

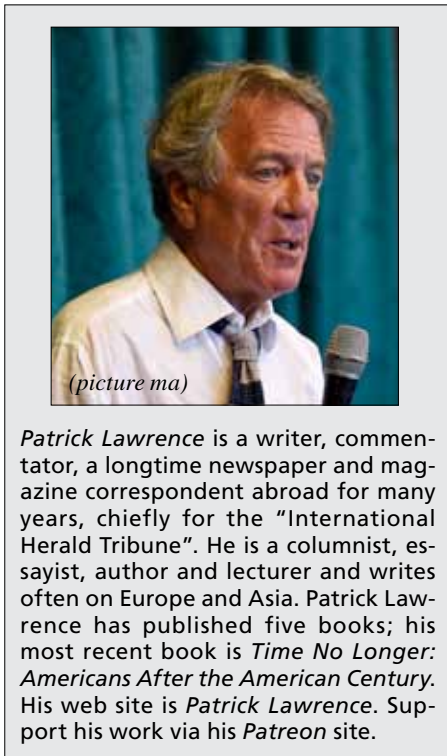
# Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,  
and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

## Our bubble of pretend

by Patrick Lawrence



Patrick Lawrence is a writer, commentator, a longtime newspaper and magazine correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the "International Herald Tribune". He is a columnist, essayist, author and lecturer and writes often on Europe and Asia. Patrick Lawrence has published five books; his most recent book is *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century*. His web site is *Patrick Lawrence*. Support his work via his *Patreon* site.

*The lack of objective, principled coverage of the war in Ukraine is a degenerate state of affairs. The one thing worse is the extent to which it's perfectly fine with most Americans.*

It is perfectly obvious by now, to anyone who cares to look, that mainstream media in America and the other Western powers are not reporting the Ukraine crisis accurately.

Let me try that another way: The government-supervised "New York Times" and the rest of the corporate-owned media on both sides of the Atlantic lie routinely to their readers and viewers as to why Russia intervened in Ukraine, the progress of its military operation, the conduct of Ukrainian forces, and America's role in purposely provoking and prolonging this crisis.

So far as I know, this is the first war in modern history with no objective, principled coverage in mainstream media of day-to-day events and their context. *None*. It is morn-to-night propaganda, disinformation and lies of omission – most of it fashioned by the Nazi-infested Zelensky

regime in Kiev and repeated uncritically as fact.

There is one thing worse than this degenerate state of affairs. It is the extent to which the media's malpractice is perfectly fine to most Americans. Tell us what to think and believe no matter if it is true, they say, and we will think and believe it. Show us some pictures, for images are all.

There are larger implications to consider here. Critical as it is that we understand this conflict, Ukraine is a mirror in which we see ourselves as we have become. For more Americans than I wish were so, reality forms only in images. These Americans are no longer occupants of their own lives. Risking a paradox, what they take to be reality is detached from reality.

This majority – and it is almost certainly a majority – has no thoughts or views except those first verified through the machinery of manufactured images and "facts." Television screens, the pages of purportedly authoritative newspapers, the air waves of government-funded radio stations – NPR, the BBC – serve to certify realities that do not have to be real, truths that do not have to be true.

This leaves us in a sad and very parlous place.

Sad: Is there some state more pitiful than having no genuine connection to one's own thoughts, perceptions, experience – altogether to one's life? If Americans are not a profoundly sad people behind all the smiles we see in advertising, idiotic comedy shows, and on *Facebook*, then I must be missing something.

Parlous: Over the course of some decades – from the mid-Cold War years, I would say – Americans have been rendered highly vulnerable to the manipulations of those who control the images through which most people have come to live. Anyone who has read a history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century knows where this can lead.

The five weeks that have passed since the Russian intervention on 24 February have been shocking on both these counts. The derelictions of the press and broadcasters are without precedent in my lifetime, and with Vietnam, the Iraq War, and the covert operation in Syria among the wreckage in the rear-view mirror, this is saying something.

I will let the American public's enthusiasm for the sinkhole that is Ukraine, the Azov Battalion, and the ridiculous posturing of President *Volodymyr Zelensky*, the comedian who is no longer funny, speak for itself.

### "Questionable veracity"

Ten days into the Russian intervention, the propaganda coming out of Kiev was already so preposterous "The New York Times" felt compelled to publish a piece headlined, "In Ukraine's Information War, a Blend of Fact and Fiction."<sup>1</sup> This was a baldly rendered apologia for the many "stories of questionable veracity," as "The Times" put it, then in circulation. I do love "The Times" for its delicate phrasing when describing indelicate matters.

There was the "Ghost of Kiev" story, featuring an heroic fighter pilot who turned out to derive from a video game. There were the Snake Island heroes, 13 Ukrainian soldiers who held out to the death on some small speck in the Black Sea, except that it turned out they surrendered, though not before Zelensky awarded them posthumous medals of honour that were not posthumous.

After railing against disinformation for years, "The Times" wants us to know, disinformation is O.K. in Ukraine because the Ukrainians are our side and they are simply "boosting morale."

We cannot say we weren't warned. The Ghost of Kiev and Snake Island turn out now to be mere prelude, opening acts in the most extensive propaganda operation of the many I can recall.

There was the maternity ward the Russians supposedly bombed in Mariupol. And then the theatre, and then the art school. All filled with huddling citizens the Russian air force cynically targeted because "this is genocide," as the ever-temperate Zelensky does not hesitate to assert.

All of this has been reported as fact in "The Times" and other major dailies and, of course, by the major broadcasters. There have been pictures. There have been videos, all very persuasive to the eye.

**"Our bubble of pretend"**

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And then, as evidence mounts that these incidents were staged as propaganda to frame the Russians and draw NATO forces directly into the war, a silence worthy of a Catholic chapel descends. We read no more of the maternity ward that turned out to be an improvised Azov base, or the theatre, where citizens were herded, photographed in raggedy blankets, and sent away. Ditto the art school: Nothing more on this since the initial reports began to collapse. No body counts, no mention of the fact that Russian jets did not fly over Mariupol on the days in question.

Before proceeding to Bucha, the outrage of the moment, I must reproduce a quotation from that propaganda-is-O.K. piece "The Times" published in its 3 March editions. It is from a *Twitter* user who was distressed that it became public that the Ghost of Kiev turned out to be a ghost and the Snake Island heroes didn't do much by way of holding the fort.

"Why can't we just let people believe some things?" this thoughtful man or woman wanted to know. What is wrong, in other words, if thinking and believing nice things that aren't true makes people feel better?

America the beautiful, or something like that.

Bucha is a suburb of 35,000 souls a few miles north of Kiev and one of the cities Russian forces began to evacuate on 29 March as peace talks in Istanbul progressed. Two days later the mayor, *Anatoly Fedoruk*, celebrated the city's liberation in a selfie-speech to his citizenry. He made no mention of anything untoward in Bucha's streets, backyards, or public spaces.

Four days later, 2 April, a special unit of the Ukrainian national police deployed to Bucha. And suddenly the place turns out to be a hellhole: bodies in the streets – 410, according to the Prosecutor General's office in Kiev – evidence of atrocities galore, people bound and shot point blank. The whole nine, in short.

**Instant outrage**

The outrage from Washington, London and Paris – "worldwide outrage," this would be – was instant. No demand for an impartial inquiry, forensic inspections, or any such thing. No one asked why corpses left in the street for five days appeared to be fresh, or why the relatives of the dead left them there until Kiev's commando unit arrived.

*António Guterres*, the UN secretary-general, was level-headed enough to state, "It is essential that an independent investigation leads to effective accountability." This is the only sound position at this

point. But we know from a long history how far SGs at the UN get with this sort of talk.

In my read this is yet another of the false flags the Kiev regime flies almost by the day now. Paying-attention people will not miss the striking similarity between these incidents and the numerous put-up jobs that featured in Washington's covert operation in Syria and the campaign of those famous "moderate rebels" who desperately wanted to draw the US into the conflict.

As a matter of principle, we must await evidence of what happened in Bucha, even as we know we are likely to see as much about events there as we have in Mariupol. We also know that to most people neither evidence nor its absence matters.

We have been told once again what to think and believe, and most of us will think and believe it.

We are to add this to various other "truths" now almost universally accepted: The Russian intervention had nothing to do with NATO expansion and was "unprovoked" – that favoured term in the Biden regime. Ukrainian forces have pushed the Russians into retreat: not that the pressure on Kiev was a Russian diversionary tactic to keep Ukrainian forces away from Donbass where the fighting is.

After the *Pentagon Papers* came out in 1971, *Hannah Arendt* published an essay in *The New York Review of Books* called "Lying in Politics."<sup>2</sup> In it she wrote of America's slide into a sort of collective psychosis she termed "defactualisation." Facts are fragile, Arendt wrote, in that they tell no story in themselves. They can be assembled to mean whatever one wants them to mean. This leaves them vulnerable to the manipulations of storytellers.

"The deliberate falsehood deals with contingent facts," Arendt explained in this remarkable piece of work, "that is, with matters which carry no inherent truth within themselves, no necessity to be as they are; factual truths are never compellingly true."

A dead body in a Ukrainian street, in other words, can be assigned a meaning that, once it is established, evidence to the contrary cannot be used to erase.

It is a half-century since Arendt published "Lying in Politics." And it is to that time, the 1960s and 1970s, that we must trace the formation of what now amounts to America's great bubble of pretend. The world as it is has mattered less and less since Arendt's time, the world as we have wished it to be has mattered more and more.

Nine years before Arendt published her NYRB piece, *Daniel Boorstin* brought out

"The Image: Or, What happened to the American Dream", an unjustly neglected work. "I describe the world of our making," he wrote, "how we have used our wealth, our literacy, our technology, and our progress to create the thicket of unreality which stands between us and the facts of life."

The press, as you can imagine, did not escape Boorstin's scrutiny. "The reporter's task," he wrote memorably, "is to find a way to weave these threads of unreality into a fabric the reader will not recognise as entirely unreal."

This is our condition. The Ukraine crisis is the mirror that reflects us as we are.

Now I will relate a peculiar coincidence, pertinent to our case.

Last week I took it upon myself to watch *Marcel Ophuls'* "The Sorrow and the Pity", all four hours of it. This is the famously explosive documentary that forced the French to come to terms with the extent to which they had collaborated with the Nazis during the three years and some they occupied France.

This film has a special meaning for me. It came out in 1969, just as I arrived in Paris for university studies. France was in an uproar over Ophuls' film. It was banned from broadcast on French television until 1981. I did not understand much of this at the time.

"The Sorrow and the Pity" shredded to pieces, relentlessly, unblinkingly, the national myth that the French had all been heroes of the resistance, or had aided it, or had in some way stood against the collaborationist *Vichy* regime of Marshal *Pétain*, hero of Verdun in World War I, capitulationist in World War II. This was nothing like the case.

Now I understand what the young student long ago could not quite grasp. The French simply could not face Ophuls' unyielding exposure of who they had been. Ophuls had punctured the enduring bubble of pretend within which they had lived for 25 years after the 1945 victory in Europe.

People can live in these bubbles a very long time. The unreality within them can be very persuasive. The French finally emerged from their bubble. It was painful, a passage full of angst, but they were fortunate to have escaped.

Will we have our interim of sorrow, of pity, and emerge from our bubble the better for it? May we someday be so blest. •

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/technology/ukraine-war-misinfo.html> of 3 March 2022

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/11/18/lying-in-politics-reflections-on-the-pentagon-paper/> of 18 November 1971

# Sorcerer's apprentices

## The NATO-EU war alliance is about to squander Europe's future

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

*The NATO-EU alliance is pursuing a policy of war escalation. This is also served by the propaganda with its blatant accusations against Russian warfare. This deepens the "enmity" against Russia and risks an even bigger war. This hate propaganda contributes to the brutalisation of the war. Ultimately, it also shatters coexistence in our societies. "Ghosts" are being awakened that the NATO-EU alliance will no longer be able to control.*

Every war involves human sacrifice, human suffering, and enormous destruction. Every day that a war ends earlier is a gain for humanity. The ideal would be a world without war. Today, no one needs to explain all this. Nevertheless, not all warfare is the same. To cite two extreme examples: The Swiss *Sonderbund War* in 1847, a year before the founding of the Swiss federal state, was different from the war of extermination waged by Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union (1941–1945) – and not only because of the difference in duration of the two wars. While the former war deliberately did *not* aim at humiliating the "enemy", inflicting as many casualties as possible or even "annihilating" it altogether and destroying the "enemy's" country in a "total war", the latter did exactly that.

### International Humanitarian Law

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, especially Switzerland and the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) have worked to create a "law in war" (*ius in bello*). In 1864, the first Geneva Convention "for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field" was adopted by twelve states in Geneva. This was followed by three further conventions (*Geneva Conventions*) until 1949 and various additional protocols in the decades that followed. All agreements and treaties together form today's *International Humanitarian Law*. Its aim is to protect those not directly involved in the fighting, especially the wounded, prisoners and civilians, cultural property, and civilian infrastructure in war.

Unfortunately, in no war, not even in any war after 1949, has *International Humanitarian Law* been fully respected. Why is this so?

### Different war strategies ...

One reason is the respective military strategies. The military strategy of the USA,

for example, deliberately aims at destroying the civilian infrastructure of the "enemy" right at the beginning of a war. Civilian casualties are not only accepted but sought. According to all that is known and what can be read in official Russian documents – including on the current war – this is different for Russian warfare. Accessible Russian briefings emphasise respect for *International Humanitarian Law* at every report and give many indications of how Russian troops are trying to ensure this as well. This cannot be seriously verified at present. But even independent experts such as the Swiss *Jacques Baud* conclude that "the Russian army is trying [...] to keep civilian casualties as low as possible"<sup>1</sup>.

### ... and hate propaganda

Another reason is the way warfare is emotionally charged by the politicians, by the command posts and by the media of the warring parties. There is no warfare without emotions and "enemy image". But the target of the emotions and the enemy images can be very different. Warfare that is based on hatred and contempt for the "enemy", that knows only "good" and "evil" and hypocritically imagines itself to be on the side of the "good guys" is the worst quagmire for a brutalisation of war. The "enemy" is demonised and dehumanised, he becomes "inhuman", a "subhuman", "vermin".

### Western and Russian media

Anyone who has compared the accessible German-language mainstream media in Germany, Austria and Switzerland with those from Russia in recent weeks and months, especially since 24 February, but also in the weeks before, must have noticed that the former have used and continue to use hate slogans almost daily. This propaganda aims at demonisation and dehumanisation. Unchecked, atrocities are attributed to the "enemy", corresponding image material is presented in large formats. These "reports" are not only intended to put pressure on political decision makers to continue and escalate the (hybrid) war against Russia<sup>2</sup> – especially at the expense of the people in Ukraine. This also includes the fervour with which German politicians like *Annelena Baerbock* have abandoned the deliberate basic line of former German foreign policy of not supplying weapons to war zones and now even want to supply heavy weapons.

### Fake democracy

Almost one third of the citizens agreed, according to a representative survey, to be living in a fake democracy. This is the result of a survey by the *Institute for Public Opinion Research in Allensbach* (Konstanz district) commissioned by SWR [*Südwestrundfunk*].

According to the survey, 31 per cent of the respondents estimated that they live in a "fake democracy in which the citizens have nothing to say". The difference between west and east is striking: In West Germany, 28 per cent hold this view, in the East German states 45 per cent. In addition, according to the survey, 28 per cent of respondents nationwide believe that the democratic system in Germany needs to be fundamentally changed.

Source: <https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/friedrichshafen/allensbach-umfrage-zu-demokratie-in-deutschland-100.html> of 11 April 2022

The "reports" of our media also aim at a mass public, at all of us and our emotions. The intellect is to be switched off; blind hatred is to be generated. The methods of hate propaganda have been described and analysed precisely for more than 100 years. And yet they still work for very many people today.

I cannot judge for sure what is true and what is not true in the German-language Russian media accessible to me – but they do not show the hate propaganda that has become intolerable in our media.

### An assault on coexistence

This hate propaganda in our media not only destroys all bridges to the "enemy" Russia. It is also an assault on coexistence in our countries – with devastating after-effects. For this propaganda destroys interpersonal trust and does violence to the social nature of human beings. We will feel the consequences.

In her article "Roadmap in times of war" (*Current Concerns* No. 8 of 12 April 2022), *Karin Leukefeld* asked the question: "What is to be done?". She wrote of a "courageous heart" and listed self-evident things: "Look closely and do not let yourself be misled. Question the media reports that try to tell us what is happening in Ukraine, what Russia is allegedly planning; seek other sources. Talk to family, friends, neighbours and colleagues about what you have found out about what is happening in Ukraine, but also about other theatres of war and injustices. Re-

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fuse to become an enemy and hold on to the friendship with Russia and its people that has been worked on for decades."

The hate propaganda of our media is designed to prevent just that. It is meant to prevent us from living our humanity. It is meant to turn thinking and compassionate individuals into bowed mass people with violent affects who inwardly obey hate propaganda. It is meant to lead us to war. Yes, there is something fascist about it.

The Germans who participated in the Second World War remember not only the victims and the destruction of the war, but also the mental disruption of an entire peo-

**Never again? – Again it shouts: "Fight and win!"**

km. On 12 April 2022, the newspaper, "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" wrote about a lecture event in the *Protestant Academy* in Römerburg (Frankfurt district). The speaker was *Ben Hodges*, US three-star general, former High officer of the US Army in Europe, today member of Washington's *Center for European Policy Analysis* (CEPA). Hodges is on tour in Germany. The newspaper writes: "Hodges hurries from one event to the next, makes telephone interviews every half hour, appears in political talkshows and speaks with journalists and military in Germany, Europe and America on a daily basis."

His core message: "Above all, Germany must be prepared to recognise that this war is about more than Ukraine, namely the fight for freedom and democracy as a whole. And it must be prepared to fight and win this battle."

ple through National Socialist hate propaganda. Once again, sorcerer's apprentices are at work.

<sup>1</sup> "Die europäischen Länder – und allen voran die Schweiz – sollten versuchen, die Wogen zu glätten, anstatt Öl ins Feuer zu gießen" (The European countries – above all Switzerland – should try to smooth the waters instead of pouring oil on the fire); interview with *Jacques Baud* in *Zeitgesche-*

*hen im Fokus* No. 6 of 5 April 2022; [https://zeitgeschehen-im-fokus.ch/de/newspaper-ausgabe/nr-6-vom-5-april-2022.html#article\\_1332](https://zeitgeschehen-im-fokus.ch/de/newspaper-ausgabe/nr-6-vom-5-april-2022.html#article_1332)

<sup>2</sup> Thus, the internet page [www.german-foreign-policy.com](http://www.german-foreign-policy.com) (<https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/news/detail/8891>) reported on 6 April 2022, after a first approach between the Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in Istanbul, the British government had warned of a too early armistice. First Ukraine would have to be in "the strongest military position".

Letter to  the Editor

**Never again? A contemporary witness, born in 1927, notes: Some things seem similar to me**

I was born in 1927 and will soon be 95 years old. At 16 I became a *Luftwaffenhelfer* (literally, "air force assistant"), at 17 I was *Hitler's* last posse in Berlin. In the terrible *Disarmed Enemy Forces* (DEF) camp in Nuremberg and Eisleben, I had time to think before my very dangerous escape. How had propaganda managed to keep us loyal to "the Führer" almost to the end on 30 April 1945?

The topic of "the effects of propaganda" had been occupying me intensively since the end of the war. My resolution at the time was: In the future, you "superiors" will not succeed in doing something like that again. That has remained true, and I observe the salami tactics with which we have been led back to the old ways in violation of the Basic Law and soon also in violation of international law. I know the admonishers *Erich Kästner*, *Wolfgang Borchert* („... then say no"), *Heinrich Böll* and *Karl Jasper*, who lived in Basel and to whom I wrote after reading his admonishing book "Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?". The Basic Law is the rock on which our freedom rests. Politicians already used it loosely, and our people knew too little of its value.

What happened in the "Third Reich" has been playing out again before my eyes in important respects since 1945: the Gleichschaltung (cooptation) of the press. Now we have arrived at the criminalisation of dissidents. People in Germany who represent Russia's position in the ongoing war in Ukraine are to be prosecuted. Because they are in favour of a war of aggression. And wars of aggression are forbidden on penalty in Germany. Does our government determine who the aggressor is? Had it forgotten this in the years since 1999?

I saw a *Putin* on television who could no longer put up with the enemy's insolence. This received little attention in the controlled media. When Putin resorted to war, the horrors of war were shown all the more with the power of images, as in Pearl Harbour, on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington. Always the same recipe. And we see that the citizen falls for it, again and again, even intelligent people. I have my own unpleasant experiences, lots of them. Today I experience media censorship. How can something like that be done – like after Hitler's seizure of power?

*Ernst Udo Kaufmann, Müllheim (DE)*

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# Swiss neutrality and the rule of law as indispensable prerequisites for the work of the ICRC

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

It is difficult to comprehend what a constant stream of one-sided war propaganda can do to people's minds. By adopting all EU sanctions against Russia in violation of neutrality, the Federal Council has sent a fatal signal: Already, politicians are calling for "much closer cooperation" between Switzerland and NATO, going beyond the existing Partnership for Peace (PfP), in order to defend the "Western world order based on freedom, democracy, self-determination and the rule of law, in step with the NATO armies. Regrettably, this is what Council of States member *Thierry Burkart* is currently demanding, who made his debut as FDP president last year with a welcome rejection of the Federal Council's deadlocked negotiations with Brussels.<sup>1</sup> The "Tages-Anzeiger" cheerfully adds: "Commentary on the NATO-taboo break – Burkart is spot on – Switzerland is not a non-aligned zone" (9 April 2022). And ex-Federal Councillor *Kaspar Villiger* explains succinctly: "There can be no neutrality in this fateful confrontation." ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 13 April 2022) Resistance from us citizens is necessary!

In addition, the "Western values" mentioned by *Thierry Burkart* are no longer even respected in Switzerland. Even fundamental principles of the rule of law are being thrown overboard in Bern, as will be explained in a moment. Particularly alarming: if the Swiss model falters, the vital humanitarian work of the ICRC in Ukraine – and in all other war zones! – is in serious jeopardy. We are witnessing this in light of the vile lies recently spread about the ICRC's work in the Donbass. The ICRC's work is inextricably linked to the warring parties' trust in Switzerland's neutrality and rule of law.

## Prejudgement "Russian war criminal" by Swiss legal scholars is contrary to human rights

The presumption of innocence is one of the most important principles of criminal law in the constitutional state and is mandatory (*ius cogens*): "Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence." (Article 11(1) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*).

The first Swiss solicitor to call out of the blue for an international arrest warrant against *Vladimir Putin* was *Carla Del Ponte*, former Swiss Federal Prose-

cutor and Chief Prosecutor of the *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia* in The Hague. Her "line of evidence": War crimes had been committed in Ukraine and their perpetrators must be held accountable. "But the first person responsible is undoubtedly President Putin"<sup>2</sup> It is to be hoped that the lady at the *Yugoslavia Tribunal* did not make such fact-free accusations. Incidentally, the Western perpetrators of the war of aggression against Serbia were never brought to justice. Actually, a Swiss jurist should have refused to participate in a tribunal that is blind to the NATO eye.

A second Swiss criminal lawyer and also former judge at the *Yugoslavia Tribunal*, *Stefan Trechsel*, comments on the Bucha investigation in a newspaper interview. For him, it is clear from the outset that the Russians were the perpetrators. *Trechsel* assumes "that the deeds were planned, organised and ordered. *But that is only my personal impression from a distance*". Despite this admission, the lawyer spins his thread further: "It is by no means excluded that this comes from Putin. [...] *However, it will be very difficult to prove this, which is why it is only speculation for now. But that does not change the fact that evidence will be sought at all costs.*"<sup>3</sup> (emphasis mine) In plain language: It does not matter that there is no evidence against President Putin – after all, the US leadership is trained to invent evidence for war crimes ...

The third in the group of pre-judging solicitors: Federal Councillor *Karin Keller-Sutter*, head of the Department of Justice (FDJP). As "evidence" for Russian perpetration in Bucha, she cites the "report" of the Ukrainian Minister of the Interior (i.e., a warring party) on "rapes, looting and killings of civilians" as well as the testimonies of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland.<sup>4</sup> Pretty one-sided evidence ... Ms. Federal Councillor also continues to spin her anti-Russian thread ad absurdum: "We must assume that Russia deliberately wants to drive as many people as possible to flee. [...] Putin hopes to be able to divide the Europeans in this way." If someone wants to weaken and divide the Europeans, it is more likely to be a power on the other side of the Atlantic.

## Blatant unequal treatment of refugees: Western values?

Recently, the "Stand up for Ukraine" donor conference organised by *Ursula von der Leyen* raised over 9 billion euros in no time. For Afghanistan, on the other

## "Neutrality does not mean indifference"

"Our neutrality is often misunderstood. I understand that because these are such polarising contexts, but it is precisely in such contexts that it is extremely important to maintain dialogue with the warring parties. This is the only way we can provide assistance to all those affected by war and create the confidence to visit prisoners of war, repatriate fallen soldiers, etc. It is just really important: neutrality does not mean indifference, but on the contrary – it is a commitment to those who are most affected by this war."

Source: Interview with *Dominik Stillhart*, Head of ICRC Operations in Ukraine; in: "10 vor 10", SRF television, 14 April 2022

hand, which has been reduced to rubble for decades and robbed of its national wealth by the USA and its vassals, only 2.44 billion dollars were pledged at the donor conference on 31 March instead of the 4.4 billion dollars demanded by the UN. This leaves millions of Afghan children and adults to starve to death. First, the Taliban should reopen the girls' schools from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade onwards, before Germany shows itself to be more generous, said German Foreign Minister *Annalena Baerbock* in *ZDF heute* on 31 March. Western values?

In Switzerland, refugees and migrants from Ukraine – unlike people from other countries – are accepted without bureaucratic hurdles and, in addition to having their basic needs met, they receive a privileged additional package: their own flats, tram passes, freedom to travel, immediate work permits and job placement, their own enrolment classes for their children and much more. Many asylum seekers and temporarily admitted persons from other war-torn countries rightly feel left behind. They can only dream of being able to lead a normal life here.

Ms *Keller-Sutter*, head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP), rejects the accusation of unequal treatment: "The situations should not be mixed". Most Ukrainians have "the firm desire to return to Ukraine".<sup>5</sup> However, many refugees from other countries also have this desire to return. Then the Federal Councillor explains in concrete terms what "must not be mixed": she says that "the war in the middle of Europe, which

### “Swiss neutrality and the rule of law ...”

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was not thought possible, *affects us all*. Many people in Switzerland would therefore have the feeling *that it could also be us*” (emphasis mine).

Anyone of us who sorts the people of our globe according to such criteria urgently needs to go over the books, whether his name is Hansli Meier or Karin Keller-Sutter. However, Keller-Sutter’s explanation lacks the factor of manipulative distortion of our fellow human feelings through years of brainwashing. While we welcome Ukrainian migrants, we remove Russian singers and conductors from the concert programme – unless they distance themselves from their state president – and *Dostoyevsky* from the lecture schedule. Western values?

### Difficult times for the ICRC and its work for the benefit of people in war zones

“We surrendered without a fight by deviating from our neutrality, although no one asked us to do so. We have held out for two centuries, and now we are submitting without a fight in less than five days! This abandonment of neutrality is not only bad for the country’s identity, but also for its credibility.” (*Guy Mettan*)<sup>6</sup>

On 29 March, the ICRC had to defend itself against unsavoury accusations from the Ukrainian side: The ICRC was far too close to Moscow, it was helping to “kidnap” Ukrainian refugees to Russia and the like – it is impossible to reproduce everything. There was even criticism that ICRC President *Peter Maurer* had visited Russian Foreign Minister *Sergei Lavrov* in Moscow and greeted him warmly (!). According to the “Basler Zeitung”, *Dietrich Dreyer*, a long-time DEZA/SDC staff member in Ukraine, said that the sole aim of these talks was “to enable the organisation to do its humanitarian work. There are negotiators on both sides, and nothing works without negotiations – and these are a matters for the boss.” Of course, Peter Maurer also talks to the Ukrainian side. “A week before his visit to Moscow, he was in Kiev,” says Dreyer, but this was never mentioned in the whole controversy.<sup>7</sup> In the same article, Ambassador *Toni Frisch*, OSCE Humanitarian Coordinator in Eastern Ukraine until 2021, also confirms that it is “essential to talk to both sides [...] for example to open a humanitarian corridor and evacuate civilians”.

### Deliberate and targeted attacks on the ICRC cause great damage

The ICRC warns that “deliberate, targeted attacks using false narratives and disinformation to discredit the ICRC have the potential to cause real harm for ICRC

teams, our Red Cross Red Crescent Movement partners working on the ground, and the people we serve. As needs increase by the hour, our *ability to deliver much-needed humanitarian assistance is today being jeopardised by a surge of misinformation and disinformation* about our work and the role we play to alleviate suffering in armed conflict.”<sup>8</sup>

The fact that “nothing works without negotiations”, as *Dietrich Dreyer* says, is explained in very concrete terms by the ICRC in its statement of 29 March: “Over the last five weeks, the ICRC has been speaking with Russian and Ukrainian authorities about their obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) and what practical steps must be taken to limit the suffering of civilians and those who no longer participate in hostilities, including the wounded, sick, and prisoners of war (POWs). To the ICRC’s great concern, *the parties are yet to meet many of their core obligations under IHL* or reach consensus on key issues that only they can concretely deliver on ...” (emphasis mine) *These* are the concerns of the ICRC that its staff have to deal with on a daily basis!

### Neutrality as an indispensable basis for the work of Switzerland and the ICRC

“Neutrality, impartiality and independence” must “always be respected” in the ICRC’s activities, Ambassador *Toni Frisch* told *bazonline* on 5 April. “For neutrality is the prerequisite for saving lives and doing justice to both parties.” The ICRC is used to working in such difficult situations: “I trust that its staff, who are now challenged in Mariupol and elsewhere, will do their utmost to find solutions.” This is what we wholeheartedly wish for the ICRC staff and the unfortunate people struggling to survive there.

At the end of his OSCE mandate in eastern Ukraine last summer, *Toni Frisch* spoke about the great importance of Switzerland’s tradition of humanitarian aid based on its neutrality: “Switzerland enjoys an excellent reputation in the field of humanitarian aid, also within the OSCE. This is a strength I relied on during my mandate in Ukraine, and our tradition, especially during *Didier Burkhalter*’s chairmanship, was held in high esteem. And it goes hand in hand with an ideal of neutrality that I hope will continue in the future. In this respect, we as Swiss have a considerable amount of credibility, which we must use in such a way that we can make a difference with it. Personally, I am glad and proud to have been able to embody this tradition during my mandate.”<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, since the end of February, the Federal Council has jeopardised this tradition by pandering to the EU and

NATO states. In conclusion, *Guy Mettan*, a member of the Geneva Parliament and former editor-in-chief of the “Tribune de Genève”, has this to say about the serious consequences of this misguided policy: “The sacrifice of neutrality is a serious attack on the country, because by slavishly surrendering to the Western nations, we have lost credibility with the rest of the world. [...] By unconditionally backing Ukraine and Europe, we are endangering the neutrality and impartiality of the ICRC. Both attitudes are inseparable in the eyes of the world. That is why the ICRC had to react firmly to Ukrainian attempts to sabotage its actions and accuse it of collaborating with Russia, because neutrality is the very heart of its mission. How can one trust an institution whose host country has violated the spirit and letter of a neutrality that is even written into its constitution, and which wants to please Western political leaders and a public opinion heated by anti-Russian propaganda?”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burkart, Thierry. “Das Ende der Igel-Schweiz: Die Zusammenarbeit mit der Nato muss massiv verstärkt werden” (The end of hedgehog Switzerland: Cooperation with NATO must be massively strengthened. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 8 April 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Lob, Gerhard. “Ukraine-Krieg. Carla Del Ponte spricht sich für internationalen Haftbefehl gegen Putin aus” (Ukraine war. Carla Del Ponte speaks out in favour of international arrest warrant against Putin). In: *Luzerner Zeitung* of 13 March 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Baumann, Meret; Gerny Daniel. “Schweizer Ex-Richter am Kriegsverbrecher-Tribunal: ‘Es ist unwahrscheinlich, dass Putin in einer Gefängniszelle landet und vor Gericht gestellt wird’” (Swiss ex-judge at war crimes tribunal: ‘It is unlikely that Putin will end up in a prison cell and be put on trial’). Interview with *Stefan Trechsel*. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 10 April 2022

<sup>4</sup> Schäfer, Fabian; Gafafer, Tobias. Interview. “Justizministerin Keller-Sutter: ‘Ich bin entsetzt. Das sind klare Hinweise auf Kriegsverbrechen’” (Justice Minister Keller-Sutter: ‘I am appalled. These are clear indications of war crimes’). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 6 April 2022.

<sup>5</sup> “Keller-Sutter sieht keine Ungleichbehandlung von Flüchtlingen.” (Keller-Sutter sees no unequal treatment of refugees). *Swissinfo.ch* of 29 March 2022 (*Keystone-SDA*)

<sup>6</sup> Mettan, Guy. “Selenskyj-Manie und das verwüstete Image der Schweiz” (Zelensky mania and the devastated image of Switzerland). In: *Weltwoche* of 7 April 2022

<sup>7</sup> Affentranger, Zita. “Helfen zwischen den Fronten – Ohne Verhandlungen geht gar nichts – und die sind Chefsache” (Helping between the fronts – Nothing works without negotiations – and they are a matter for the head of the organisation). In: *bazonline* of 5 April 2022

<sup>8</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross. “Ukraine: As humanitarian crisis deepens, parties urgently need to agree on concrete measures; misinformation risks lives”. Press release of 29 March 2022; <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ukraine-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-parties-urgently-need-agree-concrete-measures>

<sup>9</sup> Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA. “Toni Frisch – eine Karriere im Dienst der humanitären Hilfe” (Toni Frisch – a career in the service of humanitarian aid). 27 July 2021

<sup>10</sup> Mettan, Guy. “Selenskyj-Manie und das verwüstete Image der Schweiz” (Zelensky mania and the devastated image of Switzerland). In: *Weltwoche* of 7 April 2022

# Russia booted from UNHRC: weaponising human rights

What is urgent is to achieve a sustainable  
peace agreement in Ukraine that will ensure stability in the region

by Alfred de Zayas and Adriel Kasonta\*



Alfred de Zayas  
(picture ma)



Adriel Kasonta  
(picture ma)

After the symbolic vote on Russia's suspension from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) last Thursday, it is fair to say that the noble cause of defending human rights has been perverted at the behest of a geopolitical agenda and, as the UN secretary general's spokesman Stéphane Dujarric rightly warned, a "dangerous precedent" has been established.

This hypocritical instrumentalisation of the noble principles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to score political points is part of the wider psychological and informational war against any country that dares to challenge the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

## Blackmailing nations into submission

Although the official reason behind the US proposal to suspend Moscow provided last Monday was a response to Ukraine's allegations of atrocities committed by Russian troops on the civilian population in the town of Bucha, it is worth noting that the idea in fact emerged a week earlier, when a bipartisan group of members of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee signed a letter to the US ambassador to the United Nations, *Linda Thomas-Greenfield*, with the same request.

"It is our belief that Russia should not have a seat on what is supposed to be the

premier international human-rights body. Russia should not have an opportunity to continue to block, stifle, and otherwise distract from important conversations on the situation of human rights in Ukraine," reads the correspondence that was made public on 29 March, urging that "swift action must be taken."

After receiving the seal of bipartisan approval, Thomas-Greenfield came to a conclusion, which was verbalised during her visit to Romania last week, that "Russia's participation on the Human Rights Council is a farce," and encouraged "140 countries who have courageously stood together" to "match their words with action," while referring to "the images of Bucha."

On the same day, UK Foreign Minister *Liz Truss* voiced similar concerns and called for Russia's suspension from the UNHRC.

"Given strong evidence of war crimes, including reports of mass graves and heinous butchery in Bucha, Russia cannot remain a member of the UN Human Rights Council," Truss wrote on her *Twitter* account.

To keep the momentum before Thursday's [7 April] vote, Ukrainian President *Volodymyr Zelensky* requested during his speech before the UN Security Council that it bring the Russian military allegedly responsible for what he called the "genocide" in Bucha to justice.

## What was the result?

The US-led campaign to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council during a special session last Thursday garnered a total of 93 votes in favour, 24 countries voted against the motion and 58 abstained from the vote<sup>1</sup> – in a situation where two-thirds of votes in the 193-member General Assembly in New York was needed to get this outcome.

Notably, the countries that voted "no" included Russia, Belarus, China, Iran and Syria. Brazil, Thailand, India and Mexico were among the countries that abstained.

The low support points to the fact that many countries were reluctant to jump to far-reaching conclusions without being provided with the results of an independent investigation before making their decision on Moscow's membership in the UNHRC.

This conviction was best vocalised by Mexico, Saudi Arabia and China, with

Chinese Ambassador *Zhang Jun* criticising the move as risking "politicisation or instrumentalisation of human-rights issues."

As a result, Russia's deputy permanent representative to the UN, *Gennady Kuzmin*, called the outcome "illegitimate and politically motivated" and announced that his country, which was in its second year of a three-year term, would terminate its membership in the UNHRC – similar to the move made by the US in 2018 over "bias against Israel and a lack of reform."

While Russia can re-apply for membership in 2024, the current decision has proved to have a counterproductive effect, as the country's Justice Ministry announced on Friday that it had revoked the registrations of foreign organisations such as *Amnesty International* and *Human Rights Watch* (HRW).

In a situation where the US casts the first stone while having committed a lot of rights-related sins around the world, and the Ukrainian president calling for Nuremberg-like trials, this apparent hypocrisy and double standards bring to mind *Noam Chomsky's* speech in 1990, which teasingly states, "If the Nuremberg laws were applied, then every post war American president would have been hanged."

We would demur here to the extent that presidents *Gerald Ford* and *Jimmy Carter* did not have much of an opportunity to start aggressive wars or commit war crimes and crimes against humanity, although the Pentagon and the US military-industrial complex were eager to bomb Iran and other countries.

This hiatus was promptly closed during the presidencies of *Ronald Reagan*, *George H W Bush*, *Bill Clinton*, *George W Bush*, *Barack Obama*, *Donald Trump* and *Joe Biden*.

## If "human rights" had any meaning ...

If the *International Criminal Court* had any moral authority and credibility, it would start investigations into the aggressions committed by NATO countries against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Somalia etc. It would investigate the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in those countries, including the systematic practice of torture at Abu Ghraib, Bagram, Guantanamo and countless CIA and MI6 "black sites."

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Adriel Kasonta is a London-based political risk consultant and lawyer. He is an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) in Moscow and former chairman of the International Affairs Committee at the oldest conservative think tank in the UK, *Bow Group*. Kasonta is a graduate of London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

### "Russia booted from UNHRC ..."

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It would investigate the use of depleted-uranium weapons in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, and the alleged use of chemical weapons, cluster bombs, and white phosphorus in Fallujah and elsewhere.

If the ICC took the *Statute of Rome* seriously, it would have to investigate and subsequently indict those responsible for the use of disproportionate force contrary to the Geneva Red Cross Conventions, attacks on dams and water supplies, indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and the enormous "collateral damage" caused by drones, tens of thousands of deaths.

Hitherto the ICC has refused to investigate US crimes and has concentrated on indicting and prosecuting ousted African leaders or military personnel. Even if it cannot indict Israelis because Israel is not a state party to the Statute of Rome, it would at least have to investigate the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israeli forces as documented by UN Special Rapporteurs *John Dugard, Richard Goldstone, Richard Falk, Michael Lynk* and *William Schabas*.

### Greeks protest against Azov performance

ef. On 7 April, President *Zelensky* also appeared in the Greek parliament via video link. To complement his speech, he had brought two "witnesses" from Mariupol: one of them, undisguised, claimed to be an ethnic Greek with the first name *Michail*, the other was disguised and did not give a name. Both are members of the Battalion *Azov*, a Ukrainian neo-Nazi group with links to the neo-Nazi *Golden Dawn* party recently convicted in Greece for terrorist actions. While the video speeches – the current ritual in all parliaments where *Zelenskyy* makes reproachful appearances via video – were followed by standing ovations from members of the ruling party *Nea Dimokratia*, members of the Greek opposition party *SYRIZA-Progressive Alliance* immediately left the hall in protest. *Alexis Tsipras* immediately protested on *Facebook*: "The speech by members of the neo-Nazi *Azov* Battalion in the Greek Parliament is a provocation. The absolute responsibility lies with Prime Minister *Kyriakos Mitsotakis*. He has spoken of a historic day, but it is a historic disgrace. Solidarity with the Ukrainian people is a matter of course. But the Nazis cannot call the shots in parliament."

Even *Amnesty International*, which has questionable credentials and has frequently cuddled up with the US geopolitical establishment, accused Israel in 2009 of war crimes in connection with Operation Cast Lead, which left more than 1,400 Palestinians dead – at the expense of 13 Israeli lives.

In its lengthy report, *Amnesty International* charged Israeli forces with wanton destruction of thousands of Palestinian homes, and uncovered evidence of Israeli soldiers using Palestinian civilians as human shields. A UN Fact Finding Mission confirmed *Amnesty International's* findings.

Far worse than the crimes allegedly committed by Russian forces in Ukraine are those committed by Azerbaijan from September to December 2020 during its barbaric blitzkrieg against the hapless Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, the deliberate bombardment of civilians, widespread torture and execution of Armenian prisoners of war, and the destruction of ancient churches and monasteries. *HRW* has extensively documented these crimes.

Even worse than Azerbaijan's aggression on Nagorno-Karabakh is the Saudi onslaught against the people of Yemen, where egregious war crimes have been committed against the civilian population, resulting in widespread famine and what the United Nations has called the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today.

The mainstream media are not reminding us of these facts, which everyone can learn about by going on the Internet and consulting "alternative" media including the *Grayzone's Pushback*, *Consortium News*, *Counterpunch*, *Truthout* etc.

The mainstream media systematically disseminate "fake news," suppress alternative narratives, whitewash the crimes of Ukrainian extremists, the killing of Russian journalists or Ukrainian journalists perceived as friendly to Russia, and uncritically echo whatever Washington wants.

Indeed, the so-called "quality press" is complicit in the brainwashing of the public and the division of the world into the "good guys" (the West) and the "bad guys" (the Rest).

More than anything else, we need access to reliable information and pluralistic views. We need more *WikiLeaks* and more courageous whistleblowers who will reveal what machinations preceded the vote at the General Assembly, what schemes

### "Not a penny, not one rifle and not one soldier for the war"

ef. Protests and demonstrations against NATO arms deliveries to Ukraine took place in Greece and Italy. Dockworkers had already protested in Genova at the beginning of March when they noticed that tanks covered with tarpaulins were being loaded onto ships bound for Ukraine. This was followed by a day-long dock strike against the transport of arms and ammunition to Ukraine on 31 March. The dockworkers wrote on leaflets: "Not a penny, not a rifle and not a soldier for the war. We block our ports for the arms trade".

In Greece, too, there are ongoing protests against the constant arms deliveries and thus indirect war participation of the NATO states. For example, in the Greek harbour city of Alexandroupolis, transport workers refused to load US and NATO armoured military vehicles from the ships onto the trains of the Greek railway company *TrainOSE*. Many Greek trade unions supported the protest. Despite massive pressure on the workers, the transport company for a fortnight was unable to find workers in other places to load the war equipment.

are being concocted at NATO headquarters in Brussels and at the *ICC* in The Hague.

If there were a good whistleblower in the White House, we would probably learn that the idea of expelling Russia from the Human Rights Council was cooked up much earlier, and that the US was only waiting for the appropriate moment.

But let us not shed too many tears over the Human Rights Council, which in any event lacks authority and credibility, because it is perceived in much of the world as being under the control of the Western powers.

What is urgent is to achieve a sustainable peace agreement in Ukraine that will ensure stability in the region based on a European security architecture that takes into consideration the national-security needs of all countries, including Russia and Belarus. *Pax optima rerum!* (Peace is the greatest good!) •

<sup>1</sup> Abstentions are not counted, editor's note.



# On the way to Europe's collective suicide?

## Let the vassals dare to think!

by Professor Dipl.-Ing. Dr Heinrich Wohlmeyer



(picture ma)

cc. Heinrich Wohlmeyer was accommodated by farmers after his father died before being deported to a concentration camp. His parental home was destroyed by bombs and his mother became ill. He went to grammar school "on his own", studied law, international business law in the US and England, as well as agriculture and food technology at the *University of Soil Science Vienna*. Back in Austria, he made himself available as regional developer and industrial manager for the Waldviertel (the northwestern region of the northeast Austrian state of Lower Austria) and became director of the *Austrian Agricultural Industry*. After having himself "talked apart", he went to university and taught resource economics and environmental management.

In all these activities, he realised that the hubs of unsustainable development are trade and financial policies that undermine regional economic cycles. "We need regional solutions for the best possible regional prosperity," he says.

In *Current Concerns* No. 5 of 1 March 2022 Eberhard Hamer analysed the background to the Ukraine conflict.

Russia, personified by Vladimir Putin, unfortunately saw no other way out after years of systematic provocation and humiliating breaches of promise. The ongoing armament and incorporation of the Russian-murdering Azov regiments, the announcement of the conquest of Crimea and the Donbass, the massing of troops on the ceasefire line to the Donbass, the request for nuclear weapons, the covert activity of US and NATO military advisers, the existence of biological weapons laboratories, etc. left no choice from the Russian military's point of view. They did not want to be completely encircled and defenceless and hoped for a blitzkrieg as well as a relenting of the USA and its puppets in Ukraine. Therefore, in contrast to the US-NATO wars, the Russians spared infrastructure (electricity, telecommuni-

cations, transport and water) where it was strategically responsible. They could have easily interrupted the railway connections and arrested Mr. Zelensky by means of a commando execution, but they still did not want and do not want martyrs. The question is: for how much longer?

This strategy is being prevented by the USA and its vassals in NATO through the supply of weapons, the deployment of the hate-filled Azov regiments, reconnaissance aid and an unprecedented media campaign. The psychological warfare – above all with false-flag atrocities – in which the USA and NATO are masters, has created mass hysteria that goes as far as ostracising Russian culture. Heinrich Heine already warned: "Where books are burned, people will soon be burned."

The Western media campaign reminds me of Josef Göbbels' speech of 18 February 1943 in the *Sportpalast* in Berlin, where he asked the 15,000 people gathered the demagogic question: "Do you want total war? Do you want it – if necessary, more total and more radical than we can even imagine today?"

This "total war" is now being accepted by continuously intensifying the economic war against Russia (called "sanctions") and humiliating Russia by flatly disregarding its understandable and justified proposals for peace and its security and by massively arming against Russia.

One of the smartest military analysts, the editor-in-chief of the oldest military magazine in the world, *Brigadier Mag.* Dr. Wolfgang Peischel, has always admonished that one should not project one's world of thoughts into the opponent, but rather think one's way into it in order to come to a reasonable decision.

If we now put ourselves in the position of the Russians, then a desperate liberation strike against the ongoing encirclement and defamation is obvious. In military comparison with the other world powers, Russia has only the advantage of its highly armed nuclear forces. Do we Western Europeans, in suicidal blindness, want to provoke their use?

Let us finally think! Sapere aude! And also understand the backgrounds.

Sir Halford Mackinder, who is still compulsory literature in US military academies, developed the so-called Heartland Theory, in which he shows that the domination of Eastern Europe ("hub area") and the blocking of a connection of Western Europe with Russia prevents the emergence of a power bloc rich in technology and raw materials stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Then the maritime-based world domination strategy of England and its successor, the USA, would have played out ("The geographical pivot of history", 1904).

This policy pervades the entire 20th century and the 21st century that has begun.

Another source for recognising the continuous building of artificial antagonisms – especially with regard to Russia – are the two books by Thomas P. M. Barnett from 2003 and 2005 "The Pentagon's New Map – War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century" and "The Pentagon's New Map – Blueprint for Action". The Pentagon's concern that with the end of the Soviet threat (end of the Cold War) the funds for the European and North Asian bases will be cut is explained there. Therefore, new threatening scenar-

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### Former general of the Bundeswehr Erich Vad: "We have to get out of the escalation logic and start negotiations"

km. In an interview with the *German Press Agency (dpa)* on 12 April 2022 ([www.stern.de](http://www.stern.de) of 12 April 2022), Erich Vad, former German Brigadier General of the German Armed Forces and Security Advisor to Chancellor Angela Merkel, spoke out against the delivery of heavy weapons to Ukraine. He also warned against denying Russian President Vladimir Putin humanity and labelling him a pathological despot with whom one could no longer talk. He said: "We are doing a lot of war rhetoric at the moment – out of good intentions. But the road to hell, as we know, is always paved with good intentions. We have to think

about the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine from the end. If we don't want World War III, sooner or later we have to get out of this military escalation logic and start negotiations."

Harald Kujat, Chief of Defence of the Bundeswehr from 2000-2002 and Chairman of the NATO Military Committee from 2002-2005, wrote in response: "I agree with Brigadier General Dr. Vad on every single point. The train of lemmings has started moving – politics is on a war course. Why do so many politicians and journalists want to bring war to our country?" (<https://lnkd.in/dbJV6JiQ> of 12 April 2022)

# Polyerspective teaching of history in a multipolar world

## Grammar school mission: “to examine controversial topics from several perspectives” and to come to an independent judgment

by Tobias Salander

According to the school laws of the various Swiss cantons, public schools must be politically and denominationally neutral. At the same time, according to the Matura Recognition Regulations of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK), one of the educational goals of the Gymnasium (grammar school) in Switzerland is to promote intellectual openness and the ability to make independent judgments of students, as, for example, the government council of the canton of Aargau recently reminded its teachers: “This undoubtedly includes dealing with current issues, including political ones. The objective is for students to deal with such often controversial issues, to examine them from several sides, and to learn to substantiate their views with arguments and to persuasively represent them.”<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who works as a teacher today, especially as a teacher of history or political studies, faces a great challenge in fulfilling the clear legal requirements that promote domestic peace. We live in a time full of horror reports from war zones, just think of the situation of the 24 million Afghans facing starvation, the precarious situations of the people in Yemen, Congo, Syria, Libya, to name but a few. At the moment, everything is overshadowed by news about the war in Ukraine and about the refugees who ar-

rive in the cities, towns and villages of Europe in need of human attention, protection and care. Like every person who comes to us – in the rich European countries – as a refugee.

Polyerspective, to use the modern expression, is required in our schools, today more than ever. A Euro-centred narrow view of the world is passé. Every teacher who complies with the legal requirements and takes the students seriously as young adolescents will consequently, first of all, collect the prior knowledge of the adolescents entrusted to him or her in their lessons, especially in history lessons, and remind them that one listens to each other calmly, respects the opinion of the classmate, even if one does not always share it. The more multicultural the class, the more exciting, the greater the chance that the problem at hand will be “illuminated from several sides” or be approached already in the introductory phase. Certainly, Vladimir, the Russian student, will bring in the view of his relatives in Russia, which probably differs from that of the Ukrainian or the French colleague. Or does Vladimir not dare to speak out at all in the present mood against everything Russian? Although he knows that the teacher gives everyone room to contribute? And what does Pradeep from India say, whose home country, unlike Switzerland, surprisingly does not participate in

the sanctions against Russia? And Ren from China, whose system he describes in the brightest colours, full of national pride, and who has often been criticized for this? How does one talk about the conflict in exile Tamil circles? In Buddhist families differently than in Christian ones? What does Murat from the Iraqi Kurdish regions say, who repeatedly points out that his people have been waiting for their own nation state for decades, but are being held back by the Turks and the Americans? What about Amrit, the young Sikh woman who recently called Gandhi a Hitler, to the great amazement of the teacher? And Özil, who anxiously avoids any mention of his home country, probably because of the negative coverage of Erdogan? Lisa, Rosa and Max with German and, respectively, Swiss backgrounds? The two young ladies close to SPD and SPS and counting themselves to the climate youth? Christoph, a member of the young SVP, who continues to

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### “On the way to Europe’s collective ...”

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ios and reasons for war are needed. We have allowed ourselves to be drawn into this strategy of the military-industrial and financial establishment of the USA and its military arm, NATO, which is dying without a built-up opponent, and we have gone along with the provocation of the Russians to the death instead of contributing to a balanced, fair peace. Since the USA has not been affected in its own territory by all the wars it has sparked, the warmongering elites still think that this will continue – especially that a war with Russia would occur in Europe. But this is a blatant misjudgement, because desperate strikes by the Russians would be intercontinental.

But the main devastating damage would hit Europe.

Do we want to allow ourselves to be drawn into this danger instead of listening to and acting on the increasingly urgent ways to peace?

I am thinking in particular of the proposals made before the start of the war in Ukraine within the framework of the *International Progress Organization* headed by the experienced Professor Dr Dr hc. mult. Hans Köchler. By accepting the triad of “perpetual neutrality, non-alignment and federal structure”, all interests (except those of the warmongers) would be served; above all the Ukrainian people, who would benefit from being courted by East and West instead of being exploited unilaterally.

There is an old English warning: *Don’t drive them to despair*. Let us therefore end vassalage and take the road of reason instead of staggering into a war of extermination!

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**"Polyperspective teaching..."**

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adhere to the state maxim of perpetual armed neutrality and argues very eloquently and is used to the fact that the others often no longer listen to him, "because of Blocher"?

**Learn about the positions of the US schools of foreign policy.**

The writer has fond memories of the broad spectrum of opinions that met and often clashed in the classroom during his time as an active grammar school teacher, for example during the Kosovo war in 1999 or the Iraq war in 2003. As a teacher in the neutral small state of Switzerland – at that time still refraining from any sanctions – but did not oblige its citizens to be neutral in their opinions, he knew how respected his country was as a mediator in such conflicts of a war-like nature, how respectfully the Good Offices and quiet diplomacy were spoken of, but also the work of the ICRC, which could only become active on this basis. He will never forget *Sahit* and *Blerim*, whose relatives fought a fierce battle in their home country in 1999, but who continued to maintain their friendship as Serbs and Kosovars, especially through the school game of basketball.

After gathering the preliminary knowledge, the teacher must think about the next steps. Looking at the media landscape, she or he quickly notices that there is a lot of talk about Russian geostrategic master plans, "fake news", megalomania, imperial power play, war for resources, etc., etc. — but what is almost completely missing within the European media landscape, unlike in the U.S., is a look at the diverse approaches to U.S. foreign policy that naturally rival each other. If

the teacher is already of an advanced age, he will remember the debate in 1999 and after 9/11, which his current students did not experience because they were not yet born. There it was about the terms "preemptive strike", Art. 51 UN Charter with the right of self-defense, Art. 1.2 and Art. 2.1 UN Charter, the right of self-determination of peoples and the sovereign equality of all its members, a systemic contradiction of the UN Charter, Art. 5 NATO Treaty, alliance case, "war of aggression contrary to international law". It was about "fake news", war lies, some of which were admitted afterwards by *Gerhard Schröder*, who himself classified the air war against Serbia in 1999 as illegal under international law, about *Colin Powell's* lie, later admitted by himself and known as the greatest embarrassment of his life, that *Saddam Hussein* had weapons of mass destruction. And earlier, the Vietnam War with the life testimony of the then U.S. Secretary of Defense *McNamara*, who called himself a war criminal, at the age of 85; shortly before his death, the conscience of the Irish-born Catholic had come forward...

Since the debate about *George W. Bush* and the Bush Doctrine, about his advisors and cabinet members who called themselves neo-conservatives and gathered around newspapers such as *Commentary*, since the sharp criticism of the US war of aggression against Iraq in 2003, which violated international law – as later expressed by the former UN Secretary General *Kofi Annan* – since then it has been forgotten by the media, at least in Europe, or considered politically inopportune to address the various foreign policy schools of the USA. Yet everyone who deals with US foreign policy has known this since 2003 at the latest, and no teacher who discusses the history of the last

30 years in class can avoid it: Alongside, behind and in the bosom of the two parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, the various schools of foreign policy in the USA are vying for influence and top positions and for the implementation of what they see as the right policy. Besides the already mentioned neo-conservatives (i. a. *Norman Podhoretz*, *Paul Wolfowitz*, *Dick Cheney*, *Robert Kagan* and his wife *Victoria Nuland*), the US media mention the liberal internationalists (i. a. *Francis Fukuyama* and the *Clintons*) and the realists and neo-realists (from *Henry Kissinger* to *Robert McNamara*, *Paul Nitze*, *George F. Kennan* and *John Mearsheimer*). Three groups that had tried to influence the presidencies of a *George W. Bush*, *Barack Obama* and *Donald Trump* with their different but partly overlapping views. And what about *Joe Biden*? Who are his advisors? What schools do his ministers and cabinet members belong to? Where are they trying to steer the great steamship USA and its captain?

**No one who wants to be taken seriously can get past "Foreign Affairs"**

If the teacher has decided to present these schools in the required brevity or to have the pupils work on them, precisely because of their different assessments of the war in Ukraine – opinions that one hardly ever hears in Europe – the question is how to start. How to present these schools as neutrally as possible, how to enable the pupils to distinguish them and relate them to today's processes? It takes effort on the part of the teacher, since any articles on the subject can hardly be found in the daily media. So, the teacher will have to visit US websites – English language skills are a must. And he quickly finds what he is looking for. All the big schools have their websites, their exponents are professors at US universities, on *YouTube* there are recordings of lectures including PowerPoint slides and transcripts.

Since the teacher regularly listens to lectures by representatives of these schools via *YouTube*, out of interest and as background preparation, he will choose a lecture as an introduction to the topic that gives an overview of all schools and point out to the students that the statements are of course coloured, but that they will subsequently get to know the individual positions with original documents from the inside view. The choice could fall on a representative of the neo-realists, for example, whose articles are also printed in one of the most renowned journals of US foreign policy, *Foreign Affairs* of the *Council on Foreign Relations*. In this way, the students

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**"Task Force on Strategic Communications" of the EU versus John Mearsheimer et al.**

ts. The EU has kept a "Task Force on Strategic Communication" since 2015 (see [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2016-0290\\_DE.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2016-0290_DE.html)).

Its head, *Lutz Güllner*, is keeping a watchful eye on any false reports and propaganda from Russia in the current Ukraine conflict. In an interview with the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" on 11 March he names one of the prominent false reports that his agency is investigating as the cause and effect of the war. Güllner: "Here, the West and NATO are portrayed as the real aggressors." It would have been exciting if the interviewer had confronted Güllner with the statements of US political scientists such as the Madison Prize winner

and former staff member at the *Council on Foreign Relations* in New York, *John Mearsheimer*, according to which it was precisely the West and NATO that were to blame for the war because they had pushed NATO's eastward expansion. Mearsheimer, a political scientist from the University of Chicago, belongs to the neorealist foreign policy school of thought in the USA. He was against the Iraq war of 2003 and sees the real danger for the USA in China – for this, one needs Russia as a partner and would be well advised to neutralise Ukraine. One would have liked to hear from *Lutz Güllner* how he classifies the US patriot *Mearsheimer* and his statements. As Russian propaganda that needs to be censored?

## Propaganda in schools and lessons

km. In Germany, propaganda has also reached schools and the classroom. When it comes to the subject of Ukraine, "polyperspectivity" – as it is, at least theoretically, in Switzerland – is currently not in demand. This is shown by the materials for civics lessons dealing with the topic of Ukraine, which were quickly churned out after 24 February 2022.

An example of this is the four-page leaflet from the *Landeszentrale für politische Bildung* (German State Agency for Civic Education) in Baden-Wuerttemberg entitled "War in Ukraine – Putin's Attack on Peace", which is intended for only one lesson. The title alone is propaganda. There has been no peace in Ukraine since 2014. In the east of the country, a war has been raging for eight years between the Ukrainian army and Ukrainian militias on the one side and the largely Russian population on the other. Despite the *Minsk Agreement*, this war has been massively expanded since 16 February 2022, especially from the Ukrainian side, as the regular reports of OSCE observers on the ground have documented. According to the United Nations, around 14 000 people, mostly civilians, had died in Donetsk and Luhansk by 24 February 2022.

Propaganda is also the caricature on the cover of the leaflet: a military truck with Russian soldiers on their way to

Kiev. The speech bubble is put in the mouth of one of the soldiers: "They look like humans, but they are blood-thirsty, hateful monsters ...!" The cartoon suggests that the Russian soldiers invaded Ukraine with a hateful image of the enemy ... and are probably committing atrocities for that reason. However, there is no evidence for this, neither in the leaflet nor in the other material of the *State Centre for Political Education*.

The second page of the leaflet is largely factual. Here it is generally about "reasons and causes for war" and "forms of war".

The third page again has elements of propaganda. The pupils are asked to fill in three blank texts with given words. Filled in "correctly", two sentences read: "Over time, there have been efforts by Ukraine to be accepted into the EU and NATO. However, this would cause Putin to lose *power and influence*, which is why the *neutrality* of Ukraine and other former Soviet states is being demanded." (The gap fillers are written in *italics*). Here, the *State Agency for Political Education* only reproduces (and presents) what is claimed on the part of EU and NATO officials. Russia and even US-American scientists see it differently: It is not about "Putin" and his "power and influence", but about Russia's security interests and peace in Europe.

The claim in the third cloze that "in 2014 the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea was annexed by Russia [highlighted in bold in the leaflet]" also only reproduces the claim common in the West and conceals the fact that in a referendum in Crimea, with a turnout of more than 80% of those eligible to vote, more than 90% voted for independence from Ukraine and for membership of the Russian Federation.

Even the first sentence at the end of the leaflet on page 4, the conclusion so to speak – "The war in Ukraine is an attack on peace and freedom" – fits more into a Western politician's speech than it gives adequate information. Without any context, the students are confronted once again and expanded – now "freedom" is added – with the title of the leaflet. The goal is obvious: work on the enemy image of Russia.

In the Baden-Wuerttemberg curriculum for grammar schools from 2016, it says at the very beginning: "Germany's political system can only function according to democratic principles if it is supported and shaped by politically responsible citizens. Enabling and encouraging students to think and act democratically is the most important task of civic education, but also of schools as a whole." This is to be fully agreed with. But practice has moved away from this.

### "Polyperspective teaching..."

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get to know the foreign policy journal par excellence, which opens its columns to the representatives of all foreign policy schools and therefore belongs to the compulsory reading of a historian and in every better school library.

The selected lecture, which provides said overview of foreign policy schools, is entitled "The great delusion" and is by *John Mearsheimer*.<sup>2</sup>

Students learn that Mearsheimer, a former fellow at the *Council on Foreign Relations* in New York, is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago and the recipient of several awards. Among others, he is the recipient of the *American Political Science Association's* 2020 *James Madison Award*, given every three years to an American political scientist who has made outstanding scholarly contributions. He was elected to the *American Academy of Arts and Sciences* in 2003 and was a fierce opponent of the 2003 Iraq War. According to *Wikipedia*, which is not bad for a first overview, he is "the main proponent of a school of neorealist theory in international relations known as offensive neorealism. According to this theory, states

are not satisfied with a given amount of power, but strive for hegemony for security reasons." Which is why, according to Mearsheimer, there will be an exchange of blows between China and the USA. A point that will certainly make the Chinese student Ren prick up his ears.

Mearsheimer, and this could also generate a current hook, spoke about the war in Ukraine in an interview<sup>3</sup> in the "New Yorker" on 1 March and repeated what he had already published in *Foreign Affairs* in 2014.

The title, which was sure to confuse some students, and not only them, was: "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault. The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin"

### Recognise contradictions between US and European narratives

Students would be given the task of noting down the different schools mentioned, tracing the speaker's position, comparing it with the media reports they consult, looking up unfamiliar terms. With the help of the teacher, the various points would then be presented to the plenary, which would inevitably lead to an exciting discussion and further questions. For Mearsheimer, like Kennan and the other realists or neo-realists, initially even Henry Kissinger, see the West as

entirely to blame, in the previous history, the NATO eastward expansion, which Russia has rejected not only since Putin, and he emphasises that the USA, conversely, based on the *Monroe Doctrine*, would not tolerate the Russians setting up bases on the American double continent either. And that's just it: Russia should have been won over for the big fight against China that would inevitably come.

Since most students without a migration background probably recognised a blatant contradiction between the media they had consulted or the statements of the head of the *EU Task Force for Strategic Communication*, Lutz Güllner (e.g. on the cause of the war and the role of NATO, see "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 11 March 2022, see also box) and the Mearsheimer's statements, the thought process would be stimulated and the lessons could be further developed in various directions.

This is what makes history lessons so exciting, but it also always challenges the teacher to stay up-to-date and to consult as many media as possible from all over the world in order to counteract a Europe-centric narrowing of his view and to meet the legal requirements. It goes without saying that this also requires a

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**"Polyperspective teaching..."**

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lot of time, but after all, the salaries of grammar school teachers are well calculated. And favourably, the teacher also has curiosity, an alert spirit of research and a wide-ranging network of contacts at home and abroad, which also needs to be cultivated. And it can be helpful if, at the next craftsmen's appointment, he asks the professionals, who often come from abroad, how they assess the world situation. What comes back is rich and ideally complements one's own perspective on the world.

Now the lesson could be taken further as follows: The exponents of the other schools cited by Mearsheimer could also be examined with articles and lectures on *YouTube*, always from their inside perspective. For example, it would be necessary to clarify what is meant by "Bush Doctrine", who are the neoconservatives and who are the liberal internationalists. The students would be astonished to learn that while US foreign policy differs along party lines, the number of opinions and schools of thought is more diverse and in some cases even cross-party. Surely the question would then arise of what Francis Fukuyama meant by his dictum of the "end of history", why the Cold War ended, what happened to the Soviet Union, what the 1990s felt like in Russia. What the Soviets, then the USA, were doing in Afghanistan, how the statement by US General *Wesley Clark* was to be understood, that as early as 2003 several wars had been planned in the Pentagon against Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iran, etc. Certainly, one would also touch on the concept of conspiracy theory and examine who introduced this term into political discourse and when, and what distinguishes these from real conspiracies in history.

**Distinguishing between cause and reason of war – a beginner's exercise**

And all this with two history lessons a week? How is a teacher supposed to choose where to focus? She or he will develop it together with the students, taking into account the legal requirements of neutrality and polyperspective and the curriculum.

Students at all grammar school levels have already learnt in the upper grades of primary school that every war has a cause and a reason. The shooting of *Sarajevo* as the immediate cause, which could not be understood if the reason was not examined, in this case the imperialist policy of the great powers of the time and their alliance networks. Social, economic, financial and armament aspects may also have been included, depending on the teacher. And also what war propaganda triggers in people.<sup>6</sup>

Since the media are full of articles about the fact that the first victim of war is always the truth, since CIA experts are interviewed about the importance of media warfare (cf. for example "Tages-Anzeiger" of 14 March), there would already be material here for further lessons, favourably in cooperation with media studies and German teachers. But also, the foreign language teachers could be involved, today also teachers of Arabic, Russian and Chinese, languages that every self-respecting grammar school has recently started to offer as a free subject. Films could also be envisioned, such as "Ukraine on Fire" by the three-time Oscar winner *Oliver Stone*, and a question could be posed to the upper classes: Is it "boot-licking propaganda" (commentary in the *Daily Beast*) or enlightenment involving contemporary witnesses? The students would be required to collect arguments pro and con. And if they also learn something about the great investigative US journalist *Robert Parry*, who exposed the Iran-Contra scandal, so much the better.

When it comes to the question of neo-Nazis in Ukraine, keyword *Azov Regiment* (cf. "Tages-Anzeiger" of 12 March), it would certainly be exciting to collect Israeli voices. Conveniently, the history teacher also subscribes to one or the other Israeli newspaper such as "Haaretz" or "Jerusalem Post", which also have English editions. The students will gain insight into Israel's tense relationship with the USA and Russia, and inevitably questions about the history of the Middle East will arise – and the next series of lessons are already in the pipeline. Those who now think that the twelve weeks of teachers' time off from teaching are certainly justified for histo-

ry teachers, given the immense reading workload expected of them, are certainly not wrong. Horribile dictu, if only a teacher consulted the native media products right now!

**... and be no wiser than before?**

But what if, at the end of the series of lessons, the students had to say to themselves, as read in German class in *Goethe's "Faust"*: "And here, poor fool! with all my lore I stand, no wiser than before"? Well, would that be so bad? Isn't a history lesson a success if you go home with more questions about history than before?

A lot is gained if the young people are able to follow the tangle in the media jungle more consciously afterwards and slowly begin to form their own opinion – how this is then presented is up to everyone. If the pupils see the learning objectives "insight into US foreign policy discourse", "media and their perspectives", "EU task force for strategic communication", "wars in the age of nuclear weapons" etc. only approximately fulfilled, a lot has already been done and the legislator's demand to get to know different perspectives has been satisfied. If they can later contribute in their professions, family and as fellow citizens to making the world a more peaceful place, beyond ideologies and propaganda, any educator who cares about world peace can only consider themselves fortunate.●

<sup>1</sup> quoted from [https://www.watson.ch/1533754759?utm\\_medium=socialuser&utm\\_source=social\\_app](https://www.watson.ch/1533754759?utm_medium=socialuser&utm_source=social_app)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZV1aXFN2IU>, the book on this: John Mearsheimer. *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (Henry L. Stimson Lectures) Yale University Press 2018.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>

<sup>5</sup> And the lecture on: *Why is Ukraine the West's Fault? Featuring John Mearsheimer*. University of Chicago. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrMiSQAGOS4>

<sup>6</sup> cf. Forster, Peter. *But true it must be: Information as a Weapon*. Huber, Frauenfeld 1998. ISBN 3-7193-1154-6; Becker, Jörg; Beham, Mira. *Operation Balkan: Advertising War and Death*. Nomos-Verlag 2008; Müller-Ullrich, Burkhard; Medienmärchen. *Mindsets in Journalism*. Blessing, "Task Force on Strategic Communications"

# “Mum, what actually is war?”

## Finding answers to challenging questions

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and curative teacher

*War has edged closer to us. It has been around for a long time: in Afghanistan, the Congo, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and other places. But these wars were far away. Is that why they have had so little impact on our consciousness? Even the war against the ethnic Russian population in the Donbass began years ago – and many people have hardly been aware of that either. Currently, what is happening in Ukraine is present in the media. Of course, it also preoccupies our children and young people. They see headlines and pictures and watch little films on YouTube and TikTok. They sense the adults' tense mood. Once again, children from a foreign country are being taught in their class. What now? In the best case, they turn to their parents or other confidants with the questions that arise. And then these are challenged to clarify things for themselves, so that their children may not freeze in fear and uncertainty, but remain brave in their hearts.*

### Getting clarity for ourselves

If we want to talk to them about these questions, we do not only have to take

stock of our own level of knowledge; we also have to clarify our own emotional state. The media messages that are hailed down on us every day are not easy to process, even for adults. It is often difficult to verify what is factual information and which reports are edited with the intention of inflaming emotions and steering people's opinions and moods in a certain direction, as is unfortunately common in times of war. These psychological processes are an integral element of present-day warfare. It is worthwhile to take your time and study different sources, as we know that disinformation is unfortunately common in times of war. And it is downright awe-inspiring to make a mental note of the “rules of war propaganda”, as formulated by *Anton Ponsoby* and *Anne Morelli* (see *Current Concerns* No. 7 of 29 March 2022) as an internal yardstick when reading reports. This clears our thoughts, lifts the fog from our mind and gives us the inner strength that is especially important in such stressful times as well as the courage to keep going. Or as *Friedrich Nietzsche* said: “In the mountains of

truth you will never climb in vain; either you get up higher today or you will exercise your strength so as to be able to get up higher tomorrow.”

### From fact-checking to our own point of view

When exercised with enough perseverance and curiosity, “fact-checking” can lead to success and arouse interest in the debate; yet it is often more difficult to take your own stand in a conversation with fellow human beings. And this is also true for adults! Propaganda counts on this, because it is a natural need to be in agreement with our fellow human beings, especially in relationships that are important to us. So, it is not so easy to take an inner stand when the wind of public opinion blows against you. All too often, we imperceptibly begin to adjust our own opinion by fine steps until the contradiction has disappeared. It is important to reflect on this before engaging in conversation with children, especially in times when war propaganda is trying to crush the truth.

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## Letter to the Editor

### Building our hopes on young people

The question of what is being done for peace is so very important. It alarms me that, in public, there is no more talk of diplomacy, only of demands on our government to stand by Ukraine. The impression is being given that notwithstanding the Ukrainian government's pushing for arms supplies our parliament is denying them this much-needed help and that it is imperative that we (the people) convince our parliament that arms deliveries must be made now. For me, these reports are becoming more and more difficult to bear. This is idiocy being spread here. Arms deliveries only set a spiral of violence in motion. Haven't we seen this in all the wars since the Kosovo conflict?

Right at the beginning of the war, there were statements that we would supply former NVA stocks to Ukraine via Latvia. Are they now selling scrap weapons in Ukraine? And given all this, we find no reports of diplomats who care about negotiating criteria. Only in *Current Concerns* did I read about *Otto Schily's* proposal to persuade Ukraine to observe neutrality, which would mean disarmament.

There are also no more reports on the peace movement. People should take to the streets and demonstrate for Ukraine now. But can peace not only be achieved with all those who are involved in the tensions? There is no peace against Russia, but only peace with Russia. All the problems that were there before the war, that caused the war, must be talked about instead of being wiped off the table, as is happening now.

I hope that at Easter there will be Easter marches based on the traditional model all over Europe.

I am a history and politics teacher, but also an art teacher at a vocational grammar school. One subject unit in the history/community studies curriculum of Saxony is dedicated to international conflicts. I have therefore already dealt with many conflicts with my students. My basic principle is to make it clear to my students that conflicts have causes. Analysing them is important in order to understand the conflict. Another principle is that one cannot speak of religious conflicts, religions are wonderfully useful for concealing the true causes. And yet another principle is important: don't just rely on the media here,

but consult several sources. I consistently and in different ways try to make it clear to my students what war means, what long-term consequences wars have – several generations are wounded by them.

This school year I had already breathed a sigh of relief when the war in Afghanistan ended. The way in which this came about was bad, but it was an end; and now the next war is here. I am convinced that peace education belongs in schools, but this view clashes with the system of capitalism, which is based on competition. At the end of this unit, I told my students that I build my hopes on them, on the young people who have been prepared to change the world for some time. After all, we have to realise that we only have one earth. Wars only lead to the destruction of even more things that are worth living for. I also consider art to be essential in this. It strengthens togetherness across borders. It shows again and again in the most diverse ways what people can produce creatively, shape – not ruin, form instead of destroying.

Barbara Patzig, Dresden

**“Mum, what actually is war?”**

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**War is not a fantasy story or a computer game**

Children and young people have many questions, observations and often fears, because war is associated with violence, death, rape, destruction, grief and despair. This can trigger feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Perhaps some children also begin to realise that war is not a game where the dead can rise again and start over, and that reality is different from fantasy stories with happy endings. They are confronted with disturbing images that can arouse fears. Most of them realise that something is happening which makes the adults worry and fear. They also notice the adults' mood and sense that they are worried. They pick up snatches of conversation or notice that their parents suddenly fall silent.

“My parents' sudden silence occurred every time I came into the room. It was a silence that hung heavy in the air. A silence that weighed more than a rucksack full of stones,” is how *Alice* describes the family atmosphere when the First World War invaded her family.<sup>1</sup> This can awaken fears in children to which we must not give room. But how we should speak to them varies according to the child's person and age – there is no recipe! To speak appropriately to a child means to take into account his or her stage of development: What information can my child already understand? What prior knowledge does he or she have, and how complex can what is said be? That is easier said than done. Here, too, the adult is called upon to find a sensitive way in conversation – in close emotional contact with the child or young person.

**Being honest and leaving no room for fantasies**

Children have questions to which they expect an honest answer. We must not leave them to their fantasies. Of course, our explanation must be adapted to the child's age and stage of development. For *Tanja*, a kindergarten child, it may be appropriate to compare the events of the war with a quarrel. This is familiar to her from her life with her playmates, and she can make an emotional reference. Surely, she has experienced herself that it comes to quarrels when not everyone sticks to common rules or when one child always wants to decree what the others have to

do. *Tanja* will also understand that in such cases, everyone has to sit down together and find a solution in which everyone gets an equal chance. Of course, such an answer is no longer sufficient for a somewhat older schoolchild. *Roman*, for example, is sitting there with a children's atlas and looking for Russia and Ukraine. He might want to know more precisely what is happening there. He also wants to know why the war or the catastrophe happened and what will be done now. It makes sense to him that one has to put what is happening into a larger context and to know what has happened before in this area, and he is glad that many people and countries are now trying to find a solution. But it is also important for *Roman* to be able to relate the events to his own life. Hadn't he taken the pencil from his bench neighbour at school the day before and been outraged when the teacher scolded him? She hadn't listened to him when he tried to tell her that his neighbour kept “borrowing” his felt-tip pens without asking, even though *Roman* did not like this. He found this very unfair. So, this incident also had a history and he understands that. Now he takes it upon himself to talk to the teacher again. Of course, these answers do not mirror the complexity of a war event, but they can also be understood emotionally by children. Young people, on the other hand, demand facts, they want to get the exact information and they like to get involved in exploring the bigger picture. It is not simply a matter of acquiring knowledge, but of wanting to get their hands on something that will enable them to remain active in a stressful situation. This will give them security and they will no longer so easily feel at the mercy of the messages pouring in from all sides. Having, in conversation with their adult counterpart, come in contact with someone who deals with them openly and honestly, encourages them in their desire to actively participate in world events. For us adults, it is therefore always a matter of supporting children and young people so that they retain confidence and hope in difficult life situations and continue to look for solutions.

**Deterrence leads astray**

The question of how to talk to children about such difficult issues as war has always mattered to people. Thus, peace education can look back on long expe-

rience. Attempts to create a disgust for war and a desire for peace in the growing generation by taking them through exhibitions with pictures showing the horrors of war had the opposite effect. The children confronted with it either developed fears, nervousness or insecurity, or they formed a habituation to violence as well as an emotional deadening. Studies from developmental psychology explored the reasons responsible for this. Confrontation with the atrocities and cruelties that are unfortunately part and parcel of war undermines children's basic trust in their fellow human beings, in human coexistence in general. This deprives them of an important basis for the healthy development of their personality. Children need adults who, especially in difficult times, act as role models and show them the way of peace and give them the protection necessary for their psychological development, so that it will not suffer (cf. *Current Concerns* No. 21 of 29 September 2021).

**Instead of creating enemy images – promotion of peaceful coexistence**

Our own examination of current world events will protect us from taking to frivolous explanations and detecting guilty parties. For it is precisely the discussion with children that requires us to think into the future. We must not reduce these complex processes that have led to war or catastrophe to sweeping judgements about certain countries and certain persons. Emotionally anchored enemy images created in this way make it more difficult for people to live together. Enemy images are no support for our growing generation, because these young people will have to pursue the work at making the world a fairer and more peaceful place. We owe it to our children and young people to give them hope and confidence in this, because:

“Where there's hope, there's life. It fills us with fresh courage and makes us strong again.” (*Anne Frank*) •

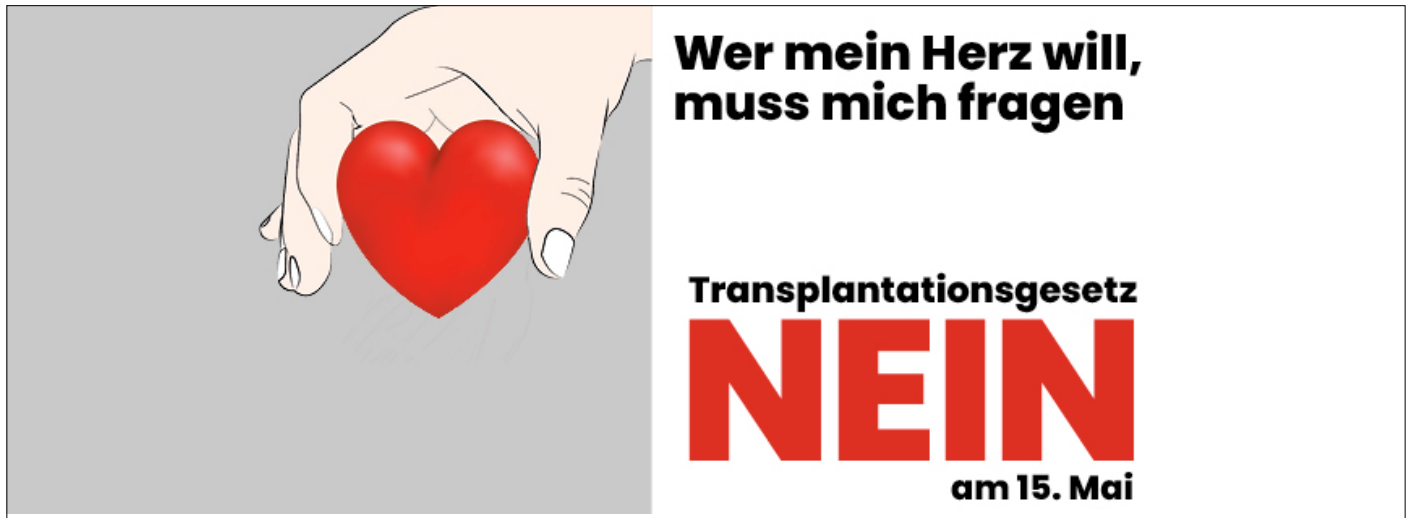
<sup>1</sup> Vereecken, Kathleen. *Alles wird gut, immer.* (Everything will be fine, always.); Gerstenberg-Verlag 2021

To be published soon:  
Maas, Rüdiger/Perret, Eliane. *Wie ich mit Kindern über Krieg und andere Katastrophen spreche.* (How to talk with children about war and other disasters.) Brainbook-Verlag

# No to the principle of presumed consent on 15 May 2022!

## No to the revision of the Transplantation Act

Statement of the Hippocratic Society Switzerland\*



The Hippocratic Society Switzerland is campaigning for a trustworthy transplantation medicine. Transplantation medicine can only be trustworthy provided that organ donation remains unchanged a donation. The meaning of the term “donation” implies voluntariness based on the personal decision of each donor.

The willingness to donate organs can either be recorded by an organ donor card, or, on the other hand, the presumed will to do so is known to the closest relatives and they consent to organ donation at the end of life. The voluntary nature is guaranteed by the principle of explicit consent which is currently in use.

On 15 May 2022, the Swiss population will be voting on a fundamental revision of the Transplantation Act introducing the principle of “presumed consent”. By voting “yes”, organs could be removed from all persons at the end of life, unless they have expressly objected to organ donation during their lifetime or unless their relatives won’t object at the time of death. Actually, the principle of presumed consent will introduce an obligation to donate organs.

*A paradigm shift of this kind, which would mean the state refraining from protecting physical integrity in every case, must be stopped with a “no” vote.*

The vote is not about a pro or con on organ donation, but about deciding whether it should be presumed that people not explicitly having said no to organ donation should be allowed to have their organs removed.

Indisputably, an increase in the number of donors is desirable. However, presumed consent is an unacceptable means

as it violates principles of medical ethics and constitutional law.

*After all, the end doesn’t justify every means!*

### Silence can’t be taken as implying consent

Every medical intervention requires good information from the attending physician, conscious, self-determined and independent consent and a documented declaration of consent (*informed consent*). However, it is unacceptable that this should no longer apply to organ donation, a far-reaching decision at the end of life. The assumption of implicit consent is insufficient. Rather, it requires a prior conscious decision embedded in a trustworthy doctor-patient relationship. Organ donation is ethically acceptable if the person concerned has actively given his or her well-considered consent during his or her lifetime.

### Human right to physical integrity must apply unconditionally

The human right to physical integrity must not be allowed to apply only when it is demanded!

Article 10 (2) of the Federal Constitution guarantees every person the right to physical and mental integrity and to self-determination. This right is particularly valid in highly vulnerable situations such as the process of dying. According to the preamble of the Federal Constitution, “the strength of a people is measured by the well-being of its weakest members”.

The principle of presumed consent, on the other hand, would require the right to bodily integrity to be explicitly demanded. Given the ignorance of many citizens about this new regulation and about the

possibility to object, a disproportionately large effort of information would be required in order to ensure that the population was correctly informed. There are concerns that parts of the population, particularly those with limited social, cultural and linguistic access, will be effectively disconnected and more or less “duped” by the new regulation.

Thus, there is a danger that organs could be automatically removed from people unaware of this new situation. However, it remains the task of the state to protect its citizens and guarantee their human rights.

### No to pressure on relatives!

If an affected person fails to express an opinion on the question of organ donation during his or her lifetime, the relatives will be asked about the presumed will during the dying process. Newly, they would not be asked about presumed consent, but whether an objection by the possible donor is known. They would be expected to credibly demonstrate that the deceased person would presumably have refused organ donation. The principle of presumed consent thus makes organ donation the rule, which increases the pressure on relatives to agree to donation. Under certain circumstances, they would have to justify themselves, provide explanations and actively oppose the planned removal of organs. As a result, there is a risk that they would no longer decide in accordance with the presumed will of the relative. Thus, a refusal of organ donation could be blamed on the relatives as “un-solidaric conduct”. Organ donation should occur in agreement with all parties in-

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**"No to the principle ..."**

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involved, combined with the satisfaction of helping a person to live on.

*No to the exploitation of the most vulnerable!*

It is unrealistic that more than 7 million adult citizens of Switzerland can be informed comprehensively that they must object and enter their names in a register if they do not wish to donate their organs. The principle of presumed consent could lead to people (especially from poorly educated, socially disadvantaged backgrounds) having their organs removed against their will because they were unaware during their lifetime that they should have objected. It is especially these socially weakest people who require be protected by the rule of law.

**Does not lead to more donations**

It is not true that presumed consent is the reason for a higher donation rate in other countries. According to several studies, the principle of presumed consent didn't signif-

icantly increase the number of donations. But even if this were the case, changing the system would be a violation of the fundamental right to bodily integrity.

**Surrender of the state's obligation to protect**

From a constitutional law perspective, the principle of presumed consent means a paradigm shift in the state's obligation to protect its citizens. Protection of the physical and mental integrity of its citizens is no longer guaranteed. This constitutes an encroachment on fundamental rights secured by constitutional law (Article 10 para. 2). Undermining fundamental rights in this way can undermine confidence in the rule of law.

**Approach based on explanation as an alternative worthy of discussion**

The National Advisory Commission on Biomedical Ethics rejects presumed consent. It advocates an approach based on explanation, i.e., citizens are regularly informed and questioned on the subject of

organ donation with the aim of motivating them to make a conscious and responsible decision. This would also include the right for people to refuse or not to be able to answer. This approach might improve the social debate on the complex question of organ donation. •

For further study:

Dres. med. Ursula und Walter Knirsch "Extended consent regulation versus extended objection regulation – what is it actually about" In: *Current Concerns* Nr. 28/29 of 21 December 2021

Fontana, Katharina. "I schänke dr mis Härz" (I give you my heart), In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 2 April 2022

Review article with representatives of the referendum committee. In: *Aargauer Zeitung* of 1 April 2022

Statement Council of the Swiss Protestant Reformed Churches: <https://refbl.ch/refbl-wAssets/>

*Aktuelles/news/2022/EKS\_10-Fragen-10-Antworten\_Organspende.pdf*

Homepage referendum committee:

<https://organspende-nur-mit-zustimmung.ch/>

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