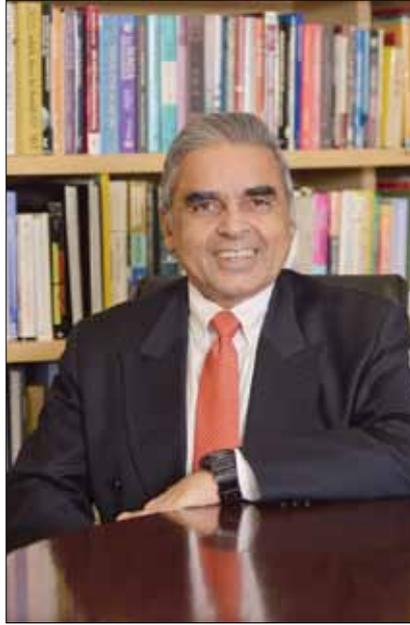
## “Has China won? – China’s emergence as the new superpower”

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

At the end of last year, US President Biden convened a so-called “Summit for Democracy” with selected countries, including Taiwan. The Chinese government reacted sharply. It said that this summit showed a tendency of being a dangerous attempt to revive the “Cold War mentality”. Likewise, the USA, Canada and Australia announced that they would not send any political representatives to the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February. In response, China published the white paper “China: Democracy That Works” with the following key message: The Communist Party CCP does have the monopoly of power (with the main task of holding together the giant country with its 1.4 billion inhabitants). But in the municipalities, counties, cities, in the numerous autonomous areas, in the numerous People’s Congresses with their committees, every single citizen has a multitude of opportunities (and these are used) to get involved, to have a say, to elect their authorities and to have a say in factual issues. Ideas and suggestions are collected and are incorporated in the authorities’ decisions. On this basis, the government can make sensible decisions and the country remains stable. – To the USA accusations, China responded with the US-critical paper “The State of Democracy in the USA” (Radio China International of 4 and 5 December 2021). – This is likely to kick off a major global debate on democracy. – I certainly hope so.

The book by Kishore Mahbubani “Has China Won? – The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy” excellently explains the background of the renewed, dangerous escalation in the relationship between China and the USA. China has experienced tremendous economic development in the last 30 years and has brought around 800 million of its citizens out of extreme poverty. It has produced millions of entrepreneurs. Thousands of new companies are founded every year, supplying the world with high-quality goods. – None of this can happen without freedom. A large middle class has emerged, so that today the country lives in modest prosperity. Surprisingly, however, the newspapers in the West and especially in the USA are full of comments critical of China and one-sided negative articles. (see p. 174)

Kishore Mahbubani mentions as an example in his book the speech by US Vice President Mike Pence on 4 October 2018, which he devoted to China. It represent-

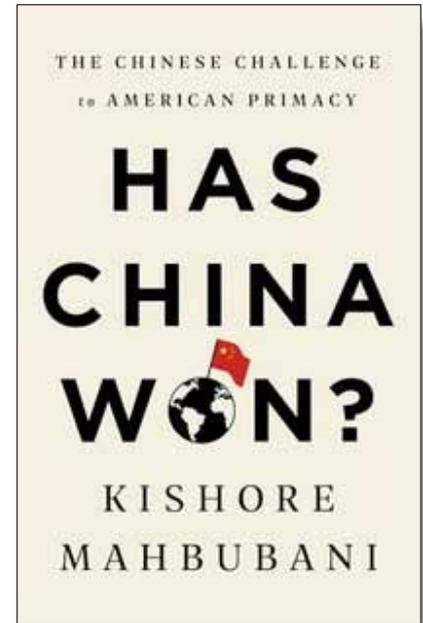


Kishore Mahbubani (picture ma)

ed a new low in the US-China relationship. Mahbubani: “It was a nasty, condescending speech, one that none of his recent predecessors would have delivered.” (p. 257) He states, “Given the poisoned atmosphere toward China, it would be unwise for any American politician or public intellectual to advocate more reasonable approaches towards China.” (p. 254) Mahbubani compares the situation to the Cold War in the 1950s.

Kishore Mahbubani takes a different view on many things. His book “Has China Won? – The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy” was published in German a few weeks ago. In view of the China-critical staccato in the Western media, his book is valuable as a counter-position. It encourages the reader not to be satisfied with the one-sided view dominating politics and the media, but to also look at the other side of the coin. My book review will therefore differ from a “normal” book review. I will take the main points of Western criticism of China as a starting point and contrast them mainly with some verbatim text passages from Mahbubani’s book. (The page numbers in the text refer to the English version of this book. For a few quotes no page numbers can be given, since they are taken from the German edition).

This much in advance: the widespread hope in the West that, with its economic development and opening-up, China would also approach the USA and the West politically has proved to be false.



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According to Mahbubani, Asia’s economic rise means that other nations must learn to accept different social and political systems in order to avoid major conflicts.

But first a few words about the author Kishore Mahbubani: He grew up in Singapore. His family has Indian roots. “My mother would take me to pray in Buddhist temples as well as Hindu temples, when I was young.” (p. 13) Mahbubani served in the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs for many years. Among other things, he was ambassador to Cambodia, Malaysia, the United States, and for ten years to the United Nations. He is currently a professor of political science at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University in Singapore. He wrote his book in collaboration with political scientists from renowned American and British universities.

His book is pleasant to read because Mahbubani is familiar with both worlds and does not take a one-sided position. He writes as a friend of America as well as of China. Thus, after the introduction, the text begins with two detailed chapters, “China’s Biggest Strategic Mistake” (pp. 25-48) and “America’s Biggest Strategic Mistake” (pp. 49-78). America lacks a comprehensive strategy for dealing with China, he writes, and there have often and for various reasons been misunderstandings in dealing with the American business community. The causes of

continued on page 8

**“Has China won? ...”**

continued from page 7

these lie in the system and Chinese officials have often failed to counteract them. As an advocate of globalisation, Mahbubani analyses these contexts thoroughly and points out the consequences. He returns to this problem again and again in the following.

**Is the communist party a discontinued model also in China?**

Mahbubani: “The Chinese Communist Party is not run by doddering old apparatchiks. Instead, it has become a meritocratic governance system, which chooses only the best and brightest to be promoted to the highest levels. The CCP is not perfect. No human institution is. [...] Yet, it is also a fact that relative to its peers around the world, the Chinese governing class generates more good governance (in terms of promoting the well-being of its citizens) than virtually any other government today. Since the Chinese Communist Party is constantly vilified in the Western media, very few people in the West are aware that the members of this Communist Party have delivered the best governance China has ever enjoyed in its entire history.” (p. 140)

“The greatest source of misunderstanding of the CCP arises when the West focusses on the word Communist instead of the word Chinese. Although the Chinese have not succeeded in creating a perfect governance system, theirs does reflect thousands of years of Chinese political traditions and wisdom. The overall weight of the Chinese government on the Chinese people is not a heavy one. The CCP does not actively interfere in the daily lives of its citizens. Indeed, the Chinese people have enjoyed more personal freedom under the CCP than any other previous Chinese government.” (p. 172)

“Yet, in the eyes of many objective Asian observers, the CCP actually functions as the ‘Chinese Civilisation Party’. Its soul is not rooted in the foreign ideology of Marxism-Leninism but in the Chinese civilisation.” (p. 7)

**Is China really threatening the free world?**

Mahbubani: “The latent fear of the yellow peril surfaces from time to time in literature and art. As a child living in a British colony, I read the popular Fu-Manchu novels. They left a deep impression on me. Subconsciously I began to believe that the personification of evil in human society came in the form of a slant-eyed yellow man devoid of moral scruples. (p. 260)

“In America, the political course towards China is dominated by a gloomy view – of China as an oppressor, an image

reinforced by a very real, subconscious fear, a fear that the American public used to call the ‘Yellow Peril’. You don’t hear the term much anymore, but the sentiment continues to resonate strongly.” (German foreword, p. 8)

“Americans tend to believe that good always triumphs over evil and that no political system is inherently as good as what the founders of their republic had in mind. This could also explain why the demonisation of China has increased so much in recent years. The more China is made out to be a bad actor (especially as China defied America’s expectation that it would open up progressively and transform itself into a democratic society as it moved closer to America), the easier it has become for America to cling to the belief that sooner or later it will triumph over China, regardless of what the chances actually are.” (German introduction, p. 27)

**Are political and personal freedoms lacking in China?**

Mahbubani: “America is the only developed society where, over the past 30 years, the average income of the bottom 50 percent of the population has gone down over the past thirty years. In the same period, the Chinese people have experienced the greatest improvement in their standard of living ever seen in Chinese history. The obvious American retort to such a statement would be to say that the Chinese still don’t enjoy the political rights that Americans do. That is true. Yet, it is also true that the Chinese people cherish social harmony and social well-being more than individual rights.” (p. 152)

“Given the absence of political freedom in China – the Chinese people clearly don’t have the freedom to organise political parties, speak in a free media and vote for their leaders – the assumption in the West is that the Chinese people must feel oppressed. However, the Chinese people don’t compare their condition with that of other societies. Instead, they compare their lot with what they experienced in the past. And all they can see is that they have experienced the largest explosion of personal freedom ever experienced in their history. When I first went to China in 1980, the Chinese people couldn’t choose where to live, what to wear, where to study or what jobs to take.” (p. 153)

“Today’s China is a happy society. That is also why the 130 million tourists who travelled abroad in 2019 returned home voluntarily and feeling good. But in America, the political course toward China is dominated by a gloomy view – of China as an oppressor.” (German foreword)

What is striking is that the likelihood of being jailed is at least five times higher in America than in China. (cf. p. 161)

**Does the West need to teach China democracy and human rights?**

“Americans hold sacrosanct the ideals of freedom of speech, press, assembly and religion and also believe that every human being is entitled to the same fundamental human rights. The Chinese believe that social needs and social harmony are more important than individual needs and rights and that the prevention of chaos and turbulence is the main goal of governance” (p. 276)

“Yet, a fundamental contradiction would only arise in this area if China tried to export its values to America. [...] China’s leaders are political realists. They would not waste their time or resources on a mission impossible. Sadly, the same is not true in the American political system.” (p. 276 f.)

In reality, so-called democracy promotion from the West can have “... the opposite effect of what the theory suggests. It can destabilise and weaken societies instead of strengthening them. [...] Against this recent historical backdrop, it would be reasonable for many Chinese leaders to believe that when America promotes democracy in China, it is not trying to strengthen China. It is trying to bring about a more disunited, divided China, a China beset by chaos. If that were China’s fate, America could continue to remain the number one unchallenged power for a century or more. Such a *Machiavelian* goal, may seem far-fetched. Yet, it would be a perfectly reasonable move for a great power if it believes that its primacy is being challenged.” (p. 179)

On the subject of “human rights abuses”: Most Americans are unaware that China experienced moments similar to 9/11, “when terrorists recruited from the Xinjiang region went on a killing spree in several cities. (p. 280) There were numerous attacks in Xinjiang with several hundred deaths. Mahbubani shows in detail that the sometimes-rigorous measures China has taken are more moderate than the “war on terror” waged by the US, which has been life-threatening for millions. Many innocent civilians have lost their lives. America has no reason to blame China in any way. It would be more appropriate, Mahbubani says, for the US itself to pay more attention to human rights and to renew and nurture its own democracy. (pp. 276-280)

**Is the Chinese government so authoritarian that it does not deserve any trust?**

Mahbubani: “... the Chinese people trust their government. This is confirmed by independent international surveys. The (US American) 2018 Edelman Trust Barom-

**"Has China won? ..."**

continued from page 8

eter report, which surveyed trust levels in several different countries, found that in terms of the domestic population's trust in their government, China ranked top, while America ranked fifteenth." (p. 154)

A wise Chinese government in the 21st century knows that it must balance three sometimes conflicting parts to ensure a healthy society: growth, stability and personal freedom. And: "According to a 2015 Pew survey, 88 percent of Chinese believe that when their children grow up, they will be better off financially than their parents, compared to a median of 51 per cent amongst other emerging countries and 32 per cent in the United States." (pp. 157f)

"... every Chinese government has known for millennia that if the vast majority of the Chinese people choose to revolt, no amount of repression can hold them down." (p. 156)

If a widespread revolt breaks out, the Chinese emperor will lose his "mandate of heaven". Mahhubani mentions the writings of *Mencius*, a disciple of *Confucius*, as an example. Mencius explained the Chinese concept of the Mandate of Heaven as follows: "The ruler of a state was established by heaven for the benefit of the people. The ruler possessed the mandate of Heaven only as long as he retained the support of the people, for it was through the 'heart' of the people that Heaven made its will known. The people, in turn, could rightfully hold their rulers to account. They had the right to banish a bad ruler and even to kill a tyrant." (p. 157)

### Is China really threatening its neighbours ...?

"The more powerful China has become, the less it has intervened in the affairs of other states." (p. 144)

Mahhubani: "... relative to its size and influence, China is probably the least interventionist power of all the great powers. Of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China is the only one that has not fought in any foreign wars away from its borders, since World War II. America, Russia, the UK and France have done so. As this book has documented in several areas, the primary goal of China's rulers is to preserve peace and harmony among 1.4 billion people in China, not try to influence the lives of the six billion people who live outside China. This is the fundamental reason why China is behaving like a status quo, rather than as a revolutionary power. In so doing, it is delivering a global public good to the international system." (p. 148f)

"Since all the immediate neighbours have lived next to China for thousands of

years and have long developed sophisticated and subtle instincts on how to manage a rising China. And the Chinese elite (unlike the American elite) has a deep understanding of their long history with their neighbours. There will be many back-and-forths between China and its neighbours. [...] But there will not be wars." (p. 93)

### ... and Taiwan and Japan in particular?

The history behind it: The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a century of raids by the West and also by Japan. Here are a few key words: British, French, German and American troops invaded China and occupied it in parts. China, which had been self-reliant and peace-loving for centuries, was no match for them. In two wars, the British forced China to accept opium (from India) as a means of payment for their imports from China (tea, porcelain). China had to surrender Hong Kong and later ceded it to Britain by treaty for 100 years (until 1997). In 1860, 4,500 British and French soldiers completely destroyed, pillaged and plundered the huge imperial palace with its thousands of shrines and cultural assets. The palace was about eight times the size of the Vatican. (see p. 138)

However, no other country's relationship with China is as strained as that of Japan. Long-term military occupation and massacres among the civilian population are keywords in this context. This also includes the annexation of Taiwan.

Mahhubani: "Nearly all the historical vestiges of this century of humiliation have been removed or resolved, including Hong Kong and Macau. Only one remains: Taiwan. It was Chinese territory until China was forced to hand it to Japan after the humiliating defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895." (p. 94) This annexation was later recognised by the Allies in the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War.

"America cannot claim that it doesn't understand the significance of Taiwan. It was clearly the hottest issue to resolve when *Nixon* and *Kissinger* began the process of reconciliation with China. Many clear understandings were reached between America and China. The most explicit understanding reached was that Taiwan and China belonged to one country. The 1972 joint communique stated: 'The US side declared: The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China.' [...] The Chinese desire to reunite Taiwan with the mainland represents a restitution, not an expansion." (p. 95)

That today's China could threaten Japan is absurd – also in view of its close

involvement in the military structure of the USA.

### Will the world descend into barbarism and chaos if America withdraws?

Mahhubani: "Having dealt with Chinese officials since I began my diplomatic career in 1971, almost fifty years ago, I have been astonished how the quality of mind of Chinese diplomats has improved, decade by decade. Sadly, for different reasons, the trajectory of the American diplomatic service is in the opposite direction." (p. 141)

The fact that there is still a strong militarisation of USA foreign policy leaves little room for diplomacy. Sanctions are quickly imposed on countries that behave insubordinately. Weapons are quickly supplied and military "solutions" are favoured (which usually make situations worse). This manifests itself in the finances of the US government: "... the budget of the State Department (\$31.5 billion) is truly miniscule compared to that of the Defence Department (\$626 billion)." (p. 123f)

The USA spends more on the military and on its huge arms industry (military-industrial complex) than all the other countries in this world put together, and that is – according to Mahhubani – not necessarily socially and economically beneficial: "America's massive arms budget gives the country the same advantage that a dinosaur gets from its massive body – not a very big one." (German foreword, p. 10)

"Having been burnt in Iraq and Afghanistan, the logical response of America, if it were supple, flexible, and rational, would be to walk away from getting involved in unnecessary conflicts in the Islamic world. The inability to make this U-turn demonstrates that, like the old Soviet Union, America has become rigid, inflexible, and doctrinaire." (p. 115)

"There is no danger of America collapsing like the former Soviet Union. America is a much stronger country, blessed with great people, institutions, and many natural advantages. However, while America will not totally collapse, it can become greatly diminished, a shadow of itself." (p. 128)

"America has done more right than it has done wrong. This explains the relatively good relations America has had with most countries in the world. Yet, it is also true that America has made several unnecessary and painful mistakes, especially with the Islamic world and with Russia." (pp. 250f.)

"If *George Kennan* were alive today, he would clearly see that America has been deeply wounded, internally and external-

### “Has China won? ...”

continued from page 9

ly, by its involvements and unnecessary conflicts in the Islamic world.” (p. 115) George Kennan was a respected strategist in the 1950s who designed the USA’s containment policy against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

#### Is China getting a dictator for life in the person of Xi Jinping?

Mahbubani: “After *Xi Jinping* removed the term limits on his presidency, he continued to remain popular in China. The long history of China has taught the Chinese people a vital lesson: when the country has weak leaders, it falls apart. [...] The removal of term limits, for which he was roundly criticised, may turn out to be one of the biggest blessings that China has had. And it may be one critical reason why China wins the contest against America.” (p. 180)

Mahbubani mentions *Plato* (427–347 BC), the “forefather of Western philosophy”. A lot of people in the West today hold that democracy is the best form of government. Plato, after his mixed experience with popular rule in Greece, concluded that the best form of government was that of a philosopher-king. Mahbubani: “There is a very strong potential that Xi Jinping could provide to China the be-

neficient kind of rule provided by a philosopher king.” (p. 180)

#### Is China’s development policy a threat to the free world?

“Now it is China, not America, that is taking the lead in building a new multilateral architecture, including the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB) and the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI). America opposed both these initiatives. This didn’t stop many of its key friends and allies from joining them.” (p. 52)

“If America is going to respond effectively to the new geopolitical challenge from China, it needs to make some massive U-turns, including cutting down its military expenditures, withdrawing from all military interventions in the Islamic world, and stepping up its diplomatic capabilities. Yet, powerful vested interests in America will make it impossible for America to make any of these sensible U-turns.” (p. 128)

“The best partner to work with to develop Africa is China. Indeed, China has already emerged as the largest new economic partner of Africa.” (p. 222) “The emergence of China does not pose a threat to Europe. Indeed, it could help to enhance Europe’s long-term security if China promotes Africa’s development.” (p. 223) “If economic and political conditions in the African continent don’t improve in the

twenty-first century, Europe can expect tens, if not hundreds, of millions of Africans to knock on its doors seeking a better life in Europe.” (p. 220)

#### Conclusion: “... make the world safe for diversity” (John F. Kennedy). (p. 276)

“Chinese communism is not a threat to American democracy. Instead, the success and competitiveness of the Chinese economy and society is the real challenge.” (p. 271)

“China’s role and influence in the world will certainly grow along with the size of its economy. Yet, it will not use its influence to change the ideologies or political practices of other societies. One great paradox about our world today is that even though China has traditionally been a closed society, while America purports to be an open society, the Chinese leaders find it easier than American leaders to deal with a diverse world, as they have no expectation that other societies should become like them.” (p. 254f)

In this comprehensive work, Kishore Mahbubani does an excellent job of including China’s “soul”, shaped by its history and culture, in his analysis. It is to be hoped that American politicians and the media in particular – but also the Western world as a whole – will read this book and learn something new. In our times of simmering trade wars and conflicts, Mahbubani’s book is an appeal to reason and an indispensable guide to better understanding the rising power China. Mahbubani: “If America and China were to focus on their core interests of improving the livelihood and well-being of their citizens, they would come to realise that there are no fundamental contradictions in their long-term national interests.” (p. 281) “If the two superpowers were to co-operate, miracles could come true.” (German foreword, p. 17) And: “... there is enough space in the world for both America and China to thrive together.” (p. 281) •

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### On the importance of Confucian culture

*www. Kishore Mahbubani* points out in several passages that China is the only one of the great cultural nations in history that still exists today after four collapses. Central to our understanding is *Confucius* with his teachings.

Confucius was a Chinese sage who lived in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. After extensive reading and meditation, the scholar decided to give up his official duties in order to devote himself to the education of his fellow men. His wisdom and philosophy made him famous all over the country. His teaching, which is based on observation and common sense and always keeps an eye on practical application, has dominated Chinese society to this day. The doctrine of decency and respect for one’s fellow men was intended to develop character and a social order. The Chinese emperors had his teaching carved in stone and declared it the state religion. The American *Will Durant*, who examined and compared the diverse cultural history of mankind in twenty volumes: “The stoic conservatism of the ancient sage sank almost into the blood of the people, and gave to the nation, and to its individuals, a

dignity and profundity unequalled elsewhere in the world or in history.”

A highly educated civil service, to which everyone had access after lengthy, demanding exams, was responsible for the administration. Feudalist structures or a church like that in the West did not exist and do not exist.

“With the help of this philosophy China developed a harmonious community life, a zealous admiration for learning and wisdom, and a quiet and stable culture which made Chinese civilisation strong enough to survive every invasion, and to remold every invader in its own image.” (Durant, vol. 2, p. 52) It is interesting that the Venetian *Marco Polo*, who travelled to China 800 years before Durant, reported something very similar.

“For *Mencius* [student of Confucius] as well as for all his successors, government was always government for the people, never through the people. The virtuous and educated take care of the people. The idea that the (uneducated) people could look after themselves in a democratic state would never have occurred to any Confucian.” (Seitz 2002, p. 46)

# Switzerland's political DNA as a yardstick

## EU policy and public service

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

“Switzerland is not an EU member for understandable reasons. It doesn't fit its political DNA.” This statement in a recent newspaper interview comes from a German who lived in Switzerland for only two years. And yet he grasped – or guessed – something essential that is less clear to some Swiss. After the Federal Council had announced in May 2021 that it was breaking off negotiations with the EU on the Framework Agreement, because they had not led to satisfactory solutions, many citizens, politicians and even editors of the mainstream media initially expressed their relief. In the meantime, the EU turbos have once again sharpened their pencils and are given space in the mainstream media to mobilise for Switzerland's closer integration into the EU. But that can't scare us – we on the other side also have sharp pencils.

Year after year, Switzerland's good public service comes under attack. A year ago, in “Current Concerns”, we opposed further privatisation of the postal service and explained what the EU ban on state aid would mean for the public service.<sup>1</sup> At the turn of the year 2021/22, some journalists are now taking up the question the other way round: The remaining parts of the Post are to be put on an austerity course and successively privatised. This would take care of any contradictions with the EU ban on state aid by itself, if required.

These two focal points are to be taken up here.

In a full-page newspaper article, the former head of *SECO* (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs), Jean-Daniel Gerber, once again serves us the indigestible chunks from the failed Framework Agreement and urges us to swallow them. Otherwise, he says, there is a risk that Switzerland “will slip into a third-country status comparable to that of some of its Eastern European neighbours”.<sup>2</sup>

### “We don't want to adopt the [...] directives passed in Brussels quasi automatically”

Ten years ago, Jean-Daniel Gerber had a very different opinion. At the time, he rejected Brussels' view that Switzerland, as a beneficiary of the EU's internal market, must “also abide by the rules that govern this market – not only the current rules, but also those of the future”. In contrast, he noted that Switzerland was not fully integrated into the internal market and, as a non-member of the EU, could not have a say in its future shape. Moreover, Switzerland was “one of the EU's largest foreign

“Something else is also part of the public service: especially in our fast-moving and digitised times, many people appreciate a personal address at the post office counter or with the letter carrier. But this is precisely where there can be saved with the big ladle: ‘The Corona crisis has shown: Most of Swiss Post's services can be handled just fine digitally,’ said the ‘Neue Zürcher Zeitung’ from December 29. In times of crisis, the digital trail is indeed better than nothing – but we don't want to make distance learning the norm.”

trade partners and an important investor”. Gerber concluded in 2011: “Accordingly, we don't want to adopt the laws and directives passed in Brussels quasi automatically.”<sup>3</sup> Gerber's arguments have lost none of their relevance today ...

### 30 years ago: Rejection of the EEA by the Swiss people

The precursor of the Framework Agreement, so to speak, was another framework that Brussels built 30 years ago for the integration of the four EFTA member states Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Switzerland: The European Economic Area EEA. On 6 December 1992, accession to the EEA was narrowly rejected by the Swiss people (with 50.3 % against) and clearly rejected by the cantons (16 to 7) at the ballot box. This meant that the Federal Council's application for full membership of the *European Community* (EC) was also off the table. As a result, Switzerland and the EU continued to settle their affairs bilaterally in their mutual interest.

The fact that Brussels is now refusing to adapt individual agreements to the current status and to open up EU research and education programmes to Switzerland as a “punishment” for not signing the Framework Agreement is in breach of the treaty. But as I said – such imposing behaviour cannot scare us: We still have many plans B in our quiver.

### Public service: counteracting neoliberal ambitions is called for

The high-quality Swiss public service is firmly anchored in the minds of the vast majority of the population and, thanks to direct democracy, can only be cracked in small pieces. But it requires the highest vigilance and the active commitment of us citizens to fight against the constantly threatening dismantling based on a return on investment-mindset that is not in

line with human needs. Switzerland can afford first-class health care, top-quality public transport, post offices throughout the country and the urgently needed expansion of electricity production under the sovereignty of the cantons and communes. We taxpayers pay for it. So let us resist neoliberal theories according to which, for example, a large hospital is “more efficient” than several small ones – which, firstly, is not true (small units usually manage most economically) and, secondly, does not serve the needs of the rural and mountain population, nor of the workforce, i.e. the well-being of the whole community.

Shortly before the turn of the year 2021/22, the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” took aim at the *Swiss Post* and listed a tough programme to “finally dust off the public service”.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, *PostFinance* should be privatised, secondly, “the remaining monopoly of the Post should be abolished” (meaning the monopoly for letters up to 50 grammes), thirdly, “after *PostFinance*, the Post should also be released into entrepreneurial freedom”. And in conclusion: “A courageous reform is needed now, before *Swiss Post* is bled dry financially.”

That means that we would leave our (still) well-functioning postal service to foreign corporations and at the same time pave the way to the EU. (see: “Excursus: Not all liberals are neoliberal!”) What preceded this: In January 2021, the Federal Council set up a commission of experts under the innocuous-sounding name “Further development of the basic service in the area of postal and payment services”. The commission is headed by *Christine Egerszegi* (FDP), a former member of the Council of States from Aargau, and is due to present its proposals at the beginning of 2022.<sup>5</sup> We will read these with a magnifying glass.

continued on page 12

### "Switzerland's political DNA ..."

continued from page 11

#### "Outdated luxury" at Swiss Post?

Is a (nowadays anyway only limited) citizen-oriented service of Swiss Post "outdated luxury", as the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" writes? Thanks to the connection of the letter and parcel traffic as well as the post bus sector with the payment transactions of *PostFinance*, *Swiss Post* has so far just not been bleeding to death, but has been cross-financed by the latter. However, anyone who expects returns from a public service operation rejects cross-financing in principle. In today's times of zero and negative interest rates, cash transactions and deposits at the counter unfortunately no longer bring in much. In such times, the state has to cover any deficits: We taxpayers have a right to the socially responsible use of our tax money.

Something else is also part of the public service: especially in our fast-moving and digitised times, many people appreciate a personal address at the post office counter or with the letter carrier. But this is precisely where there can be saved with the big ladle: "The Corona crisis has shown: Most of *Swiss Post's* services can be handled just fine digitally," said the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" from 29 December. In times of crisis, the digital trail is indeed better than nothing – but we don't want to make distance learning the norm.

#### Do not jeopardise the "play of market forces" – "The EU has its eye on this"

Since 2013, Swiss post offices have been almost halved from 1657 to 902, while at the same time agencies (postal services in stores or at kiosks) have risen to 1185.<sup>6</sup>

#### Excursus: Not all liberals are neoliberal!

*mw.* In order to do justice to the Swiss liberals, it should be noted that most of them flirt with more privatization of the public service. But this does not mean that FDP politicians and liberal entrepreneurs are in favour of the Framework Agreement or even EU accession in order to achieve this goal more easily with the help of the ban on EU subsidies.

In winter 2020/21, when it was a question of to be or not to be of the Swiss model would survive, many young and older personalities of different political persuasions from business and politics went public and said no to the framework agreement and yes to Switzerland. They heralded the end of the disastrous negotiations with Brussels. Among them were also liberals, first and foremost former Federal Councillor *Johann Schneider-Ammann*.

see also: *Wüthrich, Marianne*. "Something is happening in Switzerland's direct democracy" *More and more voices call for a fresh start with Brussels.* in: *Current Concerns* No. 2 of 5 February 2021

Even more could be saved here, the authors write in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung": "If the payment traffic mandate were removed, Swiss Post could waive own branches altogether. Another starting point would be that the letter carrier would no longer deliver letters every day, but only every second or third. [...] This would save 50 to 90 million Swiss francs annually."

According to the authors, this would also work in Sweden, where citizens receive their mail only every second day, and post offices for private customers have not existed for some time. This is where Brussels' favorite child, competition, comes into play. Sweden and Denmark merged their state-owned postal operations in 2009 to form *Postnord*, and now the rules of the "free" market apply: "*Postnord* is financed by its operating business; for any deficits, funds must be raised on the capital market. If the two states inject money as owners, this must be done in such a way that the play of market forces is not jeopardised. The EU is keeping an eye on this."

#### Consequence of privatisation: careless handling and poor service

However, according to the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", *Postnord's* reputation among customers has "suffered considerably" since privatisation: "The company is sometimes accused of negligent handling of letters and parcels and poor service." That sounds familiar. Do you remember the privatisation of the railroads in Great Britain, as a result of which the tracks were no longer properly maintained and collisions and derailments became more frequent? We don't want that kind of situation in Switzerland.

Finally, a cautionary tale from our neighbouring country Liechtenstein: "As a member of the EEA, Liechtenstein is obliged to completely liberalise the postal market". Therefore, the letter monopoly up to 50 grammes is to be abolished, and postal services may be provided in the future "by anyone, provided that the requirements specified in the law are met." In order to ensure a nationwide, high-quality and inexpensive basic service despite the competition prescribed by Brussels, there is to be a "universal service provider" instead of the state postal service (a splendid bureaucratic un-word!).<sup>7</sup> For the time being, the postal service may take over this provider, as long as no cheaper one can be found.

Conclusion: The small state of Liechtenstein has eleven municipalities, so there is no need for competition for the postal service. It is absurd to abolish the state postal service in this small, prosperous and well-ordered state just because Liechtenstein joined the EEA in 1995 – why actually? – and Brussels wants to push through for the heck of it its stubborn bureaucracy. For us Swiss, it is advisable to consider whether we would prefer to remain a "third coun-

try", with plans B wherever we deem it necessary and useful. For this, we do not need an institutional framework – and certainly not the sell-out of our good public service. •

- <sup>1</sup> Wüthrich, Marianne. "Keep the service public in the hands of the sovereign! No sell-out to EU major corporations". In: *Current Concerns* of 24 December 2020
- <sup>2</sup> Gerber, Jean-Daniel. "Europapolitik: Die Schweiz darf nicht in den Drittlandstatus relegiert werden." (European policy: Switzerland must not be relegated to third-country status.) In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 27 December 2021
- <sup>3</sup> Spescha, Geli. "Im Gespräch mit alt Staatssekretär Jean-Daniel Gerber: Wie Reformen erfolgreich angehen?" (In conversation with former State Secretary Jean-Daniel Gerber: How to tackle reforms successfully?) In: *Die Volkswirtschaft* of 1 April 2011
- <sup>4</sup> Eisenring, Christoph. "Die Schweiz leistet sich bei der Post einen überholten Luxus – und schafft so einen 'Service sans public'" (Switzerland Affords Outdated Luxury at the Post Office – Creating a 'Service sans public') In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 29 December 2021
- <sup>5</sup> "Christine Egerszegi übernimmt Leitung der Expertenkommission Grund-versorgung Post" (Christine Egerszegi takes over as head of the Expert Commission on Basic Postal Services.) *Federal Council media release* dated of 20 January 2021
- <sup>6</sup> Belz, Nina; Eisenring, Christoph; Hermann, Rudolf; Rasch, Michael. "Wie viel Service public soll es sein? Während die Schweiz darüber streitet, klingelt in Schweden der Postbote nur noch jeden zweiten Tag" (How much public service should there be? While Switzerland is arguing about it, in Sweden the letter carrier rings only every other day.) In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 29 December 2021
- <sup>7</sup> Meier, Günther. "Liechtensteins Post verliert das Monopol über die Briefpost" (Liechtenstein's Post Office Loses Monopoly over Letter-Mail). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 27 December 2021

## Current Concerns

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Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box 247 CH-9602 Bazenheid

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: [CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch](mailto:CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch)

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## Sensitive, helpful and generous Traits we can build upon in the upbringing of our children

by Dr Eliane Perret, remedial teacher and psychologist

For those who occasionally want to treat themselves to a little relaxation while reading a book, we recommend the children's and young adults' books by the deceased Swiss writer *Olga Meyer* (cf. *Current Concerns* No. 21, 2 October 2019). Unfortunately, her books are only available in second-hand bookshops.<sup>1</sup> So, I recently curled up on the sofa with "Chrigi. Heitere und ernste Erlebnisse eines Bergbuben" (Chrigi. Cheerful and serious experiences of a mountain boy). The story quickly captivated me because it inspired me to think about fundamental issues. I was impressed by how *Chrigi* acquired his tools for life in a family that mastered their life as mountain farmers under very demanding conditions. It was also pleasant to feel how the emotional solidarity went far beyond the family and how naturally one supported the other within the village community when there was a need. So, I went along inwardly into *Chrigi's* world and kept thinking new thoughts.

**"I think this little birdie will make me well again!"**

The innkeepers in the village had a bird that had never appeared in *Chrigi's* world before. It was a golden yellow canary that could sing beautifully. The boy listened to its song with fascination as he passed by, but the bird also gave pleasure to other people, as his mother once mentioned casually. *Chrigi* had observed for some time that she was often sad, for reasons that were not clear to him. "Would the little yellow bird be able to relieve her of her sadness?" he wondered. When the landlords died in a tragic accident, their belongings – including the canary – were to be auctioned off. This bothered *Chrigi* and he made a plan to buy this bird for his mother. However, he still lacked the necessary money. So, he looked for ways to earn it, and after two weeks of hard work in house construction helping, he saved necessary seven francs. Despite his efforts, the plan almost failed had his neighbour not secretly supported his strivings. So finally, on his mother's name day, the cage with the yellow bird stood on the table and accompanied her through everyday life with its song. Sometime later, the mother said thoughtfully: "I think this little bird will make me well again!" For *Chrigi*, this was a supportive and encouraging experience; it strengthened his sense of self-efficacy, as they say today. An example from another time and yet highly topical in its message!



*The experimenter's clothespin (visible in the mirror) fell to the floor. The little boy observes this and brings it to him. – Already 18-month-old children willingly go to the aid of people in difficulty. To do this, they must both understand the other person's goal and be motivated to help him. Therefore, we speak of shared intentionality, a common intention. (Images Screenshots from <https://swisscows.com>; ©Warneken/Tomasello)*

### Cooperative by nature or selfish?

What could have motivated *Chrigi* to act altruistically? Was it the emotional closeness to his mother? His child's sense of responsibility for their welfare? Of course, these individual emotional factors play an important role and must be weighted sufficiently. Today, important and clarifying results from attachment research and individual psychology are available to us. However, *Chrigi's* sympathy did not seem to me to be a rare exception. At the beginning of the Corona pandemic, for example, many children and young people spontaneously offered to do the shopping, other chores or used their digital skills to help elderly people they did not know. So, what does science have to say about this?

### An inherent quality of man

For a long time, two points of view dominated the discussion on this issue: "Humans are naturally helpful to others and are corrupted by society" was the position of one side. "Children are born as pure egoists and their ability to cooperate is due to their ability to internalise cultur-

al norms and values. Education is needed for this," argued the others. Today's research, however, clearly states that there is not an either or an or, but that altruistic behaviour is based on an interplay of biology, upbringing and social circumstances. Spontaneous sympathy, jumping in when the other person needs it, is an inherent human characteristic that must be fostered and consolidated in the education and upbringing of children. In order to understand this more precisely, it was researched carefully. It dealt with the question of helping, sharing important goods and passing on important information in human coexistence. This brought us closer to the phylogenetic and ontogenetic roots of altruism.

### Spontaneous assistance even from the youngest

As early as 2006, *Felix Warneken* and *Michael Tomasello*, two psychologists and anthropologists working at the *Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology* in Leipzig at the time, drew attention to the fact that children as

continued on page 14

**“Sensitive, helpful and generous”**

continued from page 13

young as 18 months old willingly lend a hand to people in trouble, even if they do not know them. Children who were still in nappies and only just learning to talk already recognised how they could help someone. The two researchers worked out a series of tests in which the little ones had to perform various tasks.<sup>2</sup> For example, Warneken let clothespins fall to the floor out of his reach while he was hanging up the laundry. In the first ten seconds, he tried unsuccessfully to reach for the clothes pegs. In the next attempts he made eye contact with the child and after another twenty seconds he said, “My clothespin!” Almost all the children helped at least once and in 84 per cent of all cases they did so in the first ten seconds, before Warneken could even alert them to his problem. But he never asked the child directly for help, nor did he thank them specifically or reward them for bringing him the clamp. It even turned out that rewards led to the children limiting their spontaneous help in the future. The researchers suspected that rewards undermine the intrinsic motivation of young children. An important finding in view of today’s very widespread (learning) therapies that prefer to work with such reinforcers!

**“There’s the spoon ...” –  
The shared intentionality**

But couldn’t it be that the little ones had picked up brackets before and this was nothing new for them? Perhaps they liked to tidy up or sought to maintain contact with the adult by playing a game? Warneken refuted these objections with other, more complicated tasks. He unintentionally dropped a spoon through a narrow hole into a box that had a flap through which objects could be retrieved. The scientist acted as if he knew nothing about the flap. The children again jumped in and helped him. But only if he had previously tried in vain to pick the spoon out of the box through the hole, and not if he had deliberately dropped it in. With numerous further studies, the researchers refined their statements and ruled out possible false assumptions through the experimental designs. The children’s behaviour was astonishing and challenging. To be able to provide the help needed in such situations, children must both understand the other person’s goal and be motivated to help them. One therefore speaks of shared intentionality, a common intention.

Chrigi’s altruistic behaviour was therefore – at least at that time – nothing out of the ordinary, because even two-year-old children are willing and able to stand up for others, even if they do not derive

“... even two-year-old children are willing and able to stand up for others, even if they do not derive any benefit from it. They even take a lot on themselves and, for example, interrupt an exciting game to provide help. They bring this willingness into the world through their social preadaptation. However, it must be addressed, this social preadaptation must be further developed, and cultivated by the educators and parents/caregivers.”

any benefit from it. They even take a lot on themselves and, for example, interrupt an exciting game to provide help. They bring this willingness into the world through their social preadaptation. However, it must be addressed, this social preadaptation must be further developed, and cultivated by the educators and parents/caregivers. *Alfred Adler*, the founder of individual psychology, had already pointed out this fact.

**Not only in humans**

The researchers did not limit their series of tests to the human species, but also looked at the behaviour of chimpanzees, the closest primate relatives of humans, to find out whether altruism is a behaviour already rooted in evolution. The chimpanzees jumped in similarly in the experiments, but only for simple tasks. This suggests that spontaneous helping has deep evolutionary roots and belongs to the human species. – However, altruistic behaviour is not limited to helping others achieve a certain goal. Much more demanding is sharing available resources (for example, food) or passing on important information so that a problem can be solved. Again, the research showed that young children tend to share rewards equally and generously. When they get a little older, they start to choose their exchange partners a little more selectively and prefer to share with someone with whom they have already exchanged something earlier and had a good experience.

So even young children are spontaneously helpful, sharing and supportive with important information.

**Not only me, but also the others**

Chrigi also shared his treasures with his siblings and friends. For example, he received a “Batzen” (a coin) from a cattle dealer at a market who was impressed by the boy’s helpfulness and sense of responsibility. It was natural for him to invite his younger siblings to go along with him and to think carefully about how they could spend time together and have fun. Aren’t many children today missing

exactly this experience of putting their own desires in the background and helping out others? To do this they need our guidance and our example. Chrigi had this in his father, among others. He (and I) remembered one experience in particular: During one winter, a school class from the city spent their ski camp near Chrigi. One day, one of the pupils had an accident, and when Chrigi came home from school, the victim was carefully laid on his father’s large wooden sled in the living room and carefully transported down into the valley. Chrigi followed his father to help him bring the heavy sled back home.

**Giving and accepting help**

Chrigi experienced, however, that he and his family were also helped. That same winter, their farm was buried by an avalanche. Now it was the neighbours and the people from the village who helped when the father called them for help. So, the mother and her children were rescued alive from the masses of snow. But the family’s home and livelihood were destroyed. The teenage skiers were touched deeply by the family’s plight, and now it was they who spontaneously suggested to their teacher that they would help rebuild the house, and then they did. Doesn’t this remind you of the many spontaneous offers of help at the beginning of the Corona pandemic?

**An interplay of biology, upbringing,  
and social circumstances**

So Chrigi inspired me to several important considerations – applied psychology. It feels optimistic that children are empathetic, helpful, and generous from a very early stage in their development and willingly contribute important information. They are preadapted to this by nature, so it does not need to be implanted. However, the development of altruistic behaviour is based on an interplay of biology, upbringing and social circumstances. As the children grow up, social experiences and cultural traditions become more and more important. For this, they need

continued on page 15

# “Among ten children, hardly any knew the ABC”

by Carl Bossard

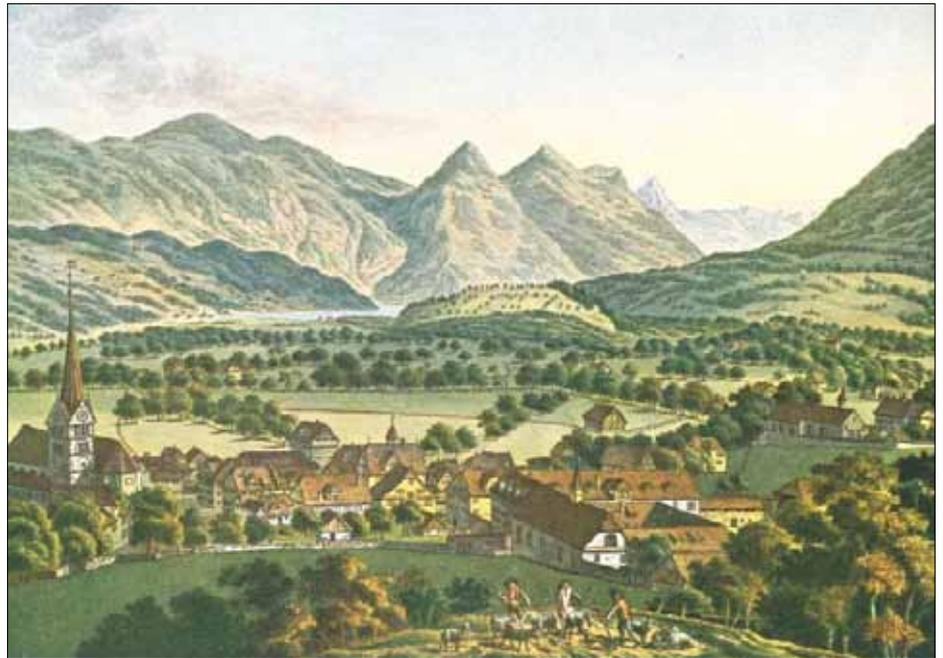
*Wars affect children in particular. Currently in Afghanistan. The great suffering is reminiscent of a humanitarian fate in Switzerland. It is connected with Pestalozzi's brief work in Stans. An attempt to commemorate.*

“Many [came] with rags laden with vermin, many gaunt, like emaciated skeletons, with eyes full of fear and foreheads full of wrinkles of worry; [...] others crushed by misery.”<sup>1</sup> This is how Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) describes the arrival of war-disabled children at his orphanage in Stans. It was early December 1798 – the first year of the Helvetic Republic (1798–1803).

## The implosion of the Old Confederation

Pestalozzi's touching description came to mind while reading a correspondent's report from Afghanistan. The news from the Hindu Kush is stirring: The situation was desolate; million children were starving.<sup>2</sup> Particularly shocking: the picture of a malnourished toddler, emaciated and spindly. Pestalozzi must have experienced something similar in the post-war microcosm of Nidwalden.

What had happened? The French Revolution of 1789 seems to many like a tectonic quake, like a volcanic eruption. The revolutionary lava of political upheaval rolled over the entire continent. Napoleon's armies have an easy time of it, there is little resistance. His troops also



Stans around 1790: in the front the convent of St. Clare, where Pestalozzi ran his orphanage in 1798/99. (picture bruehlmeier.info)

occupy Switzerland. The rebellious cry of “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” abruptly brings down what had become rotten. In the spring of 1798, the Old Confederation collapses. The Helvetic government is installed in Aarau.

## Elevenfold superiority

The new central authority demands the oath of allegiance to the Helvetic Unity Constitution. The people of Nidwalden

refuse and reject it. Attempts at mediation fail; ultimatums are not even answered. So, it comes to the threatened military invasion. On 9 September 1798, French units under the command of General Schauenburg conquer and occupy the small Free State – against a heroic but ultimately exhaustingly futile resistance.

1,600 Nidwaldeners fight against a foreign superiority of 17,700 profession-

continued on page 16

## “Sensitive, helpful and generous”

continued from page 14

parents to guide them, introduce them to the values and norms of their own culture and correct any undesirable developments. Outside of the family, school and state also have a responsibility to form the next generation. As a child I was very fortunate to hear Chrigi's story during the children's hour on the radio. Olga Meyer, the author, dedicated her book to her both big and small listeners. It would certainly also appeal to today's children. But the point here is not to glorify “the good old times”. People had to cope with harsh living conditions and the progress made since then is a blessing. That is why today's parents, educators and those responsible for education can draw on sound scientific knowledge and carry out their task with that background.

There they and all of us lay the foundations for solving even challenging situations through joint work.

This knowledge of the social human nature, of the spontaneous willingness to help each other, can be the basis for a more peaceful coexistence, on which we all so urgently depend. Having this with us, putting it into practice and passing it on can be our personal contribution to peace.

<sup>1</sup> Olga Meyer's books draw life portraits of children and young people who lived in the Tösstal valley or in the city of Zurich. They provide an insight into the living conditions and the way people lived in the first half of the 20th century. Cf. Perret, Eliane. “We should learn again to see with the heart. Thoughts on the 130th birthday of Swiss children's and youth book author Olga Meyer” In: *Current Concerns* No. 21 of 2 October 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Warneken, Felix. *Der Ursprung der Kooperation beim Menschen: Neue Einsichten aus der*

*Forschung mit Kindern.* (The origin of cooperation in humans: New insights from research with children) Keynote lecture on the origins of cooperation in humans at the International Symposium “Childhood, Youth and Society VIII”/2016 – at the Festpielhaus Bregenz – organised by the Netzwerk Welt der Kinder. Can be seen on YouTube: <https://swisscows.com/video/watch?query=Felix%20Warneken&id=DD70E141064066CDD58DDD70E141064066CDD58D>, retrieved 26 Dec 2021

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### “Among ten children ...”

continued from page 15

al soldiers. Around 100 Frenchmen and 100 Nidwaldeners lose their lives in the fierce fighting. Another 300 women, men and children die in acts of revenge by the occupying army. Over 330 houses and around 200 stables go up in flames; almost ten churches and chapels are destroyed.<sup>3</sup> A horizon of black burnt ruins! The area is “for the most part burnt and devastated”, reports Schauenburg. Unheard-of suffering as a result of the punitive expedition!

#### Only an educated people can have a say

The hardship, which is tangible everywhere, affects the children in particular, but not only. Some of the people live in miserable huts, “which protect them against wind and weather to the utmost need”. “The misery [of the population] is indescribably great and it grows with every day”, a government official describes the situation in January 1799. He adds: Cold and frost had destroyed the few potato stocks. In need, people would now eat spoiled tubers, which would make them sick.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the urgent reconstruction, the Helvetic government is planning an educational and poorhouse for Stans – for children from the age of six. The reconstruction of the education system is one of the central goals of the new state. The development and expansion of schools has top priority. The motto: Only an educated people can make the new republic concrete and have a democratic say.

#### A confident “I liked to go”

The task is enormously difficult. The search is on for a Catholic, but he cannot be found. So, the choice falls on the Protestant and sympathiser of the Helvetic Republic, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Is he aware of the pitfalls? Hardly. “I liked to go”, he states confidently. On 7 December 1798, he moved into the convent. But he finds a construction site; moreover, the building is “in no way equipped for the purpose of an orphanage [with] a considerable number of children”.

In mid-January 1799, the orphanage is officially opened – with 45 children. There is still rubble and dirt everywhere. “The dust from the walls filled all the corridors”, Pestalozzi writes. This “completed the discomfort of the beginning”. And he adds: “At the start I had to send some of the poor children home for the night because of the lack of beds. These would return verminously the following mornings.”



*Pestalozzi welcomes the orphans in front of the convent. It is the only picture in which sisters can be seen with Pestalozzi. Pen and ink drawing by Konrad Grab, before 1900. (picture ZHB Lucerne, Special Collection)*

#### Extremely difficult literacy

Soon Pestalozzi is looking after more than 80 children; only a maid helps him. The task requires almost Herculean powers. A pedagogical borderline situation! How demanding his mission turns out to be is shown by the fact: “Among ten children, hardly one could read the ABC”, he complains.<sup>5</sup> And he continues: “There was even less talk of other school lessons or essential means of education.”

“The complete lack of school education” of the children does not discourage Pestalozzi. On the contrary! “I was as much as alone in their midst from morning to evening. [...] They were with me and I was with them. Their soup was mine, their drink was mine.” Soon there were visible successes: “Learning was completely new to [the children], and as soon as some of them saw that they could achieve something, their zeal became tireless. Children who had never held a book in their lives [...] came in a few weeks to study with the greatest interest from early in the morning until late in the evening, almost incessantly.”

#### The abrupt end of Pestalozzi’s dream

A dream comes true for Pestalozzi: to educate the poor in human responsibility, to help the “people in the Zwiwh”. The longing of his educational existence is condensed in this. But the dream ends abruptly. Helvetic and French troops needed the rooms as barracks and military hospitals. On 8 June 1799, the government withdrew his assignment. Disappointed, Pestalozzi writes: “Those were my dreams; I had to leave Stans now that I thought I was so

close to fulfilling them.” Exhausted, he accepts the invitation of an acquaintance and retreats to the Gurnigelbad for a cure. In a long letter to a friend, he describes and analyses his short time work in Nidwalden. The “Stans Letter” is considered the most concise document on Pestalozzi’s pedagogical attitude and educational thinking. Testimony to his humane energy.

A small postscript: looking back into the oppressive past perhaps makes one grateful for today’s provisions – this in a world that also seems to be coming apart at the seams here and there. •

<sup>1</sup> *Pestalozzi über seine Anstalt in Stans* [kurz: “Stanser Brief” von 1799] (1997). (Pestalozzi on his institution in Stans [in short: “Stans Letter” of 1799] (1997). With an interpretation and new introduction by Wolfgang Klafki. Weinheim and Basel: Beltz Verlag, p. 9; the citations are taken from this publication.

<sup>2</sup> Roth, Jonas. “In Afghanistan bahnt sich eine humanitäre Katastrophe an” (A humanitarian catastrophe is brewing in Afghanistan). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 24 December 2021, p. 5

<sup>3</sup> cf. Messmer, Kurt. “Nidwalden 1798 – Erinnerung ist machbar” (Nidwalden 1798 – Remembrance is feasible). In: <https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch/2020/09/nidwalden-1798-erinnerung-ist-machbar/> [Status: 30 December 2021]

<sup>4</sup> Haller-Dir, Marita (2015). “Die grösste Herzlichkeit für mein Werk fand ich bey den Kapuzinern und Klosterfrauen”. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s Zeit in Stans vom 7.12.1798 bis 8.6.1799” (I found the greatest cordiality for my work among the Capuchins and the nuns. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s time in Stans from 7 December 1798 to 8 June 1799). In: *Der Geschichtsfreund*, vol. 168, p. 260f.

<sup>5</sup> Bräker, Ulrich. “Lebensgeschichte und natürliche Ebenteuer (sic) des armen Mannes im Tockenburg” (Life story and natural adventures (sic) of the poor man in Tockenburg). In: *Bräker’s Werke in einem Band*. Berlin and Weimar 1966, pp. 83ff.