

# Current Concerns

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and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

## US Policy and “West’s false narrative” stoking tensions with Russia, China

Interview of Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzales with Jeffrey Sachs



Jeffrey Sachs  
(Bild <https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

*Amy Goodman: Politico is reporting the Biden administration is preparing to ask Congress to approve a new \$1.1 billion arms sale to Taiwan. The package reportedly includes 60 anti-ship missiles, 100 air-to-air missiles. This comes after*

*two U.S. warships sailed through the Taiwan Strait Sunday for the first time since House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan earlier this month. China condemned the visit and launched major military drills near Taiwan.*

*Meanwhile, President Biden announced \$3 billion in more military aid for Ukraine last week, including money for missiles, artillery rounds and drones to help Ukrainian forces fight Russia.*

*We begin today’s show looking at U.S. policy on Russia and China. We’re joined by the economist Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University. He’s president of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. He served as adviser to three UN secretaries-general. His latest article is head-*

“The same misinformation occurred vis-à-vis Syria. The Western press is filled with recriminations against Russian President Vladimir Putin’s military assistance to Syria’s Bashar al-Assad beginning in 2015, without mentioning that the U.S. supported the overthrow of al-Assad beginning in 2011, with the C.I.A. funding a major operation (Timber Sycamore\*) to overthrow Assad years before Russia arrived.”

\* [Timber Sycamore: Name of the covert CIA operation to train and arm so-called moderate Syrian rebels]

Sachs, Jeffrey. “The Western Narrative on Russia & China.” In *Consortium News of 24 August 2022*; <https://consortium-news.com/2022/08/24/the-western-narrative-on-russia-china/>

“I think it’s useful to start 30 years ago. The Soviet Union ended, and some American leaders got it into their head that there was now what they called the unipolar world, that the U.S. was the sole superpower, and we could run the show. The results have been disastrous.”

*lined “The West’s False Narrative About Russia and China.”*

*He begins the article by writing, quote, “The world is on the edge of nuclear catastrophe in no small part because of the failure of Western political leaders to be forthright about the causes of the escalating global conflicts. The relentless Western narrative that the West is noble while Russia and China are evil is simple-minded and extraordinarily dangerous,” Jeffrey Sachs writes.*

*Jeffrey Sachs, welcome to Democracy Now! Why don’t you take it from there? Jeffrey Sachs: Thank you. Good to be with you.*

*What is the story that people in the West and around the world should understand about what’s happening right now with these conflicts, with Russia, with Russia and Ukraine, and with China?*

The main point is that we are not using diplomacy; we are using weaponry. This sale now announced to Taiwan that you’ve been discussing this morning is just another case in point. This does not make Taiwan safer. This does not make the world safer. It certainly doesn’t make the United States safer.

This goes back a long way. I think it’s useful to start 30 years ago. The Soviet Union ended, and some American leaders got it into their head that there was now what they called the unipolar world, that the U.S. was the sole superpower, and we could run the show. The results have been disastrous. We have had now three decades of militarization of American foreign policy. A new database that Tufts is maintaining has just shown that there have been more than 100 military interventions by the United States since 1991. It’s really unbelievable.

And I have seen, in my own experience over the last 30 years working extensively in Russia, in Central Europe, in China and in other parts of the world, how the U.S. approach is a military-first, and often a military-only, approach. We arm who we want. We call for NATO enlargement, no matter what other countries say may be harmful to their security interests. We brush aside anyone else’s security interests. And when they complain, we ship more armaments to our allies in that region. We go to war when we want, where we want, whether it was Afghanistan or Iraq or the covert war against Assad in Syria, which is even today not properly understood by the American people, or the war in Libya. And we say, “We’re peace-loving. What’s wrong with Russia and China? They are so warlike. They’re out to undermine the world.” And we end up in terrible confrontations.

The war in Ukraine – just to finish the introductory view – could have been avoided and should have been avoided through diplomacy. What President Putin of Russia was saying for years was “Do not expand NATO into the Black Sea, not to Ukraine, much less to Georgia,” which if people look on the map, straight across to the eastern edge of the Black Sea. Russia said, “This will surround us. This will jeopardize our security. Let us have diplomacy.” The United States rejected all diplomacy. I tried to contact the White House at the end of 2021 – in fact, I did contact the White House and said there will be war unless the U.S. enters diplomatic talks with President Putin over this question of NATO enlargement. I was told the U.S. will never do that. That is off the table. And it was off the table.

**"US Policy and 'West's false narrative' ..."**

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Now we have a war that's extraordinarily dangerous.

And we are taking exactly the same tactics in East Asia that led to the war in Ukraine. We're organizing alliances, building up weaponry, trash-talking China, having Speaker *Pelosi* fly to Taiwan, when the Chinese government said, "Please, lower the temperature, lower the tensions." We say, "No, we do what we want," and now send more arms. This is a recipe for yet another war. And to my mind, it's terrifying.

We are at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis, which I've studied all my life and I've written about, have written a book about the aftermath. We are driving to the precipice, and we are filled with our enthusiasm as we do so. And it's just unaccountably dangerous and wrongheaded, the whole approach of U.S. foreign policy. And it's bipartisan.

*Juan Gonzales: Jeffrey Sachs, I wanted to ask you — one of the things that you mentioned in a recent article that was published in Consortium News was this insistence of the United States, dragging Europe along, as well, in maintaining hegemony throughout the world at a time when the economic power of the West is declining. You mention, for instance, that the BRICS nations — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — represent more than 40% of the world population and have a greater GDP than the G7 nations, yet their interests and their concerns are pretty much dismissed or, in the case, obviously, of Russia and China, portrayed to the American people as the aggressors, as the authoritarians, as the ones that are creating turmoil in the world.*

Your point is ...

*I'm wondering if you could expand on that.*

Yeah, absolutely, and directing us to that is extremely important. The disproportionate power of the Western world, and especially the Anglo-Saxon world, which started with the British Empire, and now the United States, is about 250 years old, so a short period in world history. It hap-

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"The main point is that we are not using diplomacy; we are using weaponry. We have had now three decades of militarization of American foreign policy. A new database that Tufts is maintaining has just shown that there have been more than 100 military interventions by the United States since 1991. [...] But it was a plan. And that neoconservative plan is in its heyday right now on two fronts: in the Ukraine front and on the Taiwan Strait front."

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pened, for a lot of very interesting reasons, that the Industrial Revolution came to England first. The steam engine was invented there. That's probably the single most important invention of modern history. Britain became militarily dominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like the United States was in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Britain ran the show. Britain had the empire on which the sun never set. And the West, meaning the United States and Western Europe, now meaning the U.S. and the European Union, the U.K., Canada, Japan — in other words, the G7, the European Union together — is a small part of the world population, perhaps now roughly 10%, a little bit more, maybe 12.5% if you add in Japan to Western Europe and the U.S. But the mindset is "We run the world." And that was the way it was for 200 years in this Industrial Age.

But times have changed. And really, since the 1950s, the rest of the world, when it gained independence from European imperialism, started to educate its populations, started to adopt and adapt and innovate technologies. And lo and behold, a small sliver of the world really didn't run the world or didn't have a monopoly on wisdom or knowledge or science or technology. And this is wonderful. The knowledge and possibility of decent lives is spreading throughout the whole world.

But in the United States, there is a resentment to this, a deep resentment. I think there's also a tremendous historical ignorance, because I think a lot of U.S. leaders have no clue as to modern history. But they resent China's rise. That is an affront to the United States. How dare China rise! This is our world! This

is our century! And so, starting around 2014, I saw, step by step — I watched it with intense detail, because it's my daily activity — how the United States recast China not as a country that was recovering from a century and a half of great difficulty, but rather as an enemy. And we consciously, as a matter of American foreign policy, started to say, "We need to contain China. China's rise is no longer in our interest," as if the United States is to determine whether China is prosperous or not. The Chinese are not naive; in fact, they're extraordinarily sophisticated. They watched all of this exactly the same way that I did. I know the authors of the U.S. texts. They are my colleagues, at Harvard or other places. I was shocked when this kind of containment idea started to be applied.

But the basic point is, the West has led the world for a brief period, 250 years, but feel, "That's our right. This is a Western world. We are the G7. We get to determine who writes the rules of the game." Indeed, *Obama*, you know, a good guy on the spectrum of what we have in foreign policy, said, "Let's write the rules of trade for Asia, but not have China write any of those rules. The U.S. will write the rules." This is an incredibly naive and dangerous and outmoded way to understand the world. We in the United States are 4.2% of the world's population. We do not run the world. We are not world leader. We are a country of 4.2% of the people in a big, diverse world, and we should learn to get along, play in the sandbox peacefully, not demand that we have all the toys in the sandbox. And we're not over that thinking yet. And unfortunately, it's both political parties. It's what motivates Speaker *Pelosi* to go to Taiwan in the middle of all of this, as if she really had to go to stir up the tensions. But it's the mindset that the U.S. is in charge.

*I wanted to go back a little bit to — back into the 1990s. You recall, I'm sure, the enormous financial collapse that occurred in Mexico in the 1990s, where the Clinton administration authorized*

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"We are taking exactly the same tactics in East Asia that led to the war in Ukraine. We're organizing alliances, building up weaponry, trash-talking China, having Speaker *Pelosi* fly to Taiwan, when the Chinese government said, 'Please, lower the temperature, lower the tensions.' We say, 'No, we do what we want,' and now send more arms. This is a recipe for yet another war."

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**"US Policy and 'West's false narrative' ..."**

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*\$50 billion in a bailout to Mexico, which was really to Wall Street investors. At the time, you were advising the post-Soviet Russian government, which also had a financial — had deep financial problems at the time but was unable to get any significant Western assistance, even from the International Monetary Fund. And you were critical of that at the time. I'm wondering if you could talk about the differences how the U.S. responded to the Mexico crisis versus the Russian financial crisis, and what the roots of that may have been in what the current situation is in Russia today.*

Absolutely. And I had a controlled experiment, because I was economic adviser both to Poland and to the Soviet Union in the last year of President Gorbachev and to President Yeltsin in the first two years of Russian independence, 1992, '93. My job was finance, to actually help Russia find a way to address, as you described it, a massive financial crisis. And my basic recommendation in Poland, and then in Soviet Union and in Russia, was: To avoid a societal crisis and a geopolitical crisis, the rich Western world should help to tamp down this extraordinary financial crisis that was taking place with the breakdown of the former Soviet Union.

Well, interestingly, in the case of Poland, I made a series of very specific recommendations, and they were all accepted by the U.S. government — creating a stabilization fund, canceling part of Poland's debts, allowing many financial maneuvers to get Poland out of the difficulty. And, you know, I patted myself on the back. "Oh, look at this!" I make a recommendation, and one of them, for a billion dollars, stabilization fund, was accepted within eight hours by the White House. So, I thought, "Pretty good."

Then came the analogous appeal on behalf of, first, Gorbachev, in the final days, and then President Yeltsin. Everything I recommended, which was on the same basis of economic dynamics, was rejected flat out by the White House. I didn't understand it, I have to tell you, at the time. I said, "But it worked in Poland." And they'd stare at me blankly. In fact, an acting secretary of state in 1992 said, "Professor Sachs, it doesn't even

"When President Putin came in, he was not anti-European, he was not anti-American. What he saw, though, was the incredible arrogance of the United States, the expansion of NATO, the wars in Iraq, the covert war in Syria, the war. [...] There was no linear determination. It was step-by-step U.S. arrogance that has helped to bring us to where we are today."

matter whether I agree with you or not. It's not going to happen."

And it took me, actually, quite a while to understand the underlying geopolitics. Those were exactly the days of Cheney and Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld and what became the *Project for the New American Century*, meaning for the continuation of American hegemony. I didn't see it at the moment, because I was thinking as an economist, how to help overcome a financial crisis. But the unipolar politics was taking shape, and it was devastating. Of course, it left Russia in a massive financial crisis that led to a lot of instability that had its own implications for years to come.

But even more than that, what these people were planning, early on, despite explicit promises to Gorbachev and Yeltsin, was the expansion of NATO. And Clinton started the expansion of NATO with the three countries of Central Europe — Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic — and then George W. Bush Jr. added seven countries — Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the three Baltic states — but right up against Russia. And then, in 2008, the coup de grâce, which was the U.S. insistence, over the private opposition of the European leaders — and European leaders talked to me privately about it at the time. But in 2008, Bush said NATO will expand to Ukraine and to Georgia. And again, if you take out a map and look at the Black Sea, the explicit goal was to surround Russia in the Black Sea. By the way, it's an old playbook. It's the same playbook as Palmerston in 1853 to 1856 in the first Crimean War: surround Russia in the Black Sea, cut off its ability to have a military presence and to project any kind of influence into the eastern Mediterranean. Brzezinski himself said in 1997 that Ukraine would be the geographic pivot for Eurasia.

So, what these neocons were doing in the early 1990s was building the U.S. unipolar world. And they were already contemplating lots of wars in order to take out the former Soviet-allied countries — wars to overthrow Saddam, wars to overthrow Assad, wars to overthrow Gaddafi. Those were all rolled out in the next 20 years. They've been a complete disaster, debacle for those countries, horrible for the United States, trillions of dollars wasted. But it was a plan. And that neoconservative plan is in its heyday right now on two fronts: in the Ukraine front and on the Taiwan Strait front. And it's extraordinarily dangerous, what these people are doing to American foreign policy, which hardly is, you know, a policy of democracy. It's a policy of a small group that has the idea that a unipolar world and U.S. hegemony is the way that we need to go.

*Amy Goodman: Jeffrey Sachs, we don't have much time, but since this was such a big issue — Naomi Klein took you on big time with The Shock Doctrine, talking about you recommending shock therapy. Can you draw a line between what happened as the Russian economy unraveled to the conditions leading up to the Ukraine invasion? I mean, how did the economic catastrophe that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union lead to the rise of the oligarchic class and, indeed, the presidency of Vladimir Putin? Yeah, I've tried to explain to Naomi, whom I admire a great deal, for years that what I was recommending was financial help to — whether it was Poland or to the Soviet Union or to Russia. I was absolutely aghast at the cheating and the corruption and the giveaways. And I said so very explicitly at the time and resigned over it, both because I was useless in trying to get Western help and also because I did not like at all what was going on.*

And I would say that the failure of an orderly approach, which was achieved in Poland but failed in the former Soviet Union because there was no Western constructive engagement, definitely played a role in the instability in the 1990s, definitely played a role in the rise of the oligarch class. In fact, I was absolutely explaining to the U.S. and to the IMF and

"But times have changed. And really, since the 1950s, the rest of the world, when it gained independence from European imperialism, started to educate its populations, started to adopt and adapt and innovate technologies. [...] The knowledge and possibility of decent lives is spreading throughout the whole world."

## On the “Great Game of Powers”

ds. In 2015, *Andreas von Bülow* – born in 1937 and a member of the German Bundestag from 1969 to 1994, including on the Parliamentary Control Commission of the Secret Services, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister of Defence and Federal Minister of Research and Technology under *Helmut Schmidt* – published his book “Die deutschen Katastrophen. 1914 bis 1918 und 1933 bis 1945 im Grossen Spiel der Mächte” (The German Catastrophes. 1914 to 1918 and 1933 to 1945 in the Great Game of Powers). In it, he shows that the two world wars can be understood “only in the course of the worldwide struggle for the redistribution of power”.

“International tensions” von Bülow writes, “only lead to war when the long-term calculations of the great powers acting in the background deem the time to be right. As a rule, the attitude of the number one among the great powers plays the decisive role. In 1914 this was undoubtedly still Great Britain, replaced in this role by the United States of North America from 1918 at the latest”. (p. 27)

Britain and the USA pursued their own goals in the First and Second World Wars: Great Britain followed a 400-year-old tradition of always taking action against the strongest power on the European continent and thereby enlisting the second- and

third-ranking powers in the struggle. The United States, through huge war profits in the course of both wars, became the determining great power economically, financially and militarily, replacing Great Britain as number one.

The “Great Game of Powers” follows its own rules, writes von Bülow. The top priority is to prevent a competitive structure from developing under all circumstances. In 1941, the American President *Truman* had summed up the cynical philosophy of the “Great Game” when he formulated: “If Germany wins, we should help Russia, but if Russia wins, we should help Germany, let them exterminate each other as much as possible.” (p. 384)

And so that as many as possible could exterminate each other, major English and American banks financed both sides. – The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the war against *Hitler* and suffered 27 million deaths.

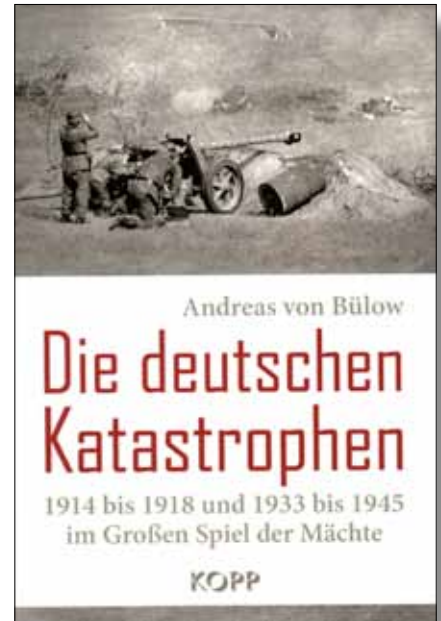
### US arms industry rejoices

ts. Business is booming for US defence contractors. As if it were the most normal business in the world, like the production of pans and prams, the mainstream media report on production bottlenecks, expansion of production capacities and excess demand. For example, *Jim Taiclet*, CEO of *Lockheed Martin*, a defence contractor whose products include the Javelin missile, said they have “shifted up a gear in defence spending due to the global security situation”. They are now investing in “expanding production capacity” in anticipation of “increased demand”. The deployment of said *Javelin* missiles in Ukraine, which is said to be very effective, has led to a boom in demand and orders, according to Taiclet: “We are already receiving enquiries from many countries.”

What if the war in Ukraine continues for months and further staged conflicts fuel the demand for these deadly goods? The shareholders of the arms companies will rub their hands. But what if the US itself is in danger of running out of ammunition, as Western mainstream journalists fear? The production of the US defence contractors – a roaring trade that could obviously backfire for the hegemon that, according to *Kishore Mahbubani*, is on the decline? But with how many additional victims worldwide? Wouldn't there be alternatives? The production of ploughshares? •

Source: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 31 August 2022

Human lives do not count in the “Great Game of Powers”.



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the *World Bank* in 1994, ‘95, what was going on. They didn’t care, because they thought, “Well, that’s OK. That’s for Yeltsin, perhaps,” all of that cheating in the shares-for-loans process.

Having said all of that, I think what is important to say is that there is no linear determinism, even from events like that, which were destabilizing and very unhappy and unnecessary, to what is happening now, because when President Putin came in, he was not anti-European, he was not anti-American. What he saw, though, was the incredible arrogance of the United States, the expansion of NATO, the wars in Iraq, the covert war in Syria, the war in Libya, against the U.N. resolution. So, we created so much of what we’re facing right now through our own ineptitude and arrogance. There was no linear determination. It was step-by-step U.S. arrogance that has helped to bring us to where we are today. •

# Reporting on Ukraine: Dangerous perception management with pictures and words

By Patrick Lawrence



(picture ma)

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 Twitter account @thefloutist has been permanently censored without explanation. His web site is [patricklawrence.us](http://patricklawrence.us). Support his work via his [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com/patricklawrence) site.

*I have been reading for some days, mostly in independent publications whose credibility I am not in a position to assess, about what goes on in the territories Ukrainian troops have recently retaken. It seems that what ensues very quickly are violent campaigns of reprisals wherein those whose sympathies lie with Russia are called "collaborators" and subject to assassination or arrest.*

You read these things and you are careful not to draw immediate conclusions. Is this or that publication reliable? How independent is it? Who are its contributors?

At the same time, these accounts square with numerous others going back some months, in which details of car

"We are flooded with images and certain freighted words, a calculated use of language intended to confer legitimacy on the condemnable, as the clerks of the governing class purport to tell us about the conflict in Ukraine. How much do most of us actually know about those waging war against Russian forces?"

bombs, point-blank shootings, poisonings, stabbings, and the like are recounted. The victims are people who hold political or administrative positions at local or provincial level, or those who advocate a negotiated settlement between Moscow and Kyiv, or those who indeed worked with the Russians when they were present, or simply those who speak Russian and share a history, traditions, or familial ties, and so a sort of "motherland" perspective.

You read, you are careful, and you wonder.

## Ukrainian hit squads

The "Washington Post" weighed in on this matter. *David Stern* has been covering Ukraine since 2009, evidently as a stringer. His piece appeared September 8 under the headline, "Ukrainian hit squads target Russian occupiers and collaborators."<sup>1</sup>

Stern writes that this campaign of murders goes back to the start of hostilities in late February and has to date claimed nearly 20 victims—killed or injured in attempted killings. He writes:

*"They have been gunned down, blown up, hanged and poisoned—an array of methods that reflects the determination of the Ukrainian hit squads and saboteurs often operating deep inside enemy-controlled territory. The unpredictability of the attacks is meant to terrify anyone who might agree to*

*serve in the puppet governments Russia has been creating with an eye toward staging sham referendums and ultimately annexing the occupied lands."*

I am in a better position to assess "The Post's" credibility, having spent some decades writing or editing at mainstream daily newspapers, and I do not rate it highly to put the point courteously.

Stern's "nearly 20" seems a low number based on what I am reading elsewhere. He blurs the question of who these victims are, terming them "Kremlin-backed officials or their local collaborators." Who knows what he means by this?

On the other hand, he acknowledges, if obliquely as if we are not to notice, that what he is describing is terrorism. He also writes, far down in the piece, that these victims, whatever they get up to, are civilians, which raises fundamental questions – moral as well as legal:

*"The assassination campaign, while cheered by many Ukrainians, nonetheless raises legal and ethical questions about extrajudicial killings and potential war crimes, particularly when the targets are political actors or civilians and not combatants on the battlefield or other military personnel. And those questions cannot simply be waved away by pointing to the illegality of Russia's invasion."*

I wondered again about all this after reading a piece RT published recently. RT is Russia's equivalent of the BBC by way of their government funding. We cannot be sure of what influence their governments exert, directly or otherwise. At least some in both cases, I have always assumed. In the past, this description has upset many people, those who still entertain a 1950s notion of the BBC's immac-

"What we witness in Ukraine is more than war as we commonly understand this term. Kyiv wages not only a war for territory. It wages a *Kulturkampf*, a culture struggle, and I use the term advisedly. From the regime's perspective this conflict is about superior and inferior people and the right of the former to extinguish the latter."

### Perception management

"Actions to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning as well as to intelligence systems and leaders at all levels to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviors and official actions favorable to the originator's objectives. In various ways, perception management combines truth projection, operations security, cover and deception, and psychological operations."

Source: [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf) of 12 April 2001 (as amended through 19 August 2009)

### "Reporting on Ukraine: Dangerous ..."

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ulate integrity. I cannot help this. One reads RT and listens to the Beeb with the same measure of caution when assessing the worth of the reportage.

### Persecution of Russian-speaking teachers after territorial capture

A piece on Sept. 13 carried the headline, "Ukraine threatens teachers with jail."<sup>2</sup> It reports that immediately after the Armed Forces of Ukraine took new territory in the northeast in recent days, these same forces began arresting "an unknown number of teachers." These teachers are not "Kremlin-backed officials or their local collaborators." They are Russian-speakers instructing their Russian-speaking pupils in Russian. This is their transgression.

### Irina Vereshchuk in the original

From the RT report:

*"Those who taught local children under the Russian curriculum will now face criminal charges in Ukraine, Deputy Prime Minister Irina Vereshchuk told the Ukrainian media outlet Strana.*

*"They have committed a crime against our nation," Vereshchuk said, adding that 'a court will determine their [...] punishment.' The deputy prime minister accused the detained teachers of engaging in 'illegal activities' without elabo-*

*rating which specific crime they had committed. According to Strana, Vereshchuk said they could be charged with 'violating the laws of war'—a charge typically used against those engaged in torture, killings of civilians and looting.*

*She also 'warned' that 'Russian citizens' that have arrived in what she called 'temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories' that they 'would certainly face punishment unless they immediately leave our territory.'"*

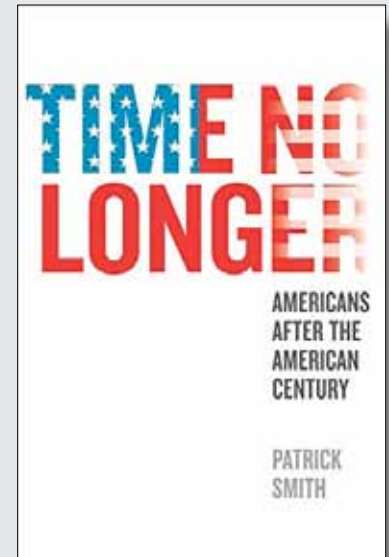
This piece is remarkable for a few reasons.

One, we no longer have to do so much wondering. RT now gives us confirmation of the campaign of persecution straight from a senior member of the Kyiv regime. I have followed *Irina Vereshchuk* for some months now, remarking notably but not only on her conduct at the time of the massacres in Bucha last spring. She is a freakishly obsessed nationalist, an intemperate fanatic reeking of contempt for Russians. And she is Ukraine's deputy PM: *Nice*.

Two, this campaign is not limited to people who can be considered by the most generous definition collaborators. These are people who speak Russian and so teach it in a region of Ukraine where this is the language of the majority. They are now threatened with prison or what will amount to forced displacement. Whether we call the latter this, or arbitrary displacement, or forced migration, it is a crime in international law.

### Culture struggle

Three, what we witness in Ukraine is more than war as we commonly understand this term. Kyiv wages not only a war for territory. It wages a *Kulturkampf*, a culture struggle, and I use the term advisedly. From the regime's perspective this conflict is about superior and inferior people and the right of the former to extinguish the latter. Wonder no more why so many Ukrainian officials refer so often and casually to the residents of the Russian-speaking east, as well as all Russians, as "animals." A better translation would be "subhumans," deriving from the Nazi *Untermenschen*.



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"I had long suspected that my true subject was my own country, and by the time I started on this book, my most recent, it was a certainty. One learns about oneself, ultimately, by going to and fro among others. I drew on the scholars for this, as I had learned to do when writing earlier books, and concluded that Americans are suspended between mythical and historical accounts of themselves. This must now be resolved – the task of our moment. Our "American century" is over – an excellent thing, as I see it—and we must dispose of the myths that have led us astray so often. We can do this by dropping "destiny" and taking up "purpose" – a distinction Herbert Croly taught me to draw. Decline awaits us only if we choose it. In this book I began to encourage readers: Discover the optimism within the apparent pessimism, and do not confuse the two."

Patrick Lawrence

This book by Patrick Lawrence was published under the name Patrick Smith and is also translated into Russian.

Source: <http://patricklawrence.us/books/>

### The Zelenski couple becomes fashion

I tumbled into a little lateral thinking as I read the RT piece. Strange as it may seem, what came to mind was that posterous photo spread *Vogue* ran in its August editions under the headline, "Portrait of Bravery: Ukraine's First Lady, *Olena Zelenska*."<sup>3</sup> Therein we were treated to pages of pictures by famed celebrity photographer *Annie Leibovitz*, featuring the glamorous *Olena* with *Volodymyr*, her husband, not so glam in his signature T-shirt, but president of Ukraine nonetheless. *Volodymyr*, "a comedian turned

"Let us be wary of pictures and words used in this manner. This is 'perception management' as it works. It is nothing new. But the manipulation of public perceptions is dangerous, plainly and simply, when it becomes as pervasive as we have it now. History tells us clearly enough where this can lead."

**"Reporting on Ukraine: Dangerous ..."**

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politician whose presidency may yet determine the fate of the free world" – that Volodymyr, not the Volodymyr who criminalizes the Russian language, bans his opposition, silences the media, strips unions of their rights, and stocks his special services with assassins.

I never imagined anyone would try to make warmongers and warmongering fashionable, but this is *Vogue* in the autumn of our empire as our imperium's leaders hire proxies such as Zelensky to defend their fading hegemony. Let us lend it style.

**To confer legitimacy on the condemnable**

I do not think my train of thought this morning is as eccentric as it may appear. We are flooded with images and certain freighted words, a calculated use of language intended to confer legitimacy on the condemnable, as the clerks of the governing class purport to tell us about the conflict in Ukraine. How much do most of us actually know about those waging war against Russian forces? This was the question my brain forced upon me.

*They are freedom-loving democrats fighting for their independence and they are just like us:* Isn't this roughly the sum total of what you would get back were you to ask someone waving a blue-and-yellow flag who Ukrainians were? It is exactly the response the flag-wavers are conditioned to give. Its principal feature is its two-dimensionality. To hear this again and again, as anyone listening to our discourse is bound to do, is like looking at a canvas flat on a stage that depicts an imaginary landscape and listening to the scene painters tell you, *No, it's not an imaginary depiction. It is truly the landscape.*

**Dangerous perception management**

Some weeks ago, *Ralph Nader* published a piece in *ScheerPost* noting that "The New York Times", which he seems to hold in far higher regard than I do, is using inordinate numbers of pictures in its news coverage. I started noticing this as I read the daily foreign report. The Times used to be called "The Gray Lady" because it was all text with a few pictures. Now a foreign story commonly features pictures, pictures, and more pictures with an interspersed text. This is especially but not only so in the Ukraine coverage.

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"A war that is apparently irrational – as many are – has deep emotional roots and claims ideological justification. Such wars are hard to end because they extend outside the range of rationality." (*Diana Johnstone*)

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Maybe the "Times" is appealing to new generations that are less given to reading, care little for history, and cannot manage complexity: This is how I first figured it. But even if I am correct it is more than a matter of the paper debasing itself in the name of the market. The "Times" is reproducing the simplistic view of the world that a declining empire requires when its decline must be hidden from view.

Pictures do not tell stories. They are two-dimensional images that purport to tell stories without, in themselves, telling those looking at them much of anything. The other day The Times ran a photograph of some empty ammunition crates strewn along a road. The caption told us this depicted the aftermath of the Russian retreat from the northeast. This was a story of fear, haste, desperation.

Was it? Whose crates were they? Who emptied them and why? How did they get there? Why would empty ammunition crates lie in a road? What "retreat" was there to see? As we witness the most propagandized war in history, and I think it is, were these crates where the caption told us they were, or somewhere else.

**Loaded vocabulary**

We find a variant of the same with the use of language. We are fed a lot of loaded vocabulary as events that reflect badly on Ukrainians can no longer be simply omitted and correspondents are required to write of them. David Stern's piece described the Ukrainians' "extrajudicial murders" and their intent to terrorize local populations – properly direct language. But his was the exception proving the rule. Ukrainian soldiers are always valorous. The Russian run penal colonies. As noted previously in this space, Ukrainian assassins are "partisans" justly killing "collaborators," the subtext a shameful reference to the *maquisards'* guerrilla campaign against Vichy collaborators during the Nazi occupation of France. These are but a few examples among many.

If pictures purport to tell stories and do not, text used in this fashion resorts to connotation, association, and insinuation to tell true stories that are not true

without directly lying. In neither case do people looking at images or those reading text have any access to the three-dimensionality of events, and all events are three-dimensional.

Let us be wary of pictures and words used in this manner. This is "perception management" as it works. It is nothing new. But the manipulation of public perceptions is dangerous, plainly and simply, when it becomes as pervasive as we have it now. History tells us clearly enough where this can lead.

*Diana Johnstone*, the distinguished Europeanist, published a superb piece in *Consortium News*<sup>4</sup> asserting, "A war that is apparently irrational – as many are – has deep emotional roots and claims ideological justification. Such wars are hard to end because they extend outside the range of rationality." Johnstone goes on to explore the profound historical forces playing out in Ukraine, high among them a subliminal Russophobia, abroad in parts of Europe as well as Ukraine, that is rooted in old, poisonous resentments of the Soviet victory over the Nazi regime in 1945.

**The third dimension**

This is the missing third dimension in mainstream media's coverage of the Ukraine crisis, or an important part of it. It is essential to our understanding and our ability to judge this conflict and people such as Irina Vereshchuk – to know what the Ukrainian leadership and military are made of. It would take an exceptional photograph to convey any suggestion of this. And reporting that uses words far more honestly than what we read in these media, with no resort to submerged narratives that dress up savagery as heroism and Nazi-inflected nationalists as democrats. •

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/08/ukraine-assassinations-occupied-territory-russia/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rt.com/russia/562663-ukraine-russian-teachers-criminal-charges/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vogue.com/article/portrait-of-bravery-ukraines-first-lady-olena-zelenska>

<sup>4</sup> <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/09/12/diana-johnstone-the-specter-of-germany-is-rising/>

# Iran: Unilateral sanctions against international law suffocate people's breathing space

## Interview with UN Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan on her ten-day visit to Iran

On 9 September 2022, the US imposed new sanctions on Iran for allegedly supplying drones to Russia. The US Treasury Department stated in a press release that these sanctions would hold Iran "accountable". The US also imposed sanctions on Iran's Intelligence Ministry, which it accuses of involvement in cyber-attacks in Albania.

At a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council, Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's Vice-President of the Judiciary for International Affairs, described the US sanctions as crimes against humanity. He also said the sanctions prevented cooperation in dealing with the refugee crisis and in the fight against drugs.

Alena Douhan is the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the realisation of human rights. We spoke with her about the sanctions against Iran.

*Current Concerns: From 7 to 18 May, you visited Iran as UN Special Rapporteur on Unilateral Sanctions to get an idea of the effects of the unilateral sanctions. How do you assess these sanctions from a legal, economic and political perspective?*

**Alena Douhan:** The political perspective is outside of my mandate so I will focus on the legal and factual perspectives. I can say that the unilateral sanctions against Iran, and indeed most unilateral sanctions generally, are rather dubious under international law as they are imposed without or beyond the authorisation of the UN Security Council and do not take the form of retortions or countermeasures that international law authorises. Any measures in the course of retortions shall not violate any international obligations: from multilateral agreements and customary norms of international law in various areas: trade, postal services, transportation, human rights; up to its bilateral agreements.

When one speaks about the mechanisms of countermeasures, any means of pressure can only be taken in full conformity with the law of international responsibility: measures shall be taken by the directly injured state in response to a previous violation of international law (with due account of situations of violations of erga omnes obligations) in full conformity with the aim (to restore fulfilment of international obligations), principles (necessity and proportionality to the violation) and limitations of counter-

measures (prohibition to violate peremptory norms of international law, including to use force, to apply reprisals in international humanitarian law; or to violate fundamental human rights).

### The unilateral sanctions against Iran are against international law ...

Since August 2020 no UN Security Council sanctions are imposed on Iran. Sanctions applied by states and regional organisations raise serious concerns about the fulfilment of obligations in the spheres of amity, diplomatic law, law of international responsibility, immunities of states and state property, and promotion and protection of human rights. These measures therefore can be qualified as unilateral coercive measures and are illegal under international law, as recognised in numerous resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly.

### ... and against human rights

The impact of unilateral sanctions on a country's economy usually affects the human rights of its whole population in numerous ways, affecting particularly the most vulnerable groups, and that is clearly visible in the case of Iran. Human rights violations add another layer of illegality to unilateral sanctions, as sanctioning countries are obliged by international conventions to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, just like all countries must do.

*Critics of unilateral sanctions, such as those repeatedly imposed by the USA and the EU, say that such sanctions are not only against international law, but also an outright act of war. How do you assess such statements?*

The nature of war is always evolving so that's an interesting question. War in the sense of international law involves armed conflict, so unilateral sanctions shall not be considered as acts of war. The Geneva Conventions as well as Additional covenants and the protection they give to civilian populations do not apply to the situations of unilateral sanctions, therefore I believe that while sanctions may be against international law their impact, even when high, shall not be qualified as those of war crimes.

### Impact of sanctions equivalent to what happens in a war

At the same time, it is important to recognise that the humanitarian impact of uni-



(picture ohchr.org)

Ms Alena F. Douhan, (Belarus) was appointed as UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights by the Human Rights Council in March 2020. Ms Douhan has extensive experience in the fields of international law and human rights as, a Professor of international law at the Belarusian State University (Minsk), a visiting Professor at the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed conflict (Bochum, Germany) and the Director of the Peace Research Centre (Minsk). She received her PhD at the Belarusian State University in 2005 and obtained Dr hab. in International Law and European Law in 2015 (Belarus). Ms Douhan's academic and research interests are in the fields of international law, sanctions and human rights law, international security law, law of international dispute settlement, and international environmental law.

lateral sanctions can sometimes be very high, even the equivalent of what happens in a war. People suffer and can die when sanctions prevent shipments of medicines and medical equipment or even food to a country, or when its vital infrastructure can't be maintained, affecting supplies of water and other necessities of life. That is while I am very carefully following the Application submitted by Venezuela to the International Criminal Court (Venezuela II). Due to the serious problems and nearly non-existence of the responsibility and redress mechanisms to the victims of unilateral sanctions, international adjudication can be a good solution to prevent the use of sanctions, hold their perpetrators accountable and to provide for compensation to their victims.



**"Iran: Unilateral sanctions against ..."**

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It is necessary to take into account however, that attribution of specific consequences to the specific state / specific type of unilateral sanctions may be rather problematic (much more problematic than attribution of activity and harm in the course of military conflicts) due to the multiplicity of sanctions regimes even in one state, the multiplicity of states imposing sanctions, and the existence of secondary sanctions, threats of sanctions, de-risking policies and over-compliance from the side of banks, businesses and other private actors.

**Humanitarian exemptions largely ineffective**

*With regard to sanctions, the sanctioning states repeatedly claim that there are humanitarian exemptions. Is this the case and how does it work in practice?*

It's true that most unilateral sanctions include exemptions that are meant to allow the continued flow of medicine and food to sanctioned countries.

In reality, however, these humanitarian exemptions are largely ineffective for various reasons. One is that sanctions are complex, overlapping and not clear, which results in the fear of possible secondary sanctions or civil and criminal penalties, even against international and national humanitarian actors. It can be very costly and time-consuming to obtain the licenses necessary to ship even the exempt goods. Then there is a big problem with over-compliance with unilateral sanctions, to avoid penalties from accidental violations. Because of this, banks, shipping companies and insurers of cargo sometimes decline to provide their services even for humanitarian goods that can be legally shipped to a sanctioned country, including for international humanitarian organisations and even for the UN agencies.

**Most severe humanitarian consequences**

In Iran the most severe problems exist as concerns the delivery of medicine and medical equipment for people suffering from rare and severe diseases, like EB, thalassemia, haemophilia, some forms of diabetes, cancer, autism and many other. As a result, mortality rates are increasing; life expectancy is getting shorter and the health status as well as the quality of life is deteriorating.

Joined by some other special rapporteurs, I have forwarded e.g., communications to companies and states where they are registered about the impossibility to procure life-saving medicine; medical equipment; or to have transplantations for onco-children. Unfortunately,

*"It is hardly known that sanctions have a devastating impact on the respective populations. What is the reason for that?"*

*Alena Douhan: "The media hardly reports on it. They suppress the information, but people don't want to hear it either. It is something very unpleasant. But it is a reality for those affected. Sanctions are the cause of people dying. That is the reason why I am very concerned about the concept of planned prevention of disinformation. The EU has decided to launch a law against "disinformation," which is a violation of the *International Covenant on Civil, Political and Cultural Rights*, as well as calling into question the right to freedom of expression. I see this as a great danger to freedom of expression and freedom of the press."*

*Source: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/476684/UN-Rapporteur-says-greatly-affected-by-impact-of-sanctions-on>*

companies are reluctant to propose relevant and often unique goods and services due to the fear of secondary sanctions or the unreadiness of banks to transfer money. States of their registration being often against the extraterritorial application of unilateral sanctions, cannot guarantee security of their businesses and refer to freedom of business activity. After coming back from Iran, I have had several meetings with Permanent Missions of states where companies producing lifesaving unique medicine necessary for EB patients and people with Thalassaemia are registered, and asked them for assistance to ensure that the medicine can be procured and delivered.

**Call for lifting of sanctions against "critical goods"**

Another problem refers to the very narrow understanding of humanitarian goods, which can hardly be isolated from other aspects of the sanctions, so if sanctions prohibit fuel imports there can be a situ-

*"What made a lasting impression on me was the impact of the sanctions on the health care system. I spoke with emergency patients, those suffering from genetic diseases, and some who were suffering from cancer. I also spoke with members of patient organisations that cared for people with serious diseases, such as various types of skin diseases, gynaecological diseases, as well as blood diseases, severe forms of diabetes, etc. All of these people suffer from these diseases and even the appropriate medicines are not available."*

*Alena Douhan*

*Source: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/476684/UN-Rapporteur-says-greatly-affected-by-impact-of-sanctions-on>*

ation where humanitarian goods arrive in the country and can't be transported to the places where they are needed. In particular, you can hardly ensure health standards if people do not have access to safe water and sanitation; cannot use transportation to get to the hospitals; or have to sell their medicines even provided by the governments to buy food for their families. Recently, I, joined by some other special rapporteurs, have issued a press release calling for lifting sanctions<sup>1</sup> on critical goods, services and infrastructure including water, electricity, transport, civil aviation, medicine, medical equipment, spare parts, purified water, seeds, fertilisers and many other items.

**No approval for development projects**

The last point which I have to mention as regards humanitarian exemptions refers to the differentiation between humanitarian and development projects. It has been repeatedly reported by the humanitarian organisations and UN institutions that even if they manage sometimes to get licences for food or medicine deliveries, no license is ever given to implement development projects, which therefore undermines the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and prevents governments from the possibility to fulfil their obligations to guarantee a decent life on their territory.

**Life-threatening effects**

*In your preliminary report, you expressed great concern about the life-threatening effects of sanctions in the health sector. What are the effects in Iran?*

The effects are seen in many ways. Iranian pharmaceutical companies have difficulty obtaining raw materials from abroad for making medicines. Quite often they have to use alternative means that make procurement take much longer, more expensive and do not necessarily guarantee the high quality of the materials. Iran is producing domestically around 95 per cent of its medicine but it still depends on imports of high-quality raw materials, technologies, spare parts and software.

As for medicines and medical equipment that must be imported, over-compliance with sanctions prevents shipments, adds costs and causes delays for material needed to treat a number of diseases, including certain types of cancer, thalassemia, haemophilia, leukaemia, ichthyosis, multiple sclerosis, epidermolysis bullosa (EB), autism, and certain forms of diabetes. As a result, prices are higher and shortages exist. In accordance with the reports received, the average mortality rate of people with thalassemia has

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increased from 25–30 to 130–170 after 2018.

It is reported that this has led to an influx of counterfeit medicines, which only adds to the harm. Then there is the problem of foreign companies refusing to sell software and spare parts for medical equipment that is needed in Iran for purposes like regulating doses of medicines or monitoring the condition of hospital patients.

In the face of the economic burden imposed by unilateral sanctions on Iran many Iranians appear in vulnerable situations and become 100 per cent dependent on governmental support. Due to the unavailability of additional funds and shrinking revenue, Iran is not able to build and equip new health facilities, despite the growing need for that in the face of lower income of people in the country and inflows of Afghan refugees (in particular, it has been reported that since August 2021 more than 850,000 of them appeared in Iran, with 5,000 – 10,000 coming every day).

### The problem of over-compliance with sanctions

*In the last interview with our journal, you already spoke of an over-compliance with sanctions, especially on the part of those countries and organisations that want to provide aid. Does this also apply to Iran?*

Yes. The over-compliance problem affects donors of humanitarian aid to Iran, whether they are other countries or NGOs. In particular, they face problems from banks that won't handle transactions involving Iran or anything that sounds like being of any reference to Iran, including selling so-called Persian dolls not originating from Iran or that discourage transactions by charging higher fees, requiring onerous documentation or taking longer to process them.

Due to over-compliance Iranians appear to be cut off from international coop-

"States have an obligation under international human rights law to guarantee that any activity under their jurisdiction or control does not result in human rights violations, and in this regard I call on sanctioning States, in particular the United States, to observe the principles and norms of international law, including with regard to the peaceful settlement of international disputes and to lift all unilateral measures, in particular on those areas affecting the human rights and the lives of all the people in Iran."

Alena Douhan

Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/iran-unilateral-sanctions-and-overcompliance-constitute-serious-threat-human>

eration in many areas including sport, art and science. It has been reported that professionals, including health workers, are losing access to online communication and research platforms, cannot register to participate in international conferences, cannot transfer money to pay membership fees, are prevented to apply for study and research grants, and are prevented from submitting articles to foreign journals.<sup>2</sup>

### Raising awareness, building global cooperation networks

*Can you tell what the impact of your work as UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral sanctions is?*

One of the things I am doing is raising awareness of the humanitarian problems that unilateral sanctions cause, and also about these sanctions too frequently not complying with the international legal obligations of countries that impose them. The fact that news media around the world report on my official visits to Iran and other countries, and take note of my reports to the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly and to my statements more generally, is evidence that this is working. Acknowledging the problem is the first step toward resolving it.

I also try to build cooperation networks between states, scholars, non-governmental organisations, UN agencies. Last week I came back from a trip in which I discussed cooperation possibilities for humanitarian impact assessments with a number of UN agencies, including FAO, WHO, UNESCO, UNCTAD and many others.

### Impressed by the courage of the people and the mutual help

*What have been your impressions of the country and the people in Iran? How do the people deal with the sanctions in their daily lives?*

I respect Iran and its history and culture, and of course its population as well. What impressed me during my visit is the courage of the Iranian people and their ability to adapt as best as possible to living in an environment that is shaped in large part by the unilateral sanctions that have been imposed against the country. I was rather impressed by the assistance provided by the most vulnerable groups to their group members to cope with the challenges of unilateral sanctions.

I need to note that the Government of Iran has taken a number of measures to mitigate the impact of unilateral sanctions via developing the domestic production of around 95 per cent of medicine; encouraging domestic production and agriculture; reallocating subsidies; and opening free access to primary healthcare and schooling to Afghan refugees.

These measures are however not sufficient to guarantee a decent life for the people of Iran. It is possible to say that the whole population of Iran is affected by unilateral sanctions in one form or another, and those who are vulnerable are suffering the most.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/un-experts-urge-states-consider-humanitarian-impacts-when-imposing-or>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/unilateral-sanctions-threaten-scientific-research-and-academic-freedom-un>

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# Cultural Exchange — a remedy against exclusion, hatred and war

## The ideology of “cultural appropriation” — itself a “völkisch”, racist construct?

by Thomas Schaffner, historian and theologian

While the Swiss citizens, with their democratic instruments such as initiative and referendum, are always in the position to peacefully and civilly put a galloping *classe politique* in its place, the rest of Europe seems to be facing a hot autumn, full of domestic unrest and demonstrations. At the same time, the columns of many media outlets are full of topics that seem only superficially absurd and laughable. Under the accusation of “cultural appropriation” it is claimed that certain groups of people are being robbed of their culture and humiliated once again, concerts by white reggae musicians with dreadlocks are cancelled. All with the justification that one wants to fight racism. But more and more voices are saying that under the guise of anti-racism, a new racism, and even a new ethnic thinking, is celebrating its reign. Despite this, some media outlets allow us to read unchallenged articles that exclude people on the basis of their nationality and pillory them in pictures and texts, mentioning their names and home addresses. Haven't we already had this several times in history? We know where it led. It's time to think back to a relevant UNESCO convention.

Susanne Schröter, ethnologist at the University of Frankfurt, points out in her just published latest book<sup>1</sup> that from a scientific point of view the term “cultural appropriation” refers to something “highly trivial”: “People do not permanently reinvent the objects and techniques they use, the customs and traditions they practice, or the beliefs they use to explain the world to themselves, but they fall back on what they find”. (p. 119) This appropriation takes place both on an individual and on a collective level. Cultural appropriation enables the development of human culture

### Ethymology of the term culture

“The expression borrowed from Latin *cultura* ‘care (of the field), cultivation, cultivation, farming’, also ‘spiritual care, training of intellectual abilities, (religious, homage) worship’ (to Latin *colere*) was integrated into German towards the end of the 17th century, after it had already been common in German texts in Latin inflected form. It initially gained currency in the second half of the 18th century with the rise of agriculture and forestry (agrikultur), but acquired its real weight in its metaphori-

cal use (also prefigured in Latin), in that culture (from around 1700) also denoted the education and spiritual perfection of the individual. The word was extended into the social sphere and became a catchword of the epoch in the philosophical thought of the German Enlightenment; *Johann Gottfried Herder* and *Immanuel Kant* played a special role in shaping and specifying its content.”

Source: <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Kultur>  
(Translation Current Concerns)

### Rösti soon banned?

#### Because the potato originates in Latin America!

ts. For as long as humans have existed, cultures have constantly influenced one another. Cultural appropriation was consistently perceived as enrichment, because of admiration and without malicious intent. Just think of the cultural transfer via the ancient Silk Road. Without cultural appropriation, the Swiss would not eat Rösti – after all, the potato comes from Latin America. Forget the Engadiner Nusstorte (Grisons nut pastry) – the nuts do not come from Grisons' high valley. Christianity without crucifix? After all, it was the means of execution used by the Romans. Central Europeans without couches or apple strudel? Both have their origins in Asian cultures. Today, who can still understand where a certain tradition or a certain object comes from? For example, the often-cited

dreadlocks were already worn by Persians, Aztecs and Tartars. As you know, acting consists of playing another person. If ultimately everyone was only allowed to play themselves, there would no longer be film or theater, only self-portrayal. The same applies to literature: If you are no longer allowed to write about people from other life-worlds, only autobiographies would remain – also interesting, but what impoverishment, what egocentrism, what an impoverishment, what an egocentrism, what a loss of training in empathy, in understanding the other and the very other – also a kind of preparation for war?

cf. Fabian Köhler. *Wem gehört welche Kultur? (Who owns which culture?);*  
in: *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*  
of 16 August 2017

by passing on what has been acquired beyond one's own group. The sciences of archaeology and ethnology, among others, live from this. One thing is certain: “Culture is fluid. It is always in motion and – viewed over a longer period of time – can only in rare cases be assigned to a geographical area or a specific collective.” (p. 120) Thus, matted hair can be found in many parts of the world. Indian gurus, for example, wear them, but in African countries they are rarely found.

Schröter locates in the free cultural appropriation, however, also a means against exclusion, hatred, and ultimately war: “It serves quite decisively the peaceful understanding of different groups or is already an expression of an attitude that aims at contact and acceptance.” (p. 120) Only in this way, prejudice-free relationships be-

come possible, only in this way, when one approaches each other with curiosity, one is immunised against hostile demarcations. “Whoever, on the other hand, emphasises that a person of any skin colour or member of a cultural group must be in sole possession of cultural attributes that cannot be shared with others, will cement differences and squander the chance of a common together.” (S. 120)

### “Such an attitude is called völkisch, and it is known from history”

*Alfred Bodenheimer*, professor of history of religion and literature of Judaism at the University of Basel, known to the wider public through his wonderful detective stories about Rabbi *Klein*, recently wrote<sup>2</sup> that the real scandal in the debate about “cultural appropriation” is the “völkisch understanding of culture” that lies behind it. The arguments put forward so far are all too defensive, for example, when it has been correctly noted “that the musical culture of modernity would not exist at all without cultural appropriation, that it is precisely the advance into other cultural worlds that would increase their acceptance elsewhere, that it is also only in this way that the really exciting syntheses emerge that take culture forward and generate its tension.” In their defensiveness, these arguments “reveal a lack of understanding of the true scandal

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of the accusation that members of certain cultures, skin colours, or ethnicities do not have the right to cultivate a preference for certain clothes, musical styles, or hairstyles that are 'foreign' to them." He continued, "Such an attitude is called *völkisch*, and it is known from history." A bombshell from Bodenheimer. He recalls that after 1933 Jewish artists were "cancelled", denied the right to interpret the works of "Aryan" composers or poets – how it then went on towards mass murder is well known. At that time, one had not yet "struggled with conceptual contortions such as 'cultural appropriation,'" but openly argued or ranted in a racist manner: "The criteria of artistic interpretation had been shifted from devotion and virtuosity to the racial tables of a scientifically misguided, misanthropic medicine." Of course, there were differences between then and now: banning everything non-Aryan also meant that German orchestras and opera houses only performed *Mahler* or *Offenbach*. But today, fortunately, "no one would demonstrate against violinists or female conductors from Korea or Senegal interpreting Beethoven." At the same time, however, this shows "where the understanding of culture has gone astray. For, doesn't this mean that 'white' culture, Western concert hall rituals and the performance in ritually strictly defined black dresses, dinner jackets or evening gowns are universally valid, while reggae, together with the associated markers such as clothing and hairstyle, is 'dwarfed' into Jamaican provincial culture?"

**Biologicistic cemented cultural apartheid**

*Harald Fischer-Tiné*, Professor of History of the Modern World at ETH Zurich with a research focus on colonialism

**Albert Schweitzer: Culture not without ethics**

ts. "Culture I define in quite general terms as spiritual and, material progress in all spheres of life, accompanied by the ethical development of individuals and of mankind." This is how *Albert Schweitzer* defines the term culture. Culture concerns humanity as a whole, and for Schweitzer it has to do with ethics. Now there is also a lack of culture, and the media hype around the topic of cultural appropriation must probably be counted among them.

Source: *Albert Schweitzer. Aus meinem Leben (From my life and thinking). Leipzig 1957. p. 192 (Translation Current Concerns)*

**Syllabus errorum and Index librorum prohibitorum are back again**

ts. British universities are providing classics of literature with so-called "trigger warnings" and thus "framing" the reading, if it is not banned altogether, in a way that we know from totalitarian states:

What the Catholic Church happily overcame – the *Index of Forbidden Books* and the *Syllabus errorum*, a list of forbidden thoughts – what the National Socialists and Marxists im-

posed with a forcibly enforced racial, respectively class point of view, is celebrating its first day not only in the UK, but also in the USA and increasingly in continental Europe. The Bible is warned against because of "shocking sexual violence" or *Shakespeare* because of "classism", to name just a few works. In 2021, 1597 books were removed from libraries in the USA. Brave new world?

and imperialism, also sees in the debate a rapprochement with "racist approaches"<sup>3</sup>: "Namely, that there is such a thing as a form of authenticity or 'cultural purity' and that one must come to a congruence between an ethnically defined group and a certain form of cultural expression." Something that is not possible in Switzerland, a nation of will with four main language groups. The approach of cultural appropriation negates "that there can be mutual borrowing, cross-fertilisation, enrichment."

The NZZ journalist *Martin Senti*, on the other hand, notes a static understanding of culture that is biologically cemented and ultimately leads to a kind of "cultural apartheid".<sup>4</sup>

The Parisian philosopher *François Jullien* therefore warns against the constructions of *Samuel P. Huntington*. In his work "Clash of Civilisations" he uses all the traditional clichés of a "Chinese", "Islamic" and "Western" culture, as if there were "homogeneous cultures" that inevitably had to clash.<sup>5</sup>

One man who, in view of the urgent problems in this world, was fed up with the debate on dreadlocks etc., a veteran Social Democrat committed to the ethics of Christian charity, recently gave vent to his displeasure in his column in a Swiss regional newspaper entitled "Aneignung – so ein Schmarren" (Appropriation – such rubbish) as follows:

"By the way, there is still war in Europe. Maybe that's a real problem we have to worry about." And further: "Maybe cultural exchange could have prevented the worst there, too – instead of nationalistic segregation and exclusion."<sup>6</sup>

**Consequences of colonialism and imperialism still far from being dealt with**

*Hans Köchler*, President of the International Progress Organisation, had warned in *Current Concerns* of 7 December 2021: "The threat of armed conflict emanating from alienation between cultures should not be underestimated." Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine is raging, de-

scribed not only by Federal Councillor *Ueli Maurer* as a proxy war between the USA/NATO and Russia. And a possible war by the West against China is becoming increasingly likely.

It is true: the consequences of colonialism and imperialism are far from being dealt with – according to former UN diplomat *Hans Christoph von Sponeck*, the inhabitants of 20 territories are still waiting to be liberated from their colonial masters – and this today, Anno Domini 2022! And: The disparagement of other cultures was and is a real problem. Fortunately, however, more and more historians of the former colonies are reclaiming their history, assisted by righteous Western colleagues.<sup>7</sup>

One of the goals of the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, in force since 2007, to which Hans Köchler referred in the same article, is: "To achieve a balanced exchange of cultural goods and services and to increase the mobility of arts and culture professionals".<sup>8</sup>

Wouldn't we be well advised to heed the concern of the UNESCO convention? To build bridges again instead of tearing them down? Also, as an antidote against further warlike entanglements. ●

<sup>1</sup> Schröter, Susanne. *Global gescheitert? Der Westen zwischen Annahmung und Selbsthass*. Freiburg i. Br. 2022

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/lauwarm-und-die-documenta-unterwegs-zu-einem-voelkischen-kulturverstaendnis-ld.1695607>

<sup>3</sup> Source: *Radio SRF, Echo der Zeit* of 25 August 2022

<sup>4</sup> Senti, Martin. "Kulturelle Apartheid in Berner Szenequartier: Blonde Dreadlocks sind nicht mehr genehm." (Cultural Apartheid in Bern's Scene Quarter: Blonde Dreadlocks Are No Longer Approved). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 28 July 2022

<sup>5</sup> Jullien, François. *Es gibt keine kulturelle Identität* (There is no cultural identity). Berlin 2017

<sup>6</sup> Walter Hugentobler in the *Thurgauer Zeitung* of 29 August 2022

<sup>7</sup> see the comprehensive history of the British Empire by *Caroline Elkins*, Professor of History and African American Studies at Harvard University, entitled *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*. See also interview with her: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O19wvq2cXqg>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unesco.de/kultur-und-natur/kulturelle-vielfalt/weltkulturbericht-2022>

# 80 years after Stalingrad – once again Germany is at war with Russia

## The citizens have to pay the price

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Not many in Germany reminded of this – and certainly not in the premature “victory” frenzy of recent days: 80 years ago, in the late summer of 1942, the German Wehrmacht, supported by other wartime enemies of the Soviet Union, began its attack on the large and industrial city of Stalingrad, located on the lower Volga River. On 12 September 1942, Hitler demanded that German troop commander General Paulus take Stalingrad. “The Russians”, Hitler said at the time, were “at the end of their tether.”<sup>1</sup> On 13 September, the major German attack began with dive-bombing and massive shelling from field artillery and mortars on Stalingrad’s inner defensive belt. The final result was a crushing German defeat and the death of more than one million people in battle.

### More and more German weapons for Ukraine

Today, 80 years later, German politicians across the board are calling for even more heavy weapons to be delivered to Ukraine. For example, on 11 September, *ARD Tagesschau* reported on its website: “Leading politicians of the governing parties in the Bundestag have called for more support for the Ukrainian military offensive against the Russian aggressors. ‘Germany must immediately contribute its part in Ukraine’s successes and supply protected vehicles, the *Marder* infantry fighting vehicle and the *Leopard 2* battle tank,’ *Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann*, chairwoman of the defence committee, told the dpa news agency. Thus Germany was standing by the Ukrainian people and taking on a ‘leading role in Europe in the fight for democracy in peace and freedom’. The FDP politician also called for no time to be lost. And this is certainly not the time for dithering and hesitation,’ Strack-Zimmermann continued.”<sup>2</sup> SPD leader *Lars Klingbeil* took a similar stance. The current military successes of the Ukrainian military were not least the result of “the fact that the West, that Germany, that we have supplied a crazy number of weapons in recent weeks and months. And that must continue. It will continue.”<sup>3</sup> Unlike in the past months, it could now also be a question of supplying German battle tanks – after consultation with the NATO partners. Now, however, German politicians want to be the intellectual pioneers. Klingbeil’s party colleague *Michael Roth*, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag, seconded that now it

was a matter of quickly supplying Ukraine with more weapons – for victory on the battlefield.<sup>4</sup> More heavy German weapons for Ukraine, as could be read on 12 September<sup>5</sup>, is also demanded by the Chairman of *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, *Omid Nouripour*.

### Germany has crossed “red lines” and acts like an enemy of Russia

So, no one should be surprised when the website RT DE, which is banned in Germany, writes on 4 September: “Germany is acting like an enemy of Russia.” Former Russian President and Prime Minister *Dmitry Medvedev*, now Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, had spread this with a short message after a press conference of the German governing parties on the same day. *RT DE* wrote: “Medvedev is not the only one who, in view of the fact that German weapons are killing again Russian soldiers and civilians in the Donbass, wonders what Germany has learned from the defeat in 1945. Obviously not what the victors wanted to teach the Germans.” Adding: “By the way, German aggression against Russian security and existential interests started on the Kiev Maidan back in 2013. At the latest.” *RT DE* attached a picture to its article showing *Olaf Scholz* standing in front of a German *Gepard* tank at the German training camp for Ukrainian soldiers in Putlos in Schleswig-Holstein.

In an interview with the Russian Federation’s ambassador to Germany, *Sergei Nechaev*, published on 12 September by the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, the ambassador said: “The very delivery of lethal weapons to the Ukrainian regime, which are used not only against Russian soldiers but also against the civilian population in the Donbass, is a ‘red line’ that the German government [...] should not have crossed.”<sup>6</sup> In the course of the Ukraine crisis, the German government destroyed the good bilateral relations with Russia and undermined the reconciliation process between the peoples. Germany was also one of the driving forces behind the West’s sanctions policy against Russia.

### The citizens have to pay the price for the war

As in all wars, the same is true now: the German citizen will have to pay the price for the German war against Russia. Germans in the east of the country – that is, in the part of the country that already once,

more than 30 years ago, had to bow to the west of the country – obviously have a greater sensorium for this, they are already noticing it. This is shown by the numerous statements from East Germany: they range from small and medium-sized businesses<sup>7</sup> to mayors<sup>8</sup> to the Minister-President of the Free State of Saxony<sup>9</sup>. And probably most of those who came together on 5 September for a first “Monday demonstration” in Leipzig will also think so – even though it is again to be expected that counterfeiterers will try to take the lead in the movement.

In addition, there are not only war losers, but also war profiteers. The economist *Christian Kreiß* pointed out in the German *Nachdenkseiten* on 6 September: “Who is profiting from German foreign and economic policy? One man’s sorrow, another man’s joy.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the thesis that not only the German government’s war policy, but also the grave consequences for the German population, both fit ideological concepts of a German ruling party and are convenient for the economic competitor, the USA, must also be examined.

German politics and the German media are aware of the discontent among the citizens. They counter this with hold-out slogans. One example of this was the *ARD* programme “Hart aber fair” on 5 September. “Winter is approaching; war seems far away: What is Ukraine’s freedom worth to us?” was the title of the programme. The website of the political talk show reads: “Germany is worried about expensive gas; Ukraine is fighting for survival. Is a warm appartement here more important than the war there?”<sup>11</sup> All the participants in the talk were pro-war.

Historians, however, point out: When the battle for Stalingrad began in the summer of 1942, the war had already been lost for the German Reich.<sup>12</sup>

P.S.: On 13 September, German Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* and Russian President *Vladimir Putin* spoke on the phone for 90 minutes. There is talk in our media that Scholz urged a diplomatic solution to the war in Ukraine. But the German government’s press release (see box) on the phone call, only repeats the familiar German demands, as they had already been formulated before 24 February 2022, and admonitions to the Russian side. There was no responsiveness to the Russian position, no criticism of the politics of the

### Press release of the German Federal Government

This afternoon (13 September), Federal Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* spoke on the phone with Russian President *Vladimir Putin*. The conversation followed the Chancellor's telephone call with Ukrainian President *Zelensky* last week (7 September). The 90-minute conversation was devoted to the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine and its consequences.

Given the seriousness of the military situation and the consequences of the war in Ukraine, the Chancellor urged the Russian President to find a diplomatic solution as soon as possible, based on a ceasefire, a complete withdrawal of Russian troops and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. The Chancellor stressed that any further Russian annexation moves would not go

unanswered and would not be recognised under any circumstances.

The Federal Chancellor called on the Russian President to treat captured combatants in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions, and to ensure unhindered access for the *International Committee of the Red Cross*.

With regard to the situation at the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant, the Federal Chancellor stressed the need to ensure the safety of the nuclear power plant. In this context, the Federal Chancellor called for avoiding any escalation steps and for the immediate implementation of the measures recommended in the report of the *International Atomic Energy Agency*.

The Federal Chancellor and the Russian President also spoke about the global food situation, which is particularly tense as a result of the Russian war of aggression. The Chancellor highlighted the important role of the Grains Agreement under the aegis of the United Nations and appealed to the Russian President not to discredit the agreement and to continue to implement it in full.

The Chancellor and the Russian President agreed to remain in contact.

Source: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/bundeskanzler-scholz-telefoniert-mit-dem-russischen-praesidenten-putin-2125516> of 13 September 2022

(unauthorised Translation  
Current Concerns)

### Press release of the Russian Presidential Office

*Vladimir Putin* had a telephone conversation with Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany *Olaf Scholz*.

The two leaders focused on developments around Ukraine in the context of Russia's special military operation. In particular, *Vladimir Putin* directed the attention of the Federal Chancellor to Ukraine's flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, the continuous shelling of cities in Donbass, which is killing civilians and inflicting deliberate damage on civilian infrastructure.

The security of the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) was also discussed. The President of Russia described in detail the IAEA-coordinated measures to ensure the physical protection of the ZNPP that Ukraine is subjecting to continuous missile attacks, despite the serious risk of causing a major disaster.

During an exchange of views on the implementation of the grain deal concluded in Istanbul on July 22, *Vladimir Putin* emphasised its package character and explained his concerns over the geographic imbalance in Ukrainian maritime shipments of grain, only a negligible share of which goes to the neediest countries. Moreover, there has been no progress in removing obstacles to Russian food and fertiliser exports. The President confirmed that Russia is ready to deliver large quantities of grain to external markets and to provide needy countries with the fertiliser blocked in European ports at no charge.

In response to a question from the Federal Chancellor, *Vladimir Putin* noted that, unlike Kiev, Russia grants the *International Committee of the Red Cross* access to POWs.

Describing the current energy situation in Europe, *Vladimir Putin* emphasised that Russia has always been and remains a reliable supplier of energy resources and fulfils all of its contractual obligations, while any interruptions, for example in the operation of Nord Stream 1, are the result of anti-Russia sanctions that interfere with the pipeline's technical maintenance. Considering that gas supply via Ukraine and Poland was stopped by their governments, as well as the refusal to put *Nord Stream 2* into operation, the attempts to shift the blame for Europe's energy problems onto Russia look very cynical.

The leaders agreed to maintain further contact.

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69343> of 13 September 2022

### "80 years after Stalingrad ..."

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current Ukrainian government and warfare, and no discussion of the question if the population in the predominantly Russian-speaking parts of the country can be expected to live in a Ukraine with a radical and violent anti-Russian policy after all that has happened. On the other hand, the press statement of the Russian presidential office is listing concrete points that would be worth reporting on in our media. •

<sup>1</sup> cit. <https://www.dw.com/de/stalingrad-als-wende-im-zweiten-weltkrieg/a-42320785> of 2 February 2018

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/ampel-bundesregierung-waffenlieferungen-ukraine-101.html> of 11 September 2022

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/gruenen-chef-omid-nouripour-fordert-mehr-waffen-fuer-ukraine-verteidigungsministerin-christine-lambrecht-skeptisch-li.266086> of 12 September 2022

<sup>6</sup> cit. <https://www.handelsblatt.com/dpa/wirtschaft-russischer-botschafter-berlin-ueberschreitet-mit-waffen-rote-linie/28675340.html> vom 12 September 2022

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.handwerk-pro-leipzig.de/m/news/1/749467/nachrichten/offener-obermeister-brief-an-den-bundeskanzler-und-minister-pr%C3%A4sidenten-von-sachsen.html>; <https://www.bbglive.de/2022/08/19/offener-brief-der-kreishandwerkerschaft-an-das-bundeskanzler->

[http://www.khs-anhalt.de/Obermeister-brief\\_2022.pdf](http://www.khs-anhalt.de/Obermeister-brief_2022.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Buergermeister-auf-Ruegen-fordern-Macht-Nord-Stream-2-auf,nordstream766.html> of 27 July 2022

<sup>9</sup> "The weapons must be silent, otherwise the whole world will fall into chaos". Saxony's Prime Minister *Michael Kretschmer* defends his statement to "freeze" the war in Ukraine". In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 8 September 2022

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=87655> of 6 September 2022

<sup>11</sup> <https://www1.wdr.de/daserste/hartaberfair/videos/video-der-winter-naht-der-krieg-wirkt-fern-was-ist-uns-die-freiheit-der-ukraine-wert-102.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/80-jahre-schlacht-von-stalingrad-interview-soenke-neitzel-militaerhistoriker-dlf-1e1b967d-100.html> of 20 August 2022

# What was the trigger for the Russian “special operation”?

## Ukrainian plan of attack or Russian imperialism?

by Hans Rudolf Fuhrer

Currently there is still a great deal of confusion shown in the discussion of the conflict in Ukraine. Ukrainian propaganda lies are no longer all believed unquestioningly and Russian counter-statements are no longer condemned as being merely a criminal aggressor’s mendacious justifications. A more objective assessment of the causes and reasons for the Russian “special operation” is slowly beginning to find expression. The basic principle of Roman law: “Audiatur et altera pars” (hear the other side too) is increasingly respected. It is conceivable that a friend-enemy relationship as the “specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced” (Carl Schmitt, 1932) may once again give way to the “concept of communicative reason” (Jürgen Habermas, 2022), although Konrad Paul Liessmann, “knowing who is your friend and where your enemy stands” (“Neue Zürcher Zeitung” of 20 August 2022), doubts it. I would like to

expand on his thoughts with my own reflections.

### Will even a preventive war theory have to be discussed some day?

In the GMS Annual 2022 “Feindbild Moskau” (enemy image Moscow), I analysed, from a neutral point of view, the discussion about the German justification of its invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 as a preventive war. It was shown that the term “preventive war” is not well defined. The US government provided a key document on the basis of which the problem can be discussed objectively 20 years ago. The terrorist act of 11 September 2001 on the Twin Towers in New York gave the discussion on the international law legality of a preventive war a decisive push towards clarification, and we must take this into account when assessing the Russian attack on Ukraine. On 17 September 2002, US President George W. Bush presented a new term in Congress, namely: “pre-emption”.

We speak of a pre-emptive attack if this takes place before an immediately expected enemy act of aggression.

An offensive act of war is considered pre-emptive if it is based solely on the assumption that a potential danger emanates from a defined opponent, and that this poses an existential threat to one’s own security interests.

### Evaluation

This US definition must guide the assessment also of Russian behaviour. Pre-emption can by all means be legitimate, under the aspect of self-defence; the UN Charter (Art. 51.7) also provides for its legality. Thus, there had to be evidence of imminent or even already triggered acts of war by Ukraine against Russia or against a Russian ally applying for help.



(Bild zvg)

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Extract from documents released by the Russian Ministry of Defence on 9 March 2022 purporting to prove Ukrainian plans to attack the Donbass. (picture <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/dokumentynua.pdf>)

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ic sanctions on the USA and few doubted their honesty.

We must assume that the rights claimed by one great power, like the USA, must in principle also be granted to another great power. The latter can thus also act preventively, based on its security interests. This raises many questions for the specific case of “Ukraine”, which have so far been largely ignored in Western assessments. Despite the widespread opinion that this is a criminal act by Moscow and not open for discussion, three questions should be asked by way of example:

1. Was it “necessary” for the Russian leadership to strike out pre-emptively?

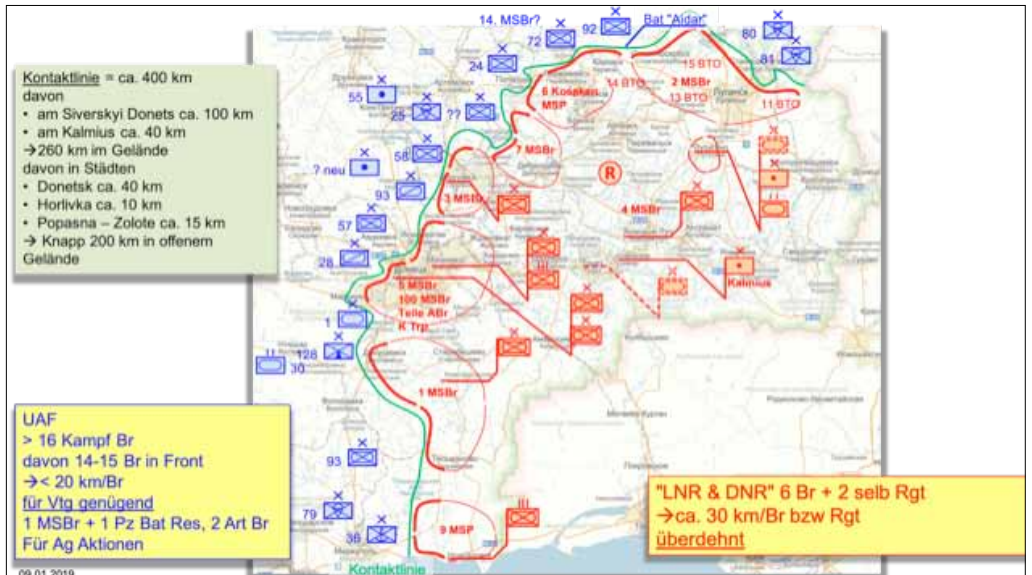
So according to the definition, an Ukrainian offensive against Russia must have been imminent or already launched.

Two documents

On 9 March, the Russian Ministry of Defence released captured secret Ukrainian National Guard documents proving a planned attack on separatists in the Donbass for 8 March 2022. These documents were classified as SECRET – unfortunately they are incomplete as a set of commands, but still meaningful enough to draw certain conclusions. They were examined, translated and evaluated by a proven expert at my request. They were issued by the 1st Deputy and Chief of Staff of the Ukrainian National Guard. In an initial order of 22 January 2022, the latter ordered various command units (including the 4th Brigade with its NATO instructors) to set up battalion combat groups to carry out “special combat tasks” as part of the “United Forces Operation”. (This is the term for the operation by Ukrainian government troops against the armed formations of the two breakaway oblasts). The receipt of the order was acknowledged.

This first document is written free from errors in a simple Ukrainian language, which is appropriate because its author had to be aware that it could be read by officers whose mother tongue was Russian. Registration notes are handwritten in accordance with Soviet tradition. It is astonishing that the document was written using information tools, which was forbidden in the Red Army at the time and in the Soviet Army from 1946 onwards.

The second document is an order issued by the commander of the National Guard on the same day. It is based on an order of the Commander-in-Chief of the



The disposition of the Ukrainian army has hardly changed since 2019. Some of the troops have been replaced, so that the unit numbers for February 2022 must be viewed with certain reservations, but this does not detract from the significance of the deployment.

(Graphic Ralph Bosshard)

Ukrainian Armed Forces dated 19 December 2021. This order is also classified as SECRET. It also orders the formation of battalion combat groups to strengthen combat power.

The measures to be taken are ordered according to a sequence plan, for example liaising with the Airborne Forces Command for the purpose of subordinating the battalion battle groups by 24 January, inspecting logistics by 3 February, training in cooperation with the 80th Airborne Brigade (Lla Br) at the Army Peacekeeping Operations and Security Training Centre in Staychi near Lvov/Lviv up to 28 February.

It is not clear from the order what was to happen to the battalion combat groups after 28 February. What is certain is that the 80th airborne brigade (Lla Brigade) was not deployed in the Donbass at that time. The additional formations visible on the orders are army pilots with helicopters and drones as well as transmission formations. This indicates a large operational deployment.

Evaluation

It can be ruled out that this ordered reinforcement of the Ukrainian government forces’ combat power in January 2022 was a consequence of special activities performed by the insurgents. Things had been quiet in the Donbass for weeks.

Conceivably, measures taken by the Ukrainian high command could be in response to the Russian troop build-up from the end of November 2021. In this sense, they would be legitimised as defensive preparations.

However, the plan is offensive and its authenticity has since been confirmed from the Russian point of view by further pieces of the puzzle, which were captured

in the village of Bugaevka in the Kharkiv region. All indications are that this is not a propagandistic fabrication of the Russian Ministry of Defence, yet there is a lack of certain essential evidential elements.

Since the Ukrainian attack plan was directed against the breakaway parts of the country and not against Russia in a territorial sense, two follow-up questions arise.

2. Does a right of secession exist?

The right of secession depends on the right of peoples to self-determination. It is an internationally guaranteed positive right, secured contractually by Article 1.1 of the two International Covenants on Human Rights of 1966 (ICCPR) and also by the Charter of the United Nations (Article 1.2), under certain conditions (among others, a substantial majority must vote in favour of secession), and it applies universally. On the other hand, there are examples like the German constitutional law doctrine, which declare the secession of a part of a state from this state to be illegal.

Evaluation

The various secession disputes (including Basque Country/Catalonia, Kurdistan, Taiwan), which all have to be judged independently, as well as the disputed definition of a “people” entitled to the right of secession and the fundamental denial of the right of secession by constitutional lawyers show that the matter is much more complicated, and that national interests often prevent the application of this right.

What seems very important to me is the fact that, for example, the recognition of Kosovo, which seceded from Serbia, has not been legitimised by any referendum in



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Kosovo (but only by a parliamentary decision). There is only a ruling by the ICJ in The Hague which has confirmed the right of the Kosovars to secede. This landmark ruling should have been implicitly applied to Crimea and to both the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts (in all of which referendums took place, for good measure).

These matters are further compounded by the fact that Crimea was integrated into Russia following a request for accession and that the two oblasts were recognised by a decision of the Duma on 22 February 2022, following a request on their part. President Putin had long refused to take this step. The West has never accepted these two processes and has condemned both as contrary to international law. The legality was thus judged differently than in the Kosovo issue. A neutral justification of this diverging attitude of the West has not been provided so far.

3 Is there a right to intervention in an internal conflict?

The Ukrainian government continued not to accept the comprehensive autonomy of the two oblasts, as part of Ukraine, despite signing the Minsk Agreement of 2014/15, of which the demand for this autonomy was an integral part. Ukraine invoked national interests and contractual assurances of the territorial inviolability of its nation. For eight years it has therefore waged incessant war against its breakaway parts. Russia supported the separatists’ struggle in various ways without openly intervening. In contrast to the covert and overt support of the Ukrainian army by NATO under US leadership, Russian behaviour was always sharply criticised. On 24 March 2021, President Zelensky issued a decree confirming that strategic goal of recapturing the breakaway provinces and Crimea that he had expressed since he took office. As a result, the Ukrainian army began to constantly reinforce itself along the confrontation line. The US satellite images can undoubtedly – if they are ever released – prove the Ukrainian as well as the Russian troop build-up. Since 15 February 2022, OSCE monitors recorded intense radio interference and increased artillery fire into the Donbass unprovoked by separatist shelling of Ukrainian positions (15 February: 41; 16 February: 76; 17 February: 316; 18 February: 654; 19 February: 1413; 20-21 February: 2026; 22 February: 1484). Many new civilian casualties were added to the more than 15,000 killed as well as the destruction wreaked in the previous eight years. Protests still did not rise in the West, although it had signed the Minsk agreements.

The fact is that on 24 February, it was not necessary to bring Ukrainian units to the eastern front from all that far afield. The Ukrainian assault units of the first echelon were ready at the line of confrontation with the Donbass (14-15 mechanised brigades).

The Ukrainian army dispositive has hardly changed since 2019. Some of the troops had been replaced, so the unit numbers for February 2022 should be viewed with certain reservations, but this does not detract from the significance of the deployment.

This concentration of troops did not go unnoticed by the Russian intelligence services, and the looming danger was, for example, brought to the attention of the readership in four possible scenarios in the “Komsomolskaya Pravda” of 9 – 15 February. Extensive evacuations of the civilian population were carried out.

On 24 February 2022, two more elements emerged: the call for help from the two republics recognised by Russia and, as seen from this point of view, a call for intervention on humanitarian grounds.

By coming to the aid of the two republics in the face of their imminent military subjection, President Putin provided emergency aid. From his point of view, conventional assistance overrode the prohibition of intervention under international law. Before his decision on the so-called “special operation”, he had several times pointed out that it was important to prevent a “Srebrenica” in the Donbass. In doing so, he relied on the events of the past eight years (including those in Mariupol), on the declared Ukrainian intentions to attack as well as its preparations for attack that had been established beyond doubt by intelligence services, and above all on the documented realisation of the threat of annihilation of ethnic Russians that had been voiced several times in the past eight years by the “Right Sector” (including “Russians are



Russian intelligence services were not unaware of the Ukrainian troop concentration, and the looming danger was brought to the attention of the readership, for example, in “Komsomolskaya Pravda” of 9-15 February 2022 in four possible scenarios. Of particular interest are the possible Ukrainian offensives against the Donbass and Crimea. (Picture: HRF)

animals, they must be eliminated.” (Dmitri Janosh).

Evaluation

Since the breakaway republics appealed to Russia for military assistance in self-defence in accordance with international law (Art. 51 UN Charter), the crucial question is whether an outside power is in all cases entitled to intervene in an internal conflict of a state on the basis of a call for assistance. This problem is at least as complex as the earlier questions. Historical experience shows that “calls for help” can also be constructed by an aggressor. A comparison with the Kosovo war may well serve again. It is disputed today whether the US justification that it wanted to prevent a genocide and was called for help by the Kosovars, who were doomed to die, stands up to objective scrutiny (see GMS annual 2023, to be published in September 2022). The same care of evaluation must also be applied in the Donbass case, unless we are of the opinion that if two do the same thing, it will yet never be the same. It should also be taken into account

**"What was the trigger..."**

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that the NATO-led air strikes against Serbia were primarily aimed at civilian facilities in order to break the population's will to resist. This led to almost no international protests and to no economic sanctions against NATO states. The 3rd Serbian Corps in Kosovo remained unmolested. The Russian warfare in Ukraine should be analysed in the same unreserved way. The same demand would apply to the Ukrainian side. In the meantime, *Amnesty International* has taken first steps in this direction and uncovered shocking results.

**Two open questions**

1 I wonder, why those aspects of a preemptive war mentioned above, as well as comparable previous and current USA actions, have so far been so little used by the Russians for propaganda purposes. Even if the publications in Russian media are not taken note of in the West or are deliberately suppressed, there might be opportunities. The Moscow government would then have to openly declare its true strategic goals. The slogans of "demilitarisation and denazification" of Ukraine would have to be decoded. In particular, reasons would have to be stringently revealed for the justification of an integral attack on a sovereign state, the attempt to overthrow its government and fillet the country, instead of only executing a limited intervention in favour of harassed secessionists. Had the open Russian intervention been limited to the two Donbass oblasts after the launching of the Ukrainian offensive, the reaction of the West would probably have been different. This delta of proportionality is irritating in any case. Thus remains the all-poisoning fear of the West, and especially of the intermediate zone in its East, that Moscow wants to bring all the lost territories of the former Soviet Union back "home to the empire". The "special operation" has given new nourishment to the traditional "image of Moscow as the enemy", and this has since prevented the resumption of the discussion initiated in the 1990s about a security zone in Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and among equal partners who are satisfied with their borders. In return, the strategic goal of the US hawks to marginalise Russia in terms of power politics would have to give way to an alternative based on partnership. Then also the logical conclusion that Ukraine is fighting a "proxy war" for covert NATO interests would be unfounded. The consequence would be a rethinking of the transatlantic relationship and the current vassalage of the EU, but also a rethinking of the Ukrainian leadership's policy in dealing with its population. This outline of the problem alone shows that the matter is



*Ukrainian ultra-nationalists and international sympathisers with fascist ideas.  
(Picture <https://twitter.com/Conflicts/status/538103872322289664/photo/1>)*

very complex and that playing with hidden cards and the lies on both sides cannot possibly lead to a sustainable peaceful understanding, but may in an extreme case result in nuclear self-destruction.

2 I also ask myself why the NZZ, a liberal newspaper that sees itself as objective, announced the article of 20 August 2022 which I mentioned in my lead so luridly: "The Ukraine war has torn Europeans out of their flowering dreams of a new eternal age of reason, dialogue and balance. Now they are facing the painful lesson of regaining the political dimension." The text is subsequently formulated in a more differentiated way, although giving a lot of space to the largely unweighted bellicose reflections of "many contemporaries". Thus, the spotlight is on eye-catching sentences such as: "The war has brought a tremendous clarity of thought." "We now know where the enemy stands." "One does not enter into an intimate relationship with the enemy." ... The "crown lawyer" of the Third Reich, *Carl Schmitt*, unfortunately suppresses relativising statements with his assertion that "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy." Criticism is set very discreetly: "The adversary, who may still be granted negotiable interests, becomes a criminal, the rejected, the barbarian, the absolute enemy, who must not be merely defeated but destroyed, or at least punished for the wrong he has done. This presupposes not only a superior moral standpoint, but above all the achievement of a monopoly of power and violence that can no longer be countered. Whether this would be an altogether desirable state remains undecided." Thus, fascist statements remain largely unevaluated: only the demonisation of climate deniers would lead to an effective climate policy, or the social ostracism of xeno-

phobes and racists would enable a responsible migration policy.

Consistently, the silencing of so-called "Putin sympathisers" is the effective defence of one's own community of values and the legitimisation of a "correct" foreign policy. But this is national socialist thinking, and where this friend-foe image leads is shown by performance bans on Russian composers, bans on Russian books in Ukraine and planned entry bans on Russian citizens considered guilty by association. In my opinion, the writer *Ilija Trojanow* was right when he said in his speech at the opening of the Salzburg Festival: "Nationalism leads to war and confuses thinking."

**Conclusion**

I have tried to show the way of objective historical analysis, setting out from the preemptive war thesis and evaluating the problem areas that arise from it. Of course, it is too early to do this comprehensively, as we do not have access to the relevant sources. Moreover, I do not see any chance of doing so at present. The positions of both parties are too entrenched, and far too many victims have already been caused by this conflict. If we do not want the war to continue until the defeat of one side or the exhaustion of both sides, I believe that both warring parties should first be approached by a suitable person to find out whether there is political scope for preliminary negotiations and whether there is a chance for later negotiations. For this, however, signs of goodwill are needed from both sides. It seems to me that American politicians, in particular, hold the most important keys to a solution. Even if it is too early to make a historical analysis, it is never too early to depart from the pattern of "here the good guys - there the bad guys" and to realise that although one-eyed people can see, they do lack depth of focus.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# Swiss electricity supply

## Politicians are slowly recognising the seriousness of the situation

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

Gas and electricity prices are also skyrocketing in Switzerland. In the National Council and the Council of States, which began their autumn session on 12 September, corresponding proposals are ready: Financial aid for low-income households, a “rescue umbrella” for “system-critical electricity companies” (specifically for Switzerland’s largest electricity company Axpo, which is wholly owned by the cantons of north-eastern Switzerland and their power plants). In addition, the ESPEC Committee of the Council of States, which is responsible, is taking urgent measures “to increase winter electricity production from renewable energies as quickly as possible”, and a demand by the Swiss Federation of Commerce (sgv) goes in the same direction. For the sgv, the top priority at the moment is to protect SMEs from astronomical electricity prices, in other words, to save thousands of jobs and avert a wave of bankruptcies.

Federal Councillor *Simonetta Sommaruga*, head of the Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications DETEC, launched her energy-saving campaign under the motto “Don’t waste!” with the emotional but inaccurate words: “The war in Ukraine is causing energy to become scarce – in Switzerland, too. This affects us all, the population as well as our companies.”<sup>1</sup> Firstly, the feared gas shortage is not due to the war in Ukraine, but to the artificial shortage of fossil energies by the Anglo-American oil and gas multinationals and the Gulf states. The European governments, including the Swiss government, are adding to this with their uniquely harsh sanctions against Russia: they are knowingly and willingly accepting that the



Solar System, Gondo in Wallis. (picture gondosolar)

Russian oil and gas flow, which has been reliably flowing for decades, will come to a standstill or dry up completely. Secondly, the threat of a shortage of electricity in winter is homemade and has been known for years, this year intensified by the presumed loss of French nuclear power, which Switzerland uses to fill its electricity gaps in winter. France is likely to have difficulties in procuring enough uranium for its 56 NPPs because uranium supplies from Russia are officially frowned upon in the EU area (but are apparently still being procured to some extent from behind the scenes<sup>2</sup>). In addition, the French NPPs benefit from the high electricity prices to which they contribute with their shut-downs.

Knowingly and willingly, our governments are allowing their people and busi-

nesses to run into an energy shortage. What would *Obelix* say? The Europeans are crazy!

### Ground-mounted solar systems in Valais high valleys

The fact that Switzerland is making far too slow progress with the expansion of renewable energies has been known long before the Ukraine war. Now, however, things are moving. *Peter Bodenmann* (former President of the SP Switzerland), *Pascal Couchepin* (former Federal Councillor, FDP) and *Oskar Freysinger* (former National Councillor and former Cantonal Councillor for the Valais, SVP), all three citizens of the canton of Valais, have joined forces across party lines to support two solar projects in uninhabited, sunny high valleys on the territory of the municipalities of Gondo and Grengiols.

The Committee for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy (ESPEC) of the Council of States has quickly picked up this thread. On 29 August, it decided to “create the legal basis for the accelerated expansion of photovoltaics [...]”. For “plants with a high proportion of winter electricity production, as is particularly conceivable in alpine terrain”, rapid and uncomplicated approval procedures are to be provided for with a planned annual production of over 20 GWh. In particular, “the interest in their realisation should take precedence over other interests of national and cantonal importance”. “The consent of the landowners and local communities is a prerequisite. The federal government also supports these facilities with

### Freezing in the living room or banning Bitcoin?

mw. To begin with, it is good for us post-war generations, spoiled by prosperity, to think seriously about the waste of resources from time to time. Many of us have been doing this for a long time and are also willing to learn. But when the Federal Council and the daily newspapers try to make us believe that we can prevent an energy shortage by taking shorter showers and lowering heating temperatures, or even “help put a stop to Putin in the Donbass and make sure that no one at home has a cold bed”, then they are mixing up carrots and cabbages and manipulating people in the worst possible way.

By the way, did you know how much electricity could be saved with a Bitcoin ban? Ex-Swissgrid crisis manager Paul Niggli: “We should ban Bitcoins. I am shocked that no one has come up with this idea yet.

The Bitcoin business is based on computers that require an incredible amount of computer power and eat up electricity accordingly. A single Bitcoin transaction consumes as much electricity as a household in one and a half months. *Global Bitcoin electricity consumption is roughly twice that of Switzerland.* (emphasis mw) And we “ordinary people”, who don’t rake in speculative profits with a big ladle but have to budget with our wages or pensions, we are supposed to freeze in our living rooms?

Sources: Kälín, Karl. “One should prescribe compulsory stocks.” In: *Walliser Bote* of 24 August 2022.

Neff, Benedict. “Showers for two and lids on the pot – with its energy tips, the government is distracting from its own failings”. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 14 September 2022

**"Swiss electricity supply"**

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an investment contribution."<sup>3</sup> In Gondo and Grengiols, the owners and the municipalities are of course in agreement, because they would get cheap electricity and contributions for the site municipalities. Other mountain communities would certainly follow suit, and if the federal contributions cover costs to some extent, the Swiss electricity companies will also be prepared to invest. On the other hand, *Pro Natura* and the *Foundation for Landscape Protection* have already come forward and are calling for greater consideration of environmental interests.<sup>4</sup>

**Priority for renewable energies: a paradigm shift**

On 9 September 2022, a clear majority of the *ESPEC-S* (9 to 2 votes with 2 abstentions) approved the Federal Council's proposals for the revision of the Energy and Electricity Supply Act with reservations and inserted substantial amendments. While the Federal Councillor responsible, Simonetta Sommaruga, did not include the promised "streamlining of the licensing procedure" in the draft bill, the Council of States Committee considers it "necessary to act more quickly and go further" than the Federal Council in the expansion of renewable energies.<sup>5</sup> In order to achieve higher target values for electricity generation from renewable energies more quickly, the Committee decided by 8 votes to 5 "that the fulfilment of these expansion targets should enjoy priority over environmental law and must not be hampered by its provisions". On 15 September, the Council of States approved this proposal as an urgent federal law with 32 votes in favour, 9 against and 4 abstentions. In doing so, it heralded a paradigm shift. In a power shortage situation, the supply of energy to the population – under certain conditions – would have to be given higher priority by the administration and the courts than the protection of the landscape and the environment. Now it is the turn of the National Council.

The proposals of the *Swiss Confederation of Commerce* (sgv) of 12 September go in the same direction: "The construction of small-scale plants of all sustainable technologies at the household level should be exempt from approval. Large-scale hy-

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*"Knowingly and willingly, our governments are allowing their people and businesses to run into an energy shortage. What would Obelix say? The Europeans are crazy!"*

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droelectric and wind power projects should be exempt from the objection procedure". According to the sgv, the insecurity of the energy supply, combined with the "virtually exploding electricity prices", "no longer permits any delay with regard to the economic survival of some SMEs".<sup>6</sup>

**Sensational "No" to the "Opening" of the Swiss electricity market**

Another decision by the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committee of the Council of States (*ESPEC-S*) is nothing short of sensational! In its media release of 9 September, the Committee "opposes the complete opening of the electricity market proposed by the Federal Council". The reason given by the *ESPEC*: "In its work, the Commission has found out that full market liberalisation is not capable of gaining a majority and makes no sense in view of the current situation."

This means nothing less than a "No!" to the full privatisation of the public service in the electricity sector demanded by Brussels and sought by the Federal Council for more than 20 years. Or to put it another way: it means a No to an electricity agreement with the EU. An "institutional umbrella", as Brussels wants to impose on Switzerland, floats off into the distance. A look back is necessary here.

**20 years ago, the Swiss people stopped the rapid march towards Brussels**

In 2000, the Federal Council and the parliamentary majority approved the *Electricity Market Act* (EMA), a pure liberalisation law in accordance with EU directives, without protection of supply security and without price regulation. At the time, the *Swiss Trade Unions Federation* (SGB) alone took the initiative for a referendum. On 22 September 2002, the electorate said no to the sell-off of Swiss power plants with 52.6 per cent of the vote. A few years later, the Federal Council and the parliamentary majority, who were already staring at the EU snake like

chickens instead of adhering to the will of the people, drafted a law with partial market liberalisation, which has been in force since 2009. Nobody wanted to collect 50,000 signatures a second time – that's how you strangle direct democracy! In a "first step" (also called "salami tactics"), large consumers (from 100,000 kWh per year) have been able to choose their own supplier since then (i. e. buy their electricity on the "free" market), while households and small businesses remained in the state-guaranteed basic supply. However, businesses also had the option of remaining in the basic supply, what many SMEs did. On the other hand, once a company had opted for the market, it could not return to the basic supply.

For many years, the model of "partial market liberalisation" paid off for the SMEs that had chosen this path, while the companies and households in the basic supply could not choose their suppliers and thus also the electricity tariffs - which were based on the cost price. The Federal Council has been aiming for the second salami slice for some time: complete opening of the electricity market, i. e., free choice of electricity supplier also for households and small businesses. Federal Council quote: "The Federal Council expects the restructuring of the electricity market to strengthen decentralised electricity production and thus improve the integration of renewable energies into the electricity market."<sup>7</sup> It doesn't get more absurd than this!

**Swiss electricity supply as a traditional public service**

The Swiss power plant companies, including the large ones such as Axpo and Alpic, but especially the numerous small ones, have always been almost exclusively owned by the public sector, i. e., primarily by the cantons and communes. Many communes operate their own hydroelectric power plant on their land and supply households in the locality with their electricity. If they do not have enough electricity for their consumers, they have to buy it on the market. The large corporation Axpo is also wholly owned by the public sector, but at the same time it is a multi-lateral company, which means that Axpo invests in wind power plants on the North Sea, for example, and does business in many countries. Some large corporations are partly listed on the stock exchange, but that is the exception.

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The Bitcoin business is based on computers that require an incredible amount of computer power and eat up electricity accordingly. A single Bitcoin transaction consumes as much electricity as a household in one and a half months. Global Bitcoin electricity consumption is roughly twice that of Switzerland. (*Paul Niggli*, former crisis manager of *Swissgrid*)

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**"Swiss electricity supply"**

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For the basic electricity supply, this diverse network means that the tariffs of the individual suppliers are not the same for all Swiss households. In the *Electricity Supply Act*, the Confederation lays down the obligation of the approximately 630 network operators to ensure supply, as well as precise regulations for calculating tariffs. The tariffs must be reported to the *Federal Electricity Commission* EICom, which publishes them in advance. However, as EICom writes: "Prices vary within Switzerland between network operators, in some cases considerably, which is mainly due to major differences in energy procurement (share of own production, procurement strategy)." In 2023, electricity prices in the basic supply for households will increase by 27% on average. However, "the differences can be much higher at the local level", according to EICom.<sup>8</sup> It should be added that due to the strong increase in e-mobility and unchecked immigration, the regional power plant companies are being forced to purchase more and more additional electricity. Nevertheless, the Swiss electricity system, especially the hydropower companies, is still largely rooted in the ground. Their integration into the EU market, but also a standardisation of electricity tariffs by the federal government, would not fit in with the small-scale, federal system. Public service – with the exception of postage stamps – does not necessarily mean that it is the same price everywhere in the country.

**Many SMEs want to go back to the basic supply**

In today's situation of electricity shortages and skyrocketing electricity costs, the basic supply model is proving to be clearly superior, many Swiss SMEs are reaching their limits and want to return to the basic supply. For example, *Fabio Regazzi*, president of the *Swiss Federation of Commerce*, Centre national councillor and roller shutter manufacturer from Gordola in the canton of Ticino. His company employs 140 people and has an annual turnover of around 25 million Swiss francs. His family business has been a customer of *Società Elettrica Sopracenerina* (SES) since it was founded a good 75 years ago. When the Swiss electricity market was opened up to medium-sized companies in 2009, Fabio Regazzi remained an SES customer, but chose the more attractive offer of the "free" market there. In 2022, his company will pay 60,000 Swiss francs for the electricity. Now his four-year contract is coming to an end, and the electricity provider is asking for a whopping one million for 2023! If he does not find a solution, Regazzi says, he will have to cut jobs.<sup>9</sup> According

"In its media release of 9 September, the Committee 'opposes the complete opening of the electricity market proposed by the Federal Council'. [...] This means nothing less than a 'No!' to the full privatisation of the public service in the electricity sector demanded by Brussels and sought by the Federal Council for more than 20 years. Or to put it another way: it means a No to an electricity agreement with the EU. An 'institutional umbrella', as Brussels wants to impose on Switzerland, floats off into the distance."

to the daily press, about 22,000 Swiss companies are in a similarly difficult situation.

That is why the *Swiss Federation of Commerce* sgv is proposing a regulation whereby companies can return to the basic supply from the so-called free electricity market at their own request. To prevent constant back and forth, depending on market prices, they would have to comply with certain conditions, for example a lead time of one year, and after switching to the basic supply they would have to remain there for at least 3 years.<sup>10</sup>

It doesn't scare off a goat: The public service and direct democracy are vastly superior to internationalisation and profit orientation. The Swiss electorate will still have a say in the design of the electricity supply!

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.energieschweiz.ch/programme/nicht-verschwenden/spartipps-privathaushalte/>  
<sup>2</sup> "Uran aus Russland: Kein Gas, dafür Uran. Frankreichs Atomindustrie ist auf russische Lieferungen angewiesen" (Uranium from Russia: No gas, but uranium. France's nuclear industry relies on Rus-

sian supplies.). In: *Zeit online* of 13 September 2022

<sup>3</sup> "Dringliche Massnahmen zur Erhöhung der Winterstromproduktion" (Urgent measures to increase winter electricity production). *Media release* of the ESPEC-S of 29 August 2022

<sup>4</sup> Bühler, Stefan. "Solar-Revolution: Bergler im Goldrausch" (Solar revolution: mountain people in a gold rush). In: *Walliser Bote* of 30 August 2022

<sup>5</sup> "Stärkung der Versorgungssicherheit mit ambitionierten Zielen für einen schnellen Ausbau der erneuerbaren Energien" (Strengthening security of supply with ambitious targets for rapid expansion of renewables). *Media release* of the ESPEC-S of 9 September 2022

<sup>6</sup> Swiss Federation of Commerce sgv. "Massnahmen zur Bewältigung der Stromkrise – es muss rasch gehandelt werden". (Measures to tackle the electricity crisis – action must be taken quickly). *Media release* of 12 September 2022

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.uvek.admin.ch/uvek/de/home/energie/oeffnung-strommarkt.html>

<sup>8</sup> "Sharply rising electricity prices in 2023". *Media release* from the Federal Electricity Commission of 6 September 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Müller, Myrtle. "1600 percent more for electricity!" In: *Blick* of 10 September 2022

<sup>10</sup> Swiss Federation of Commerce sgv. „Massnahmen zur Bewältigung der Stromkrise – es muss rasch gehandelt werden" (Measures to tackle the electricity crisis – action must be taken quickly). *Media release* of 12 September 2022

## The question of nutrition and environmental protection

by Hans Bieri, Swiss Association for Industry and Agriculture (SVIL)

The Swiss agricultural scientist Urs Niggli rejects the idea that the high price segment "organic" in the field of nutrition is at the expense of the nutritional basis of the world's poor ("No people are starving in Africa because we eat organic products", in: "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 8 August 2022).

In the meantime – to give an example – almost 20 million hectares of the best Ukrainian soils are being used by Western investors with state-of-the-art technology to export cheap grain to the Maghreb and Africa. The World Agricultural Report of 2008 criticises this development, which, starting from agrarian priority areas with the most modern technology, damages indigenous agriculture in the Maghreb and Africa and thus destroys previous forms of local supply.

This has created the vulnerabilities to disruption that are now playing out, for example, in the Ukraine war. However,

one should not only mention the war in Ukraine, but also the destruction of Iraqi grain crops in the Iraq war, the destruction in Libya and Syria, especially since the agriculture of these countries was not only damaged by cheap imports, but also directly and specifically by military means.

The question of nutrition is linked to the question of ecology. This is not only about the deterioration of the natural bases of production in connection with the global underpayment of agriculture, but also about the climate as one of the repercussions that show the unsustainable use of the economic bases of production and life.

The question is, why not start with the obvious possibilities of social and economic reorganisation in favour of sufficient incomes for peasant agriculture or with the recultivation of the destroyed natural basis (greening of deserts)? The proposal to genetically reorganise nature instead is surprisingly "conventional."

# Swiss Matura\* – quo vadis?

by Dr phil. René Roca, grammar school teacher

At the moment, a consultation procedure is being conducted almost silently within the framework of the so-called “Further Development of the Gymnasium Baccalaureate” (WEGM). The first step is a reform of the Matura Recognition Regulations and Ordinance (MAR/MAV, basically identical). A further reform step will follow in a year’s time, when a new nationwide framework curriculum (RLP) will be developed, for which only a “hearing” is planned. Why these reforms?

## Reforms without necessity

The key players in this reform process, the *Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research* (EAER) and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK), justify the reform steps with the fact that “the Swiss education system has changed profoundly in recent decades”. This is certainly the case. In this context, explicit reference is made to the *HarmoS* Concordat, the new language-regional curricula for compulsory schooling (including Curriculum 21) and the Bologna Process at universities. As the “last building block”, the upper secondary level, i.e. in addition to the vocational schools and the KV (vocational business school), the Matura schools must now be “fitted” into the new system. According to the EAER and the EDK, this integration is necessary because the basis of upper secondary education has hardly developed since the last reform in 1995. In addition, “megatrends” such as globalisation and digitalisation are cited as justification for the WEGM in order to dismiss critics of the reform right away as eternalists and technophobes. The WEGM notabene is taking place at a time when the serious shortcomings and catastrophic effects of the above-mentioned reforms are clearly visible and are therefore attracting more and more critics, who are now also being heard in the media.

In the last 25 years, there have always been sensible partial revisions of the MAR (for example, the introduction of computer science as a compulsory sub-



Grammar school students in chemistry class. (picture caro)

ject). A fundamental reform is absolutely not imperative, so the reform is being carried out without necessity.

## Focus on competences

For the time being, the Swiss Matura still has a very good reputation worldwide. But why are the reforms being pushed through anyway? Overall, the WEGM uncritically submits to the aforementioned “megatrends” in order to achieve an internationalisation of education. Ultimately, it is a mere adaptation to the already failed Anglo-Saxon model, which focuses only on competences and further depletes the concept of education and knowledge. Thus, the orientation towards competences is mentioned and initialised for the first time in the MAR; for the new, completely overloaded RLP (framework curriculum), competences are simply the basis. Where does this lead? The central role of the teacher is crucial for the success of the educational process; however, this role is further weakened by the reforms. Without a doubt, they will also lead to more control and steering, i.e., to more control from above and a consolidation of the top-down strategy. This is good for the education bureaucracy of the Confederation and the cantons, but bad for the teachers. The next reform steps, such as the fundamental questioning of the subject canon (similar to the KV reform), are already in the pipeline.

## Rejection of the WEGM – a fundamental discussion is necessary

The entire reform is following a tried and tested pattern: an overly ambitious reform package is chased through short-term “consultations” and a consultation procedure. The package is then slimmed down a bit, but the rest however is pushed through, an ultimately non-transparent and undemocratic procedure. What to do?

If the first goal of the Gymnasium Baccalaureate, namely “examination-free access to university and teacher training colleges” is to continue to be achieved throughout Switzerland in the long term, the previous reforms of the primary schools and also the “Bologna Process” at the universities must be critically questioned. The sole fixation on what are ultimately ideologically motivated “competences” must be revised and learning goals need to be defined more clearly again with a reasonable concept of knowledge. Only in this way can a humanistic concept of education be regained that will secure the quality of grammar schools in the long term and stop the continuous level lowering. In addition, the second goal of the Gymnasium Baccalaureate, the “deepened maturity for society”, would come within reach again. •

\* maturity diploma

# Neutral and impartial humanitarian work saves lives!

Why it is so important to talk about the Red Cross principles right now

by Eva Funk\*

The false reports about the mission of the *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* and the highly emotionally charged debates, especially on social media, have caused great uncertainty. This makes it all the more important that we agree on the principles that form the basis of our assistance to the most vulnerable – that we understand them and know why our movement and our engagement must remain neutral and impartial at all times.

The Red Cross Movement is providing neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian assistance in the Ukraine conflict and in the resulting humanitarian emergencies. We act without taking sides and refrain from any judgement. We support people in need, regardless of their origin, nationality or political convictions. The focus is always and at all times on the most vulnerable.

This attitude, in line with our Red Cross principles (in particular impartiality and neutrality), is immensely important to ensure that aid providers such as the *Ukrainian Red Cross*, the ICRC and our Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners can continue to access civilians and provide assistance where it is most needed.

- The Red Cross principle of impartiality means that only the extent of need or neediness is relevant to our assistance. Our help applies indiscriminately to all people who need it.
- Our neutrality is a prerequisite, especially in conflict situations, for us to be able to provide assistance to all affected people – regardless of which side they are on. It ensures that we can carry out vital humanitarian measures where they are needed.

\* *Eva Funk*, diffusion specialist at the Swiss Red Cross.

## The 7 Red Cross Principles

The work of all members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is based on the same principles: The Seven Red Cross Principles of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntaryness, Unity and Universality. They are the expression of our values and ideals. They provide orientation and create trust. Above all, however, they are a call to action: to protect the life, health and dignity of people everywhere and at all times and to stand by them in emergency situations.



*The Red Cross provides neutral, impartial and independent help in emergencies.  
(Picture "Ready for redcross", p. 29)*

Neutrality and impartiality are not abstract concepts or fine-minded values. They are the indispensable foundation of our humanitarian work on behalf of the most vulnerable – they demand respect and build trust. They enable the Red Cross to reach out and help the civilian population in an armed conflict.

They must therefore be reflected in all our activities and decisions, but also in our communication, especially in our choice of language and images. For example, we avoid taking sides through symbols (e.g., national flags, certain colours or subjects) or certain terms.

# Mexican parliamentarians support Julian Assange

by Andrea Becerril, Víctor Ballinas and Fernando Camacho

The stance of [Mexico's] President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to confront the US government and offer asylum to Julian Assange "will resonate throughout the world", highlighted the father of WikiLeaks founder John Shipton recently in the Senate during an event in which deputies from the Morena faction promised to fight from Congress for the release of the journalist and activist.

Later, during a discussion at UNAM's Faculty of Philosophy and Literature, John Shipton, accompanied by his son Gabriel, stressed that although Julian Assange is not guilty of any crime, he has been subjected to "cruel and malignant treatment" for more than 13 years simply for having exposed war crimes committed by Washington in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Julian's case is "a disturbing example of how justice can be trampled on in today's world without anything happening".

In UNAM, Gabriel Shipton said that despite the fact that the trial of his brother was flawed, he still had a chance of the UK Supreme Court preventing his extradition to the United States after an appeal to that effect was allowed a fortnight ago.

In the Senate, he pointed out that demands had been made in most parliaments around the world to drop the charges against Assange, and he urged the Morena legislators present not to let up in their defence of press freedom. He asked them to "let their colleagues in the US Senate know how they see the unjust persecution" of his brother.

As part of the Dialogues for Freedom of Thought, Expression and the Press, Senator Citlalli Hernández Mora, Secretary General of Morena, supported "the outstretched hand" offered by the Mexican government to the founder of WikiLeaks. Together with Senator Héctor Vas-

concelos, she urged that the Assange case be brought more into public focus and that they join the fight that John and Gabriel Shipton have been waging for years for the journalist's release.

Hernández Mora insisted that Mexico has been a world reference in terms of political asylum since the 19th century and argued that Julian Assange must find refuge in this country, as José Martí, Leon Trotsky, Luis Buñuel, León Felipe, Fidel Castro, the family of Salvador Allende, the Spanish Republicans and all those who in the past decades fled Latin American dictatorships have experienced.

Activist and journalist Alina Duarte, who organised Shiptons' visit to Mexico,

## Assange appointed as Mexico City's guest of honour

The head of government of the Mexican capital Claudia Sheinbaum symbolically appointed Julian Assange as guest of honour and handed over the keys of the city to his father and brother, who took part in Mexico's independence celebrations on 15 and 16 September. The city of Mexico has always defended "the great freedoms", he said.

The presidents of Chile, Colombia and Bolivia have also called for Assange's release. On the same day, an open letter demanding Assange's release was also made public to the new British Prime Minister Liz Truss, written by Manuel Zelaya, ex-President of Honduras, and signed by numerous personalities from Latin America, including Fernando Lugo, ex-President of Paraguay, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel.

Source: <https://amerika21.de/print/260055>



"We have to stop believing that the case of Julian Assange is really about a criminal investigation for sexual offences, espionage and hacking. What WikiLeaks has done threatens political and economic elites worldwide alike. The Assange case shows that governments today are no longer concerned with legitimate confidentiality, but with suppressing the truth to protect uncontrolled power, corruption and impunity."

Nils Melzer

(Translation Current Concerns)

concluded the Senate event by saying, "If we don't get Julian Assange out of jail, it could be any of us tomorrow."

Source: <https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2022/09/14/politica/resuena-el-apoyo-de-mexico-a-julian-assange/> of 14 September 2022 (Translation Current Concerns)

## "Neutral and impartial ..."

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Examples in the current Ukraine crisis:

- We do not use the colours yellow and blue
- No postings with hashtags like #weStandWithUkraine or similar.
- We refrain from using terms like "separatism", "occupation", "war of aggression".
- We refrain from phrases like "We support Ukraine". Better: "We support vulnerable people in Ukraine" or "We support people who have fled".

In addition, it is important that we continue to engage with vulnerable people whose fates have fallen out of the public eye due to current events. We draw atten-

## International Humanitarian Law

Wars and armed conflicts have dramatic consequences for the populations affected. International humanitarian law – also known as "the law of war" or "the law of armed conflict" – sets clear limits to war. It protects civilians, the wounded, the sick, prisoners of war, internees, shipwrecked persons, medical and pastoral personnel as well as civilian objects and facilities such as hospitals, ambulances, medical material and relief supplies. In addition to this it restricts the means of warfare and prohibits the use of certain weapons that cause unnecessary suffering.

tion to the plight in other crisis and conflict areas around the world. In accordance with the principle of impartiality, we help where our aid is most urgently needed. For example, we stand up for the rights, protection and dignity of all refugees in Switzerland – regardless of their origin, nationality, religious affiliation or residence status. We are committed to the equal treatment of refugees and prioritise where the need and vulnerability are greatest. Our commitment to people from Ukraine must not be at the expense of vulnerable people fleeing other crisis areas.

Source: "Ready for red cross 2, 2022" (Swiss Red Cross Youth Magazine), p. 28f.

(Translation Current Concerns)