

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

BRICS Summit in Johannesburg reminds of the natural aspiration of all peoples

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

From 22–24 August 2023, the representatives of the five BRICS countries have met in Johannesburg, South Africa, for the XV Summit. Up to 600 members of delegations from the five states Brazil, India, China, and South Africa have been led by their presidents or prime ministers, with Foreign Minister *Lavrov* taking over for Russia. To spare South Africa the dilemma caused by an ICC arrest warrant, Russian President *Putin* had agreed with the South African government not to travel to the summit. However, Vladimir Putin was connected to the summit via video and spoke several times.

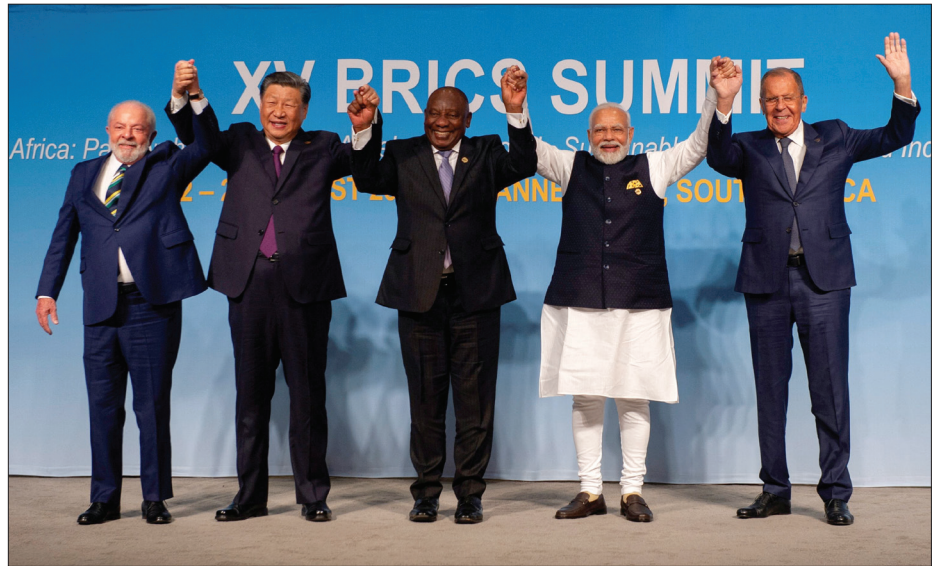
In addition to the five BRICS states, representatives of 61 other states were present, including 46 from Africa with 20 presidents or prime ministers, as well as UN Secretary-General *António Guterres* – but no NATO or EU state. The three-day summit was followed by other BRICS forums.

Comprehensive final declaration and concrete results

The comprehensive final declaration of the summit (<https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Jhb-II-Declaration-24-August-2023-1.pdf>) has 26 pages covering 94 points. After a preamble, there are declarations on a “Partnership for Inclusive Multilateralism”, on the “Promotion of an Environment conducive to Peace and Development”, for a “Partnership for Accelerated Growth” and a “Partnership for Sustainable Development” (the two largest chapters of the final declaration), for a “Deepening of Peoples’ Relations” and finally for the “Further Development of Institutions”.

All BRICS decisions must be taken unanimously.

Important results of the summit were – the agreement on accession criteria (more than 40 states have signalled interest in joining and 23 states have submitted a formal application for membership) and the invitation to six states (Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) to become full members of



The five heads of delegation at the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg: Lula da Silva, Xi Jinping, Cyril Ramaphosa, Shira Narendra Modi and Sergei Lavrov. (Picture ma)

the BRICS on 1 January 2024, which will then be called BRICS plus;

- the unanimous demand for a reform of the UN, the UN Security Council, the Bretton Woods Institutions (IMF and World Bank), the WTO etc. towards an increased international representativeness, equality and “democracy”, especially to promote equality and more say for the Global South;
- the further development of international transport routes (for example, the “New Silk Road” initiated by China and the “North-South Corridor” initiated by Russia) to facilitate and promote trade among the BRICS countries, but also the trade of the Global South in general;
- the strengthening and expansion of the BRICS-plus Development Bank to promote lending to the BRICS-plus countries, but also generally to the Global South, and for more independence from the IMF and the World Bank;
- the intention and the mandate to the responsible bodies of the BRICS-plus countries to work out concrete plans by the next summit in October 2024 in Kazan, Russia (Russia will take over the chairmanship next year) on how in-

ternational trade and in particular the trade of the BRICS plus countries can become less dependent on the US dollar.

Reports and comments of varying quality

The reports, commentaries, and analyses of the past three weeks on the BRICS summit and the judgements contained therein from all over the world are wide-ranging. In mainstream Germany, for example (but similarly in Austria and Switzerland), there is no support at all for BRICS, BRICS plus and their concerns. Here, an explicit or implicit “friend-foe” thinking dominates. There, the headlines range from “BRICS gets more members: Why the alliance should be taken seriously” (*Wirtschaftswoche*), to “World political caesura: How the expansion of BRICS challenges the West” (“Merkur”), to “USA and Germany see no major changes” (“Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”) or (implicitly also revealing, as far as Western goals are concerned): “Why even ‘BRICS plus’ cannot break Western dominance” (*Focus*). A press conference by the German Foreign Minister prompted the

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The “BRICS spirit”

The chair of the conference, South African President *Cyril Ramaphosa*, concluded by saying:

“We shared our vision of BRICS as a champion of the needs and concerns of the peoples of the Global South. These include the need for beneficial economic growth, sustainable development and reform of multilateral systems. We reiterate our commitment to inclusive multilateralism and upholding international law, including the purposes and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. We are concerned about ongoing conflicts in many parts of the world. We stress our commitment to the peaceful resolution of differences and disputes through dialogue and inclusive consultation. [...]

We encourage multilateral financial institutions and international organisations to play a constructive role in building global consensus on economic policies. We have noted that there is global momentum for the use of local currencies, alternative financial arrangements and alternative payment systems. As BRICS, we are ready to explore opportunities for improving the stability, reliability and fairness of the global financial architecture. [...]

Through this summit, BRICS has embarked on a new chapter in its effort to build a world that is fair, a world that is just, a world that is also inclusive and prosperous.”

A civilizing meeting

Brazilian President *Lula da Silva* is quoted as saying in a press release from his government:

“This is a civilising meeting. Poor countries can also speak, they also have the right to do so, they also have the desire to do so. What we want is to express what we wish to bring to our people. It’s time to better share our daily bread. I am reborn in politics and in hope. I leave South Africa with the certainty that I can finally tell the people who are listening to me that another world is possible – a world that seemed impossible a while ago. [...]

I think this is a historic moment for humanity – in which, for the first time, countries from the South may use their strength. I think things will evolve; it will now be easier to sit down and talk. Who knows, maybe the BRICS bloc will meet with the G7 bloc to discuss trade, scientific and technological advancement – and to discuss democracy.”

Creating opportunities and shaping the future

The website of the Indian Prime Minister *Shira Narendra Modi* states, among other things:

During his address, Prime Minister called for a strengthened BRICS that will be:

- B - Breaking barriers
- R - Revitalising economies
- I - Inspiring Innovation
- C - Creating opportunities
- S - Shaping the future

In his various interventions, Prime Minister highlighted the following:

- Called for setting defined timelines for UNSC reforms
- Called for reform of Multilateral Financial Institutions
- Called for reform of WTO
- Exhorted BRICS to build consensus on its expansion
- Urged BRICS to send a global message of unity and not polarisation.”

“It is time everyone starts building equal relations”

Russian Foreign Minister *Sergei Lavrov*, representing his president, said in a press conference after the summit:

“The difference between BRICS and the G7 or other West-centric associations is that in those associations, everybody looks up to the United States. There may be small differences and some parties may try to push other decisions in addition to the strategic course determined by Washington – but the United States dictates the general course.

Our association takes a completely different approach. [...] Every participant is equal to the others. If somebody is not satisfied with a decision, there will be no consensus. If somebody feels uncomfortable, the other parties will do their best to come up with a wording or decision to ensure our unity. This is how we reach consensus instead of obeying the big boss. Consensus takes more time but agreements achieved through this process are significantly more stable, lasting and fruitful.

This summit raised to a qualitatively new level the discussion about justice, maintaining that one cannot go on forever draining resources from developing countries. Africans remember only too well the colonial times and what they fought for. Having gained independence, they realised the West was again trying to use them only as suppliers of low-cost resources, while appropriating all the added value and its advantages. They are not happy about this. [...]

It is time everyone starts building equal relations, respecting each other, seeking a balance of interests. It is time nations stop dictating things to others, and all governments follow the requirements that are fully consistent with the UN Charter, which stipulates the sovereign equality of all states, large and small. If at least once the West tries to pursue a policy that is in line with this requirement, which it signed and ratified when the UN was established, perhaps common sense would have a chance.”

Fairness and justice in international affairs

Finally, Chinese President *Xi Jinping*. He said:

“We gather at a time when the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation. It is undergoing major shifts, division and regrouping, leading

to more uncertain, unstable and unpredictable developments.

BRICS is an important force in shaping the international landscape. We choose our development paths independently, jointly defend our right to development, and march in tandem toward modernisation. This represents the direction of the advancement of human society, and will profoundly impact the development process of the world. Our track record shows that we have consistently acted on the BRICS spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, and taken BRICS cooperation to new heights in support of our five countries’ development. We have upheld fairness and justice in international affairs, stood up for what is right on major international and regional issues, and enhanced the voice and influence of emerging markets and developing countries. BRICS countries invariably advocate and practice independent foreign policies. [...] We do not barter away principles, succumb to external pressure, or act as vassals of others. We BRICS countries share extensive consensus and common goals. No matter how the international situation changes, our commitment to cooperation since the very beginning and our common aspiration will not change. [...]

The Cold War mentality is still haunting our world, and the geopolitical situation is getting tense. All nations long for a sound security environment. International security is indivisible. Attempts to seek absolute security at the expense of others will eventually backfire. The Ukraine crisis has evolved to where it is today because of complex reasons. What is pressing now is to encourage peace talks, promote deescalation, end the fighting, and realise peace. No one should add fuel to the fire to worsen the situation.”

The final declaration

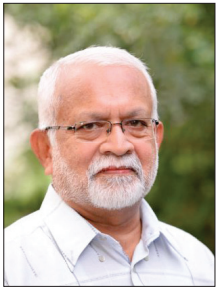
The second paragraph in the preamble of the *final declaration* fits in with all these interventions:

“We reaffirm our commitment to the BRICS spirit of mutual respect and understanding, sovereign equality, solidarity, democracy, openness, inclusiveness, strengthened collaboration and consensus. As we build upon 15 years of BRICS Summits, we further commit ourselves to strengthening the framework of mutually beneficial BRICS cooperation under the three pillars of political and security, economic and financial, and cultural and people-to-people cooperation and to enhancing our strategic partnership for the benefit of our people through the promotion of peace, a more representative, fairer international order, a reinvigorated and reformed multilateral system, sustainable development and inclusive growth.”

(Selection by *Current Concerns*)

G20 is in need of genuine reform

by M. K. Bhadrakumar*



M. K. Bhadrakumar
(picture ma)

India being the host country, the triumphalist tom-toming that G20 summit on 9–10 September was a “success” is both understandable and probably justifiable. Certainly, Indian diplomacy was in full cry. The negotiation of the G20 Declaration is no mean achievement in a highly polarised environment.

That said, in a forward-looking perspective, the geopolitical factors that were at work in the Delhi summit will continue to remain the critical determinants for the G20’s future as a format to forge new directions in economic strategies. In a world torn apart, many imponderables remain.

The geopolitical factors can be attributed largely to the fact that the G20 summit took place at an inflection point in the Ukraine war, an event that is, like the tip of an iceberg, a manifestation of the ten-

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“BRICS summit in Johannesburg ...”

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“Handelsblatt” to write the “astonishing” title “Baerbock: Talks also with BRICS accession countries”. And the highest-circulation German “Bild” newspaper took the biscuit: “BRICS expansion: How dangerous will this bloc of tyrants be for us?”

If you want to read other voices, you have to turn to the media of other, non-Western countries. These are not storms of enthusiasm, but differentiating analyses, certainly also with different emphases, judgements, and critical questions. This multitude of voices cannot be adequately reproduced here.

Voices of the actors on the ground

Instead, here the direct actors on the ground and the results of their work should have their say. They are meant to stand on their own, uncommented, stimulating reflection – and perhaps also to warm up for what is going on beyond the Western world.

“The United States derives tremendous geopolitical power from the dollar’s status as the world’s leading currency. Because most international trade is in U.S. dollars, the United States can print money to pay for goods that it buys from abroad, allowing it to finance a large international trade deficit without having to worry that it will run out of cash. The wide use of the dollar also makes it easy for Washington to implement effective sanctions, because it can cut its adversaries off from much of the global financial system simply by restricting their access to the dollar.” [...]

“But the dollar could lose its dominance even without a clear successor. The international economic order could instead give way to a multipolar currency system, in which countries use a variety of currencies to trade, including those of growing, emerging-market economies.” [...]

“For Washington, this would have serious consequences. Because international trade takes place mostly in dollars, the United States does not need to

accumulate foreign currency reserves. Central banks everywhere else, however, need dollars to nance their imports. To do so, they hold large quantities of U.S. Treasuries, which lowers U.S. borrowing costs. The dollar’s widespread use in international transactions thus gives the United States the exorbitant privilege of trading and borrowing in its own currency at favorable rates. It also provides the United States with a powerful geopolitical lever. The world’s reliance on the U.S. dollar payment systems allows Washington to unilaterally sanction other states causing major economic effects. But if countries can easily deal in other currencies, Washington will no longer be able to singlehandedly penalize its adversaries in an effective way.”

Source: *Filippo Gori America’s Debt-Ceiling Disaster. How a Severe Crisis or Default Could Undermine U.S. Power. Foreign Affairs, 24 April 2023*; Filippo Gori is an economist who has worked at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labor Organization, and the European Central Bank.

sions building up between the Western powers and Russia in the post-cold war era.

The heart of the matter is that the Cold War ended through negotiations but the new era was not anchored in any peace treaty. The void created drift and anomalies – and security being indivisible, tensions began appearing as the NATO embarked on an expansion eastward into the former Warsaw Pact territories in the late 1990s.

George Kennan had warned

With great prescience, *George Kennan*, the choreographer of Cold War strategies, forewarned that the *Bill Clinton* administration, seized of the “unipolar moment,” was making a grave mistake, as Russia would feel threatened by NATO expansion, which would inexorably complicate the West’s relations with Russia for a long, long time to come.

But NATO kept expanding and slouching toward Russia’s western borders in an arc of encirclement. It was an unspoken secret that Ukraine was set to become ultimately the battleground where the titanic forces would clash.

Predictably, following the regime change in Ukraine backed by the West in 2014, an anti-Russian regime was installed in Kiev and the NATO embarked on a military build-up in that country alongside a concerted plan to induct it into the western alliance system.

Suffice to say, the “consensus” evolved at the G20 summit last week regarding Ukraine war is, in reality, a passing moment in the geopolitical struggle between the US and Russia, as embedded within it is the existential crisis Russia faces.

A turbulent time lies ahead

There is no shred of evidence that the US is willing to concede the legitimacy of Russia’s defence and security interests or to give up its notions of exceptionalism and world hegemony. If anything, a very turbulent period lies ahead. Therefore, do not exaggerate the happy tidings out of the Delhi summit, much as one may savour the moment.

Washington’s climbdown at the summit regarding Ukraine has been both a creative response to the mediatory efforts by the three BRICS countries – South Africa, India and Brazil – as much as, if not more, in its self-interest to avert isolation from the Global South.

Evidently, while Moscow is profusely complimenting India and *Modi*, the opposite is the case in the western opinion where the compromise on Ukraine has not gone down well at all. The British newspaper “Financial Times”, which is wired into government thinking, has written that Delhi Declaration refers only to the “war in Ukraine,” a formulation that supporters of Kiev such as the US and NATO allies have previously rejected, as it implies both

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sides are equally complicit, and "called for a 'just and durable peace in Ukraine' but did not explicitly link that demand to the importance of Ukraine's territorial integrity."

Indeed, feelings are running high and, no doubt, as the Ukraine war enters the next brutal phase, they will boil over at the prospect of a Russian victory.

Challenged by the rise of the BRICS

Again, there is no question that the West feels challenged by the dramatic surge of BRICS – more to the point, the group's seductive appeal among the developing countries, the so-called Global South, unnerves the West.

The West can never hope to gain entry into the BRICS tent, either. Meanwhile, the BRICS is moving with determination in the direction of replacing the international trading system which provided underpinning for western hegemony. The US' weaponisation of sanctions – and the seizure of Russian reserves arbitrarily – has created misgivings in the minds of many nations.

Plainly put, the US has forgotten its solemn promise when dollar replaced gold as the reserves in the early 1970s that its currency will be freely accessible for all countries. Today, the US turned that promise upside down and exploits dollar's primacy to print the currency as much as it wants and live beyond its means.

The trend is towards moving away from the dollar

The growing trend is toward trading in local currencies, bypassing dollar. The BRICS is expected to accelerate these shifts. Make no mistake, sooner or later, BRICS may work on an alternative currency to replace dollar.

Conceivably, therefore, there will be western conspiracies to create dissonance within BRICS, and Washington is sure to continue to play on India's disquiet over China's towering presence in the Global South. While exploiting Indian phobias regarding China, the *Biden* administration also looks toward Modi government to act as a bridge between the West and the Global South. Are such expectations realistic?

The current developments in Africa with a pronounced anti-colonial, anti-western overtone, directly threaten to disrupt the continued transfer of wealth out of that resource-rich continent to the West. How can India, which has known the cruelty of colonial subjugation, collaborate with the West in such a paradigm?

Fundamentally, all these geopolitical factors taken into account, G20's fu-

"In the 1960s, French Finance Minister *Valéry Giscard d'Estaing* complained that the dominance of the U.S. dollar gave the United States an 'exorbitant privilege' to borrow cheaply from the rest of the world and live beyond its means. U.S. allies and adversaries alike have often echoed the gripe since. But the exorbitant privilege also entails exorbitant burdens that weigh on U.S. trade competitiveness and employment and that are likely to grow heavier and more destabilizing as the United States' share of the global economy shrinks. The benefits of dollar primacy

accrue mainly to financial institutions and big businesses, but the costs are generally borne by workers. For this reason, continued dollar hegemony threatens to deepen inequality as well as political polarization in the United States."

Source: Foreign Affairs, Juli 2020 It Is Time to Abandon Dollar Hegemony. Issuing the World's Reserve Currency Comes at Too High a Price. By Simon Tilford and Hans Kundnani 28 July 2020; Simon Tilford is an economist at the Forum for a New Economy. Hans Kundnani is a Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House.

ture lies in its capacity for internal reform. Conceived during the financial crisis in 2007 when globalisation was still *in vogue*, G20 is today barely surviving in a vastly different global environment. Added to that, the "politicisation" ("Ukrainisation") of G20 by the Western powers undermines the format's *raison d'être*.

The world order itself is in transition and the G20 needs to move with the times to avoid obsolescence. For a start, the G20 format is packed with rich countries, most of whom are pretenders with little to contribute, at a juncture when the G7 no longer calls the shots. In GDP terms or population, BRICS has overtaken G7.

"Greater representation of the Global South is needed"

Greater representation of the Global South is needed by replacing the pretenders from the industrial world. Second, the IMF needs urgent reform, which is of course easier said than done, as it involves the US agreeing to give up its undue privileges of vetoing decisions it disfavours for political or geopolitical reasons – or, plainly, to punish certain countries.

With IMF reform, the G20 can hope to play a meaningful role focused on creating a new trading system. But the West is playing for time by politicising the G20, paranoid that its 5-centuries old dominance of the world economic order is ending. Unfortunately, visionary leadership is conspicuous by its absence in the Western world at such a historic moment of transition.

The role of India

As far as India is concerned, the main challenge is two-fold: commitment to the uplift of the Global South by making it a central plank in its foreign-policy priorities and secondly, perseverance in follow-up of what it espoused during the G20 summit deliberations.

Herein lies the danger. In all probability, with the G20 Leaders gone from Indian soil, Delhi may revert to its China-centric foreign policies. India's commitment

to the cause of the Global South should not be episodic. Delhi is wrong to assume it is a Pied Piper.

Such a mindset may work in Indian politics – for some time at least – but the Global South will see through our mindset and conclude that India is only helping itself in its frenzy to carve out a place for itself at the high table of world politics.

Put differently, Modi government must ask itself not what the Global South can do for boosting India's international standing but, genuinely, what it can do for the Global South.

Source: <https://www.indianpunchline.com/g20-is-in-need-of-genuine-reform/> of 12 September 2023

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The inexorable rise of polycentrism

by Atilio A. Borón, Argentina

The expansion of the BRICS was surprising, not because it was not already in the organisation's plans, but because it was only decided at the last minute at the Johannesburg Summit. It clearly shows that a significant change has taken place on the international geopolitical and economic chessboard. It is no longer an ongoing process that progressed hand in hand with the slow but undeniable decline of the global power of the United States. In the economic sphere it manifested itself in the increasing loss of influence of the dollar in the world economy, in the military sphere in the ignominious withdrawal from Afghanistan after twenty years of war, to name but two examples. Instead, we are dealing with a process that has already come to an end and in which a new configuration of global power relations has emerged that has put an end to the unipolarism of the USA and the global supremacy of the West.

The international scene today presents a very different picture than it did a decade ago: the BRICS form an organisation whose combined gross domestic product exceeds that of the G-7 countries; a tremendous advance in new information and communication technologies in countries like China and India (and to a lesser extent Iran), which surpass the United States and Europe in several areas; the decay of five centuries of Western domination over the rest of the world, which is evident in the challenges the countries face today that were plunged into backwardness and misery by England and its European accomplices, such as China through the two Opium Wars, or subjected to a colonial status, such as India, or marginalised as an expression of "Asian barba-

Front page of the Argentine daily newspaper *Página12* of 25 August 2023: Argentina has taken a decisive step to diversify its foreign trade and sources of finance.



risim", such as Russia; or the renewal of an anti-colonialist stance in several African countries, which Emmanuel Macron experienced first-hand during his recent visit to some countries in the region; Europe, which has become an unworthy American protectorate, lacking a minimum of influence on its own territory, let alone in the surrounding regions, and where NATO has replaced the European Union as the real European supranational organisation, run remotely from Washington. Examples of this posthegemonic reconstruction of the global power structure can be found in the most diverse areas of the international stage.

The expansion of the BRICS has added six new countries, five of which are rich in energy resources (oil in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, and gas in Argentina and Ethiopia), while the old-world economic elite of the G7 is characterised precisely by its dependence on oil and gas imports, although not all its members to the same extent.

Hence the lament and criticism of imperial thinkers and strategists in the face of the enlarged BRICS. Argentina's entry into this organisation could not have come at a more favourable time: It will diversify our foreign trade, provide access to new funds for infrastructure projects and industrial development, and be a valuable lever to put an end to the IMF's shameful influence on our country's internal affairs.

As was to be expected, the right wing [of Argentine politics] spoke out flatly against BRICS membership and dropped a number of worn-out platitudes such as "our place is in the West" and the like.

Given their status as mere representatives of the colonial powers, nothing else could be expected from them. Their proposals, one more retrograde and destructive than the other, will now face new obstacles in a country empowered by its membership of the BRICS and by its association with the great emerging economic and political powers that have already built a new polycentric and post-hegemonic international order.

Source: *Página12* of 24 August 2023; <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/581939-el-irresistible-asenso-del-policentrismo>

(Translation from the German *Current Concerns*)

The G-77 Summit: Global South calls for an end to the West-dominated international order

At the summit of the G77, the group of so-called developing and emerging countries, host Cuba called for a much stronger international influence of the Global South. Cuba's leader said the Global South must "change the rules of the game" of the international order after centuries of wealthy Western nations putting their own interests first. President Miguel Díaz-Canel said developing countries are the main victims of a "multi-dimensional crisis" in today's world, ranging from "abusive unequal trade" to devastating climate change. The Cuban leader also lamented an "international architecture" that is "hostile" to the progress of the Global South.

At the summit, UN Secretary-General António Guterres also called for a world

order that is "more representative and more responsive to the needs of developing economies". These are currently "caught in a tangle of global crises".

Cuba took over the rotating presidency of the G77 in January. The group was founded in 1964 by 77 countries of the Global South to better promote their interests internationally. Today, 134 countries belong to the group, which represents about 80 percent of the world's population. China participates in the demands of the alliance, but does not consider itself a member.

Source: <https://de.rt.com/international/180955-g77-gipfel-globaler-sueden-fordert/16-September-2023>

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“Neutrality is much more deeply anchored in the population than is readily admitted in Bern”

Interview with National Councillor Franz Grüter*



Franz Grüter
(picture ma)

Current Concerns: The Swiss Armed Forces recently published a new report entitled “Strengthening Defence Capability”. To my mind, two questions emerged. Firstly, have our military personnel become queasy because the

army has been run down to a level that is not suitable for national defence? Secondly, are those people who want to join NATO using the war in Ukraine to finally bring Switzerland closer to NATO?

Franz Grüter: Both theories are probably true. Concerning the first question: In the last 20, probably even almost 30 years, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there were many politicians from almost all parties who said: There will never be another war in Europe. The Social Democrats were still saying this at the beginning of the 2000s: we will never again need tanks, we will never again need planes. Today, for the first time in 75 years, we have a war in Europe. This has opened the eyes of many, and people in

the army have also – fortunately – slowly become aware of the fact that the Swiss army would no longer be able to guarantee the security of the population if Switzerland were really attacked.

There was a war in Europe before that, the Yugoslavian war.

There was indeed a war in Yugoslavia, but it was never perceived in as emotional a way. It did have major consequences for Switzerland in terms of immigration, but it did not stir people up as much as the war in Ukraine has done, which has a completely different dimension.

On the current state of the Swiss Armed Forces

Corps Commander Süssli [head of the armed forces] once spoke of four weeks’ staying power, which is of course equal to nothing. The mobilisation of troops has also ceased to function. In this respect, I think it is positive that people now do realise that there is a need for action. *Adolf Ogi* [former Federal Councillor and head of the *Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport DDPS*] said at the time that there would be ten years’ warning in case of a war. These are and were illusory considerations, and I am pleased that the priorities are being set in a different direction, namely that the armed forces must once again be able to

guarantee the security of our population and thus maintain defence capability.

No closer affiliation with NATO

The Swiss Armed Forces have always procured their armaments in the West and have also made sure that these are compatible with Western goods. In the past, we bought the US Tigers, the FA-18s; they were always Western fighter jets. Today we are re-equipping the air force with the F-35, and we are getting a state-of-the-art surface-to-air defence system (Bodluf), the US *Patriot* missiles. We have always been mindful of the so-called interoperability, as we call it so nicely in German Newspeak. But many politicians in Bern want to join NATO even more closely than this. That is, of course, unacceptable. Because we would only be allowed to join forces with other states if Switzerland itself were attacked. Apart from that, Swiss neutrality does not permit such a rapprochement.

In June, the Council of States approved the postulate submitted by its member Josef Dittli. This demands that the Federal Council “present in a report how – without joining an alliance and while preserving the right of neutrality – a deeper, institutionalised cooperation in the field of defence with NATO can be achieved”.

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* Franz Grüter is president of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council (FAC-N), IT-Enterpriser and Captain of (the) Swiss Army.

Armed foreign missions by Swiss Armed forces are in contradiction to Swiss neutrality

mw. On 10 June 2001, the Swiss people very narrowly, with only 51% votes in favour, approved an amendment to the Military Act, which allowed Swiss soldiers to carry weapons on missions abroad. Various citizens’ groups had filed a referendum, and I still remember the discussions launched when I was collecting signatures. The Federal Council’s main argument was that armed Swiss should only be allowed to take part in “peace keeping” but not in “peace enforcement” missions. Obviously, the population’s critical questions as to what exactly the difference was could not and cannot be answered in situations of crisis and violence.

In the preliminary talk to the interview, National Councillor *Franz Grüter* confirms this from his own experience: “What certainly needs to be addressed once again is the deployment of our soldiers abroad. We have around 200 people in Kosovo, the deployment

was recently extended by parliament. I was in Kosovo myself before Christmas 2002. There was a lot of unrest in the north, roadblocks, all the Serbian police had resigned, and I saw for myself how the Swiss, who were supposed to be effecting *peace keeping*, suddenly became involved in *peace enforcement*, so to speak, i.e. in the forcible implementation of peace. This shows how quickly it can happen, when we have troops abroad who should be keeping the peace, that things can tip over very quickly and become an armed conflict.”

Franz Grüter continues: “A fact also flying completely under the radar is that we still have about 20 people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and we would also have to ask ourselves once again what they are doing there. It is worth taking a close look and asking critical questions over and over, for example, whether such deployments are altogether in line with

our constitution.” This question was answered clearly 20 years ago by the journalist *Philippe Kropf* on *Swiss television 1*: “For the first time, members of the armed forces are going on a peace mission to Kosovo with their weapons. In doing so, they are breaking a Swiss principle. The 7th *Swisscoy* contingent is a model case for all further foreign missions.” He continued, “The idea of Swiss soldiers carrying weapons abroad has been completely unthinkable until today because of Swiss neutrality. Swiss citizens participated in multinational operations only as UN military observers, as medical personnel on UN missions or as Yellow Hats for the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE).” Bravo!

¹ *Kropf, Philippe. “Schweizer Soldaten bewaffnet im Ausland (Swiss soldiers armed abroad), swissinfo of 2 October 2002; emphasis mw*

“Neutrality is much more deeply ...”

continued from page 6

The Council of States agreed to this. Would that not be practically equivalent to joining NATO?

Well, this is a postulate, which means that the Council of States first of all demands a report from the Federal Council [in contrast to a motion, which directly demands a draft law]. But the direction in which they want to go is clear. It is also dishonest to the population to say: after all, we do not want to join NATO. Because everyone knows very well that according to our constitution, this would not be possible in any case. A referendum would be needed for the accession to NATO.

On the one hand, it is good when our people realise that we are no longer able to defend the country and guarantee the security of our own population with our own army, both in terms of equipment and training. But the demand should be a different one, namely: What does the army need? And this is what I would expect precisely of a member of the Council of States like *Josef Dittli*: he is a former instruction officer of the Swiss army, a colonel in the general staff, a man who understands things about the army. I think very

highly of him in other respects. But his question should be: Where are the biggest gaps? What do we need to bring the Swiss Armed Forces to the level where we can secure our country ourselves? We have to face this honest discussion. The focus must be on our ability to defend ourselves, and not on joining any alliances just because we are no longer prepared to accomplish the tasks that face us at home. That would be a cheap way of shirking responsibility.

Ensuring our neutrality

This is also about ensuring our neutrality. This brings us to foreign policy, i.e., the tasks of my Commission. For a small state, defence capability is an important instrument. But it is just as important that we act as a neutral small state, that we do not interfere in foreign conflicts. On the contrary, we should try to mediate and offer our good offices. The readiness to do this is precisely what has been diminished in recent times, because we have virtually taken sides. Being neutral during a war is of course much more uncomfortable, much harder, it takes much more backbone and much more strength. To say in a war, we are steering clear, we do not con-

demn anyone, even if inwardly you would probably like to do this – by the way, everyone is allowed to do it in private – but the state itself is not allowed to do that, it has to remain neutral. That is why these questions have also moved back into the focus of politics.

It would be good if more Swiss politicians gave our neutrality the weight it deserves, like you do. But the new army report goes in a completely different direction. It wants cooperation with NATO to be “further expanded and intensified in the coming years”. What does that mean in concrete terms?

Obviously, it all started in 1996 with the “Partnership for Peace” and since then, Switzerland has been working more and more together with NATO. Today we participate in joint exercises in cyber defence, and the air force trains abroad. But if we want to participate in military exercises of ground forces, if we want to purchase armaments jointly with Germany and Austria and, according to Swiss Federal Councillor *Amherd*, should participate in the so-called “Sky Shield”, then it is dishonest to say: we are doing almost every-

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“Our militia army is part of our state model. It has to protect the country and the people and has to guarantee our neutrality”

Replies to the Army report from August 2023

mw. The Swiss Army has published a report in August of 2023, the title being “Strengthening the defensive ability – sight picture and strategy for growth”.¹ Since the 1990’s, the Swiss Army has been boiled down to a state where it is neither capable of protecting the population nor of defending the sovereignty and neutrality of the country. These days, those defensive abilities shall be re-established as part of the general arming of the EU and NATO states – which is allegedly not possible without an even closer binding of Switzerland to the NATO. This claim is nothing new, but continues to lead to misconceptions.

Without going into too much detail: It is absurd when the current army report specifies all necessary measures to somehow capacitate the insufficient manpower, education and gear as well as the mainly trashed or sold infrastructure of the army – which had been pushed through by the federal authorities and army leaders themselves willingly and knowingly – under heavy time and money expenditures.

20 years ago, various groups of citizens took the referendum against the “Army XXI” to avoid the unconstitutional deconstruction of the Swiss Defence Army and to stop the non-neutral alignment with the NATO which had been al-

ready initialised back then. Sadly, the Army XXI was accepted by the people on May 18, 2003.

In reality, the claim back then that a later “Aufwuchs” (growth) to the needed number of well-trained and motivated soldiers was possible in a couple of years was unrealistic from the get-go. The vision of the authors of this years’ army report, that the military education needs to “accommodate the demands of the army members who are used to competence-oriented lessons from their civil education even more than today” (report p. 37ff.), sounds downright grotesque. A reliable defence of the country can neither be organised with the failed methods of the “Curriculum 21” nor with NATO compatible weapons or communicative networking with NATO bureaucracy. Instead, this has to be carried out by us, the citizens, knowing what we want to protect and preserve in Switzerland. Focussing on raising a youth who gets a clear vision on Swiss history and federal structures, who identifies itself with its country and is willing to commit to it is an urgent task in particular – as a soldier in the military, in the local community and wherever a helping hand is needed.

¹ Swiss Army. Group Defense. “Die Verteidigungsfähigkeit stärken. Zielbild und

Strategie für den Aufwuchs” (Strengthening the defence capability. Vision and strategy for growth) from August 11th. PDF, 60 pages

From the arguments of the referendum committee against Army XXI in 2003:

“Our militia is part of our state model. It has to protect the country and the people and has to guarantee our neutrality. Therefore, it has to be free of alliances. Active freedom policy is only possible that way. Switzerland has to be able – nowadays, where war is not “ultima ratio” anymore – to exercise its freedom supporting task reliably: That means to invite to negotiations and peace conferences on neutral grounds, contribute to de-escalating conflicts with good services and to preserve faith in neutral humanitarian aid. The new military law and the Army XXI are standing in contradiction to all this. They are products of a fateful foreign-policy development. Federal Councillor *Cotti* (FDFA) signed a work of contracts with the NATO in 1996 which comprises of entering the military “Partnership for Peace, PfP” as well as the “Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council EAPC”.”

(Voting booklet, p. 7)

“Neutrality is much more deeply ...”

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thing, but we are not involved. We have to counter that: red lines must be drawn here.

I do not think this is what the Swiss people want

On 30 August, Federal Councillor Viola Amherd said in the “*Tages-Anzeiger*” that she wanted Switzerland also to take part in NATO ground troops exercises. Of course, everything would have to be “in conformity with the law of neutrality”. The interviewer asked: “Can Switzerland now practise the alliance case with NATO?” Viola Amherd’s answer was: “The alliance case is a bit much. But in future we can participate in defence exercises. We must simply not commit ourselves to collective defence.”

Yes, this is exactly the dishonesty I was referring to. When NATO carries out big manoeuvres, the troops are effectively practising the alliance case. If one of the NATO countries is attacked, the alliance automatically comes into effect. This means that the defence alliance obliges each member state to provide troops and to join in the fight, i.e., to become involved in an act of war. If the Swiss army participates in exercises where the case of alliance is practised, then it is simply dishonest to say: “We are not a member of NATO, we will not participate anyhow.”

I do not think this is what the Swiss people want. We have to show clearly what it would mean. Incidentally, I do not rule out the possibility that such an alliance case could actually occur one day. If Switzerland were to join, it would have to send soldiers to war zones, and that is definitely not possible according to our Federal Constitution. Fortunately, it would require a referendum, and I am sure that it is not what the Swiss would want. I have great confidence in our people. Neutrality is much more deeply rooted in the population than is readily admitted in Bern. Things are not going in the right direction in Bern.

Thank you very much for the interview,
National Councillor Grüter. •

“Switzerland should defend its neutrality tooth and nail”

Roger Köppel: *What does the experienced general and NATO expert with historical awareness and the view of diversity say? Must Switzerland cultivate neutrality, or must it give it up? Should Switzerland draw closer to NATO in this uncomfortably worsening situation?*

Harald Kujat: I say this also as a former chairman of the NATO Military Committee. Switzerland has a history of achieving security through its neutrality. A future for Switzerland in security and freedom means preserving neutrality tooth and nail. Because if you accept what I have just said, and Switzerland joins the Western bloc, then Switzerland – according to the old saying “in for a penny, in for a pound” – is part of this confrontation. And that is a situation that could become very un-

comfortable for Switzerland. I am in favour of dissolving these blocs, not reinforcing them. That we dissolve them, that we actually come to a multipolar world in which each state has a place that guarantees it security and freedom, but not this connection to another state that pursues other interests and other goals. Switzerland has its own goals, its own interests, and it must preserve them. It must not make itself the executor of the interests of other nations.

Source: Köppel, Roger. “Nato General Kujat: ‘Switzerland should defend its neutrality tooth and nail’”. Interview with retired General Harald Kujat, former Inspector General of the German Armed Forces. (Excerpt) *Weltwoche* daily of 6 September 2023

“This is also about ensuring our neutrality. This brings us to foreign policy, i. e., the tasks of my Commission. For a small state, defence capability is an important instrument. But it is just as important that we act as a neutral small state, that we do not interfere in foreign conflicts. On the contrary, we should try to mediate and offer our good offices. The readiness to do this is precisely what has been diminished in recent times, because we have virtually taken sides. Being neutral during a war is of course much more uncomfortable, much harder, it takes much more backbone and much more strength. To say in a war, we are steering clear, we do not condemn anyone, even if inwardly you would probably like to do this – by the way, everyone is allowed to do it in private – but the state itself is not allowed to do that, it has to remain neutral. That is why these questions have also moved back into the focus of politics.”
(Franz Grüter)

Why Swiss Neutrality is essential for American national security

by Scott Ritter*, USA



Scott Ritter
(picture evo)

Thirty years ago, a gathering of like-minded teachers, social workers, and medical professionals took place in Switzerland. Their goal was to create a discussion group dedicated to the idea of the courageous pursuit of

ethical living – “Mut zur Ethik”.

Over the course of three days – 1-3 September – this group, by this time veterans of three decades of commitment to their cause, convened their 30th meeting in a conference center in the Swiss town of Sirmach and in its quaint surroundings. The conference featured speakers from around the world – Bolivia, the Congo, and Afghanistan stand out – as well as Europe and North America. The noted journalist Patrick Lawrence, together with his wonderful wife, Cara, were in attendance. I joined them as the only other American present in a crowd that numbered well over 200, with many more participating via video conference.

Swiss neutrality – a matter of the heart

Numerous topics were discussed, ranging from American exceptionalism to Lithium mining, and almost everything in between. But the one that stood out to me was the issue of Swiss neutrality. Perhaps it was the fact that I had the opportunity to spend quality time with two Swiss officers, one of whom served as an observer in the DMZ separating North and South Korea, and the other who did a tour with the OSCE in Ukraine and heard first-hand the value of having a neutral presence in conflict zones dominated by violently competing objectives and ideologies. Maybe it was the allure of the uniquely Swiss tradition of direct democracy, which had been engaged by the pro-



A loaf of Swiss bread baked in honor of the 30th Anniversary of the founding of “Mut zur Ethik”. (picture Scott Ritter)

ponents of Swiss neutrality to enshrine the practice in the Swiss Constitution.

Switzerland must remain perpetually neutral

Or maybe it was the outrage I felt upon learning about the role my own country was playing in undermining an institution that had been formally recognized in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. The main takeaway for me from the “Mut zur Ethik” conference was the absolute necessity of Switzerland remaining viably neutral, and how important this was from the perspective of American national security.

The current debate regarding Swiss neutrality has erupted in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The European Union (EU), together with the United States, enacted a series of stringent economic sanctions targeting Russia and Russian interests. Switzerland joined in on the EU sanctions, provoking a Russian rebuke in the form of finding itself on a list of nations Russia deemed to be “unfriendly.” The reality of this action was made manifest when Russia refused to meet with the United States in the Swiss city of Geneva, traditionally the venue for arms control talks, citing Switzerland’s loss of its neutral status because of its decision to sanction Russia.

No direct arms supplies

Switzerland continues to honor its current laws prohibiting the direct delivery of weapons to any nation engaged in war. Moreover, the re-export of Swiss-made weapons by third countries requires permission from the Swiss government. In the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, several European governments whose military possess stocks of Swiss-made ammunition have made such requests, but to date, no permission has been

granted, something that has drawn the ire of the United States.

Sanctions, money and weapons

Enter *Scott Miller*, the US Ambassador to Switzerland. Miller has strongly urged Switzerland to allow the re-exportation of munition, declaring that the ban “benefits the aggressor [Russia], who violates all principles of international law.”

Miller also argues Switzerland should do more regarding the sanctioning of Russia, including the freezing of Russian assets. While the US Ambassador has acknowledged that the Swiss have frozen some \$8.37 billion in Russian assets held in Swiss banks, he noted that there was an additional \$50-100 billion in Russian assets that should be seized by Switzerland. “Sanctions,” Miller recently told Swiss reporters, “are only as strong as the political will behind them. We need to find as many assets as possible, freeze them and, if necessary, confiscate them to make them available to Ukraine for reconstruction.” Miller has taken umbrage over comments made by State Secretary *Helene Budlinger*, the Swiss director of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), indicating doubt from within the Swiss government over the utility of sanctions.

The Neutrality People’s Initiative

Many Swiss are concerned about what they view as the blatant interference in Swiss neutrality on the part of the US and its European allies. Last year, a non-partisan committee launched a popular initiative that wants to anchor Switzerland’s proven state maxim of perpetual armed neutrality in the constitution and prohibit participation in future sanctions and defence alliances. Accordingly, Switzerland should only be allowed to join a defence alliance if it has previously been directly attacked.

* *Scott Ritter* is a former Marine intelligence officer who served in the former Soviet Union, implementing arms control agreements, and on the staff of General *Norman Schwarzkopf* during the Gulf War, where he played a critical role in the hunt for Iraqi SCUD missiles. From 1991 until 1998, Mr Ritter served as a Chief Inspector for the United Nations in Iraq, leading the search for Iraq’s proscribed weapons of mass destruction. Mr Ritter was a vocal critic of the American decision to go to war with Iraq. He resides in Upstate New York, where he writes on issues pertaining to arms control, the Middle East and national security. *Disarmament in the Time of Perestroika* is Mr Ritter’s tenth book.

“Why Swiss Neutrality ...”

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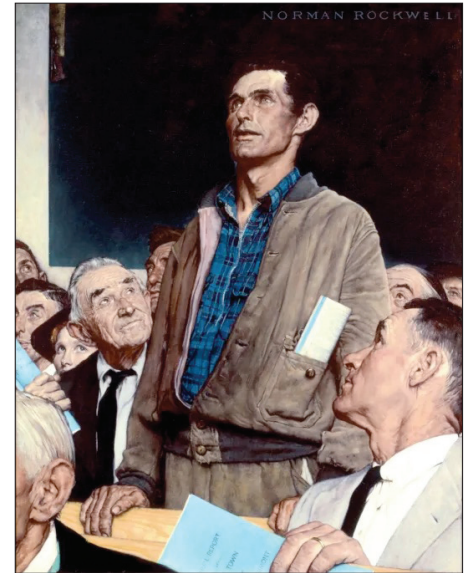
But first the initiators need to collect 100,000 signatures in support of the referendum by the Spring of 2024 before the measure can be brought to the people for a vote. Recent polls indicate that more than 90% of Swiss voters are in favor of maintaining Swiss neutrality. But this number is deceiving – the poll also indicates that 75% of Swiss voters believe that sanctions are compatible with Swiss neutrality, and some 55% believe that Switzerland should be able to reexport munitions to Ukraine.

If the initiators can gather the 100,000 signatures needed (as of the Mut zur Ethik conference, some 70,000 signatures had been collected), then the matter will go before the people. Even if the measure passes muster through a simple majority, it must still be recommended for adoption by the Federal Council and Swiss Parliament. For this to occur, there needs to

be a double majority, meaning at least 24 of the 46 members of the Federal Council and 101 of 200 members of Parliament must vote in favor. While the Swiss People’s Party is the largest in the Swiss governmental system, holding 53 seats in the parliament and six in the Federal Council, it would need the support of other parties to assure adoption of the amendment, an outcome which is not assured.

As an American I am insulted

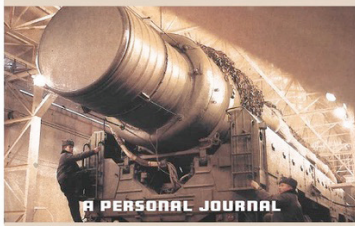
Even if the popular initiative passes and is subsequently adopted, it won’t shield Switzerland from the pressure brought to bear on it from Scott Miller and other non-Swiss parties. As an American who has sworn to uphold and defend the US Constitution from threats both foreign and domestic, I am insulted by the notion of an American ambassador, and by extension the US government, displaying such open disregard for the will of the Swiss people as freely and openly expressed through a democratic process which far exceeds the American equivalent in terms of transparency and accessibility. I would hope my fellow citizens would share in this outrage.



Norman Rockwell’s “Freedom of Speech” (1943). The oil painting by the early 20th century US painter and illustrator shows an ordinary citizen standing up and speaking while the audience listens attentively and respectfully. It “depicts the spirit of Swiss direct democracy” (Scott Ritter). (picture ma)



DISARMAMENT
in the time of
PERESTROIKA
Arms Control and the End of the Soviet Union



A PERSONAL JOURNAL

SCOTT RITTER

Clarity Press, Inc.
ISBN 978-1-949762-61-7

Disarmament in the Time of Perestroika (2022) is the definitive history of the implementation of the INF Treaty signed by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan in all its complexities, and the lengths both sides went to “trust, but verify” this successful and unique historic disarmament process. It demonstrates how two nations fundamentally at odds with one another could come together and rid the world of weapons which threatened international peace and security and, indeed, all of humanity... (Clarity Press)

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“There will be a critical need for a neutral party who can provide a haven for the talks and negotiations that will be essential for the preservation of world peace and security. Switzerland is ideally positioned to be that neutral party, but only if it can regain the stature it enjoyed prior to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This can only happen if the United States stops pressuring Switzerland to give up on its neutrality [...]”

“... in the best interest of the national security”

One way to prevent future interference of this nature would be for the American people to engage in a bit of direct democracy themselves, writing letters to their elected representatives in the US Congress seeking an amendment to the US defense and foreign affairs budget that “prohibits any US funds to be spent in support of policies that act in contravention to the principles of neutrality as defined by the government of Switzerland,” and which “promotes policies that encourage Switzerland to maintain a genuinely neutral status, since such a posture is deemed to be in the best interest of the national security of the United States insofar as it promotes the principles of peaceful coexistence among nations.”

This amendment would do far more than simply show respect for the will of the Swiss people. One day the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will end. At that time, the United States and Europe will need to find a way to engage Russia on the issue of formulating a new European security framework, as well as breathing new life into the issue of arms con-

trol and nuclear disarmament. Given the level of distrust that currently exists between Russia and the collective West (the US and Europe), it is difficult to imagine such talks taking place directly.

“Switzerland is ideally positioned ...”

There will be a critical need for a neutral party who can provide a haven for the talks and negotiations that will be essential for the preservation of world peace and security. Switzerland is ideally positioned to be that neutral party, but only if it can regain the stature it enjoyed prior to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This can only happen if the United States stops pressuring Switzerland to give up on its neutrality in pursuit of shortsighted policies that will do little to change the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Swiss neutrality is not just good for Switzerland. It is also essential for US national security and should be supported at all costs.

Source: https://www.scottritterextra.com/p/why-swiss-neutrality-is-essential?utm_source=profile&utm_medium=reader2 of 9. September 2023, subheads and slightly edited by Current Concerns

The “new self-confidence”: an old theme

Independence has an empowering effect – in Africa as in the whole world

by Peter Küpfer

Saying “no” – to the pressure to conform to those who set the tone – is not popular in “guided democracies”, especially among their leaders. The leaders of these guided democracies, by which we mean formally democratic governments that function as a *de facto* authoritarian government, love “their” people only selectively. Wire-pullers have something in common with one another in all types of political systems – with those leasing “authoritarian” or so-called “freedom-defending” systems alike. In dictatorships, the dictator’s love for “his” people often takes the form of a spurious version of care. He “sacrifices” himself for the difficult office of steering the state, because the people are not yet mature enough to be able to decide for themselves.

In the West’s “advance” party democracies, also guided by “soft power”, real commitment to the people is also a highly fickle passion among the self-described elites. Their vows to work for the people’s welfare are typically very frequent, especially before elections. Afterwards, they can go so far as to classify a “no” vote on their policies as “unconstitutional” – this without remorse but with legal consequences. Yet democratic constitutions oblige governments to put the welfare and freedom of their people (which surely includes freedom of expression) at the forefront of their governance, above all else.

Therefore, to say “no” justifiably and emphatically in the face of the current undermining of real democracy is and remains a popular virtue. It is a disgrace for our submissive, head-nodding democracies that this redemptive rejection comes from countries that have long been considered the poorest of the poor – for example from the Sahel zone. In plain language, their “no” means: “We have had enough of your sort of development aid. We don’t need it – non, merci! On the other hand, we need the right to develop ourselves – ça oui, alors!”

A look at classical literature – for example, at a fable by the once fabulously famous, widely read (even in schools), and often bitterly realistic classicist *Jean de La Fontaine* (1621–1695) – is unexpectedly instructive in this regard.

The Wolf and the Dog, according to Jean de La Fontaine*

A wolf was emaciated to the bone from the hopeless hunt for prey. Moreover, what had been within reach near the farm in the clearing was now guarded day and night by watchdogs. Suddenly, one of them

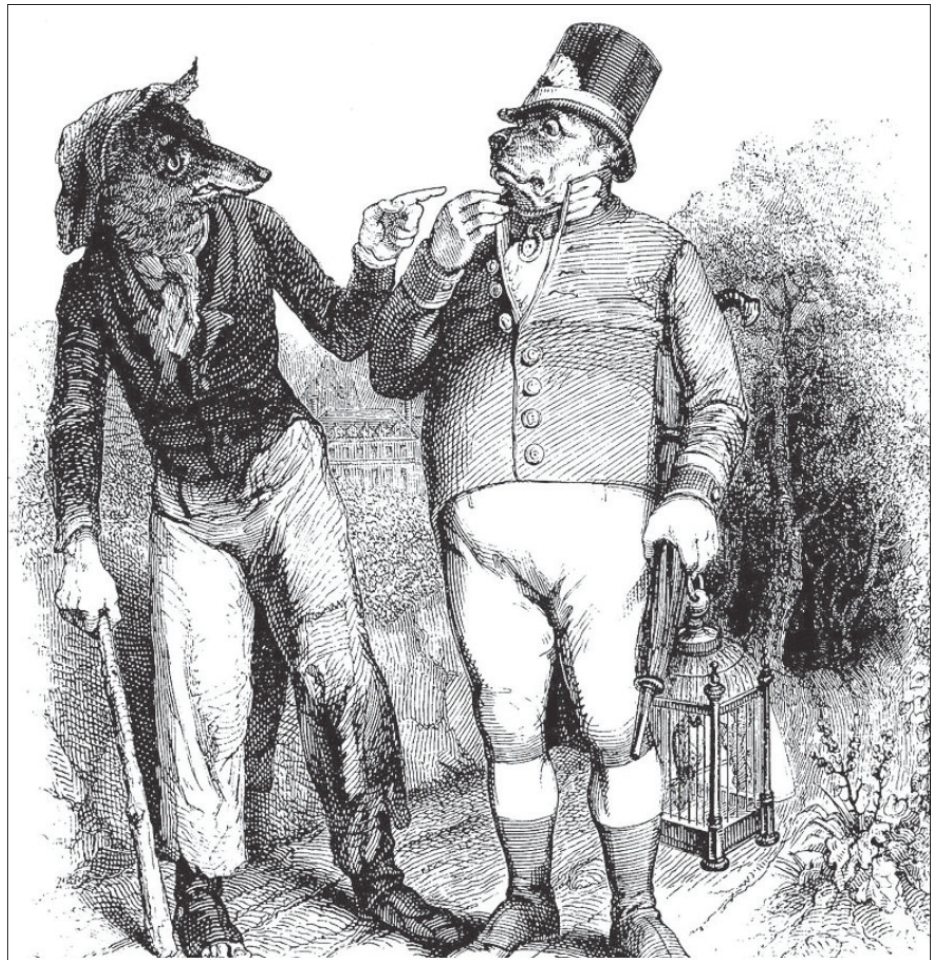


Illustration of La Fontaine’s fable ‘Le loup et le chien’.
Woodcut by Jean–Jacques Grandville, 1845. (picture Wikimedia Commons)

stood in front of him. The wolf recognised him immediately. The dog had slipped away in an unguarded moment and was now on his own in the deep forest. He came just in time for the wolf. The first impulse of the impoverished “Sir Wulf” is to attack and tear to pieces such a dog of the pack that is making his life miserable.

However, the fellow in front of him looks impressive. So instead of starting a fierce fight, the wolf approaches his tamed and strong relative in a civilized manner, complimenting him on his imposing stature.

*So, then, in civil conversation
The wolf express’d his admiration
Of Tray’s [of the hound’s] fine case. Said
Tray, politely,
“Yourself, good sir, may be as sightly;
Quit but the woods, advised by me.
For all your fellows here, I see,
Are shabby wretches, lean and gaunt,
Belike to die of haggard want.
With such a pack, of course it follows,
One fights for every bit he swallows.
Come, then, with me, and share
On equal terms our princely fare!”*

Of course, the wolf knows from his own experience that nothing is given to anyone in this world. So he asks the farmyard dog the obvious question: “What would I have to do for that?”

*Replies the dog: “To bark a little now
and then,
To chase off duns and beggar men,
To fawn on friends that come or go forth,
Your master please, and so forth;
For which you have to eat
All sorts of well-cook’d meat –
Cold pullets, pigeons, savoury messes –
Besides unnumber’d fond caresses ...”*

Thus, the frozen-through wolf starts to feel warm all over. He already imagines a carefree old age. On the way to the farm gate, attentively trotting along beside his mentor, he learns even more animating details. All at once, his gaze falls on the badly bruised neck of his companion, and he stops.

*But faring on, he spies
A gall’d spot on the mastiff’s neck.*

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"The 'new self-confidence'" ...

continued from page 11

"What's that?" he cries. "O, nothing but a speck."

"A speck?" Ay, ay; "tis not enough to pain me;

Perhaps the collar's mark by which they chain me."

"Chain! chain you! What! run you not, then,

Just where you please, and when?"

"Not always, sir; but what of that?"

"Enough for me, to spoil your fat!

It ought to be a precious price

Which could to servile chains entice;

For me, I'll shun them while I've wit."

So ran Sir Wolf, and runneth yet.

So versed La Fontaine, four hundred years ago at that. His critique of unprincipled conformity, of which there were enough living examples during his lifetime in the France of *Louis XIV*, is palpable. The illustration of *Jean-Jacques Grandville* in the garb of the French post-revolutionary monarchy (who represents the dog in the typical clothing of the again privileged French bourgeoisie, keen to realise the slogan *Enrichissez-vous!*) shows that La Fontaine's critique of conformity towards those who set the tone was still relevant two hundred years later.

And today? Today, well-developed countries could also adopt the great 'No' exemplified in the fable. Even the predominantly head-nodding part of the leadership in the EU and in Switzerland, those who are politically and commercially restrained. Such a 'no' to the adaptation to

Douglas Macgregor on the question of Swiss neutrality and NATO

Weltwoche: You mentioned Switzerland. We are discussing that we should abolish or weaken neutrality. Even membership in NATO is a prospect. What is your advice?

Douglas Macgregor: The first question I would ask: Has neutrality worked so badly that it should be abandoned now? I think the answer is no. Switzerland's neutrality was a blessing because people could go there who otherwise refuse to speak to each other. Why should Switzerland abandon that? And how is that in the interest of Western civilization? I don't think it is.

What do you see as NATO's task today?

Its original task was purely defensive. It did not seek global power or influence in the hands of these globalist, neo-conservative elites that dominate the West today. But then there was a constant ef-

fort to expand it and use it elsewhere. We saw that in the Balkans, and I think that was a blatant abuse of the alliance. I would argue anyway that any alliance with 32 members is inherently dysfunctional. As a Russian, I would laugh at that, because the Russians have the advantage of unified effort and unified command. In Europe, there is neither unified effort nor unified command. So, who are we really kidding when we say we are much stronger than Russia? I believe that this alliance will ultimately break down because of this conflict in Ukraine. I think the EU is on a similar path.

Source: Interview with Douglas Macgregor, former U.S. Army colonel, political scientist, military theorist, consultant and author in: Die Weltwoche No.37 of 14 September 2023 (excerpt; translation Current Concerns)

the American style of life and democracy, largely adopted by EU-Europe, including unquestioned war vassalage, is still an option for Western democracies – it is, in fact, an urgent one.

What will it be like in a few years? Returning to one's natural freedom, of which the wolf has a fairly realistic idea, means in practice, at least for the global West, coming to terms with less luxury and fewer external comforts. Who knows? Maybe, if we have the courage to get by with a little less, one day it will

be much more. It could also bring a little more independence, or, which is the same thing, more freedom. Not a bought freedom, but a real one. Not a bought freedom that pleases our master, but a real freedom, which will be able to make us, Europeans or Africans or others, go the way that is truly ours, running "just where you please and when ...".

* *The Fables of La Fontaine*. Elizur Wright, trans. B. W. M. Gibbs, 1882. Project Gutenberg edition, 2014. Fable I.5: "The Wolf and the Dog" (Le loup et le chien). Interpolations by *Peter Küpfer*.

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To become a fellow player The most important thing in times of war ...

by Renate Dünki

As a small child, I experienced the dangers, the threat of the Second World War and I still remember them indelibly: the air-raid shelter, the fear of the droning approach of airplanes, the daily efforts of all the adults to find food for the large family in the smallest of spaces. The fact that the children fitted in, were quiet when their great-grandmother slept behind a screen, was a matter of course, not worth a great deal of talk. The life-preserving cohesion in the family is what has remained unforgettable to me from that time. It was about essential things: survival, a roof over one's head. In the time after that, it was about the freedom to read, about culture that wanted to tie in with the time before fascism. I experienced all this in my early childhood and can still draw from it today.

And today ...

I am all the more concerned about the issues with which our society is oppressed and manipulated today, how the meaning of the family is disturbed, how our children have to grow up without history. And

it is all the more exciting for me, even in our confused present, to experience children who can still grow up "in the bosom of the family".

Favorite toy: a screwdriver

Once again I need the help of a professional for a technical problem, so I set off. In a family business near me, daughter and son-in-law work in the "Übergwändli" [workwear] in their father's job. Father and mother do office work, consulting, customer service, and behind the office desk the grandson has his kingdom: all kinds of toys, a high chair. He is one and a half years old, a close observer, threads himself into all the adults' movements, is in eye contact with them. His favourite thing is a screwdriver to tighten the screws of a bench, but he also likes a key, which he successfully inserts into the keyhole. He walks nimbly and purposefully, always has a plan, because he always learns something from the adults' activities, imitates them and practices again and again. Children's books for his age do not interest him, but he leafs through brochures of

tools with perseverance, which he recognises and shows. His little fingers are dexterous, his eyes alert. The grandparents have a telephone call to make, something to show a customer. Their grandson is there in the background without disturbing the work.

The mother has things to do

When his mother comes, they greet each other and rejoice; he knows she is there, but she doesn't stay long, she has things to do, and then others are there: the father, the grandparents, the staff. Everyone turns to each other, they all speak a few words to the little one, calmly and naturally. He is not the king child, but already in these young years a fellow player.

As a farewell, he waves to me on his grandmother's arm. Elated, I make my way home. This experience shows me again how a child is dependent on relationships, how he or she is positively guided by role models within the family circle, and how he or she can actively develop his or her own path. This also today. •

Neutrality and peace Reflections on an inner attitude

by Nicole Duprat, France

Today, there is an increasing tendency to weaken or even denigrate neutrality by misinterpreting it as outdated or even obsolete. Neutrality is being stripped of its essential content.

Peace, for its part, strangely becomes the stated aim of those who start wars. Peace can only be achieved by waging war, which is completely absurd, and the idea of a just war is unacceptable. There is no such thing as a just war.

Your don't start with the roof

You don't build a house by starting with the roof, but with the foundations. Peace and neutrality are the foundations of a *modus vivendi*, both for individual human conduct and for the collective conduct of states and nations.

Just as there is no cloth without tissue and no tissue without cloth. There is no peace without neutrality and no neutrality without peace. A commitment to peace means a commitment to neutrality, and

vice versa. They are two sides of the same coin.

Neutrality is a reality inherent in anyone who cultivates peace and whose understanding of the world in which we live is devoid of any biased or partisan viewpoint.

Neutrality acts and functions as an indicator of a different way of being, thinking and acting, because it is part of a relationship of peace between individuals, states and nations.

Neutrality is not a notion with variable geometry, nor a principle subject to the opinions and ideologies of others. A principle does not have the force of law. That is why it must be enshrined in a Constitution, because a law can and must be strictly applied. To refuse to enshrine it in the Constitution is to leave a dangerous crack in the system of direct democracy.

Faced with the slander of its detractors, neutrality must not be equated with selfishness, cowardice or indifference.

Abandoning neutrality means abandoning a precious instrument of peace that can deescalate conflicts.

To be just is to be neutral

To be just is to be neutral, to reject a climate of division, not to favour one side over another. It means treating everyone equally. It's an inner attitude that gives us a sense of perspective and helps to counteract the spirit of division.

It makes sense both individually and collectively. It places the individual above immediate interests. Without neutrality, the Red Cross could not function.

Each of us is responsible for weaving the indestructible threads of neutrality and peace to generate a solid collective fabric of fair and balanced relations, free and united in a spirit of unity. •

(Translation Current Concerns)

Bridges between people and places

by Eliane Perret

Children and young people look for role models among those they know personally. Adults, being aware of this, must help guide the next generation on a life path that we shape with confidence and *joie de vivre*, as an expression of responsibility for the common good. If we do not do this, young people will take their role models from the media. There, children are exposed to influencers who, obligated by their sponsors to advertise, urge them to buy frivolous products. Or, they are exposed to celebrities who appear to lead lives of glamour and self-importance.

But there are other role models for our youth, people engaged in positive and inspiring activities who should be discussed in families and schools. One such role model is *Toni Rüttimann*, also known as *Toni el Suizo* Toni the Swiss. As a young man Rüttimann, shaken by reports and images of a severe earthquake in Ecuador, left Switzerland and began a life devoted to helping others and to forming meaningful interpersonal bonds and relationships.

The 777th suspension bridge

It was 31 March 2018 when Rüttimann, from Pontresina, married his wife, *Palin*, a teacher from Thailand, in Pay Pin Taung in Myanmar. The ceremony took place on the 777th suspension bridge – a bridge that he initiated, planned, and built together with the villagers.¹ But this story began much earlier:

In 1987, on the night of his graduation from the *Lyceum Alpinum* in Zuoz, Rüttimann set off for earthquake-ravaged Ecuador. Shaken by reports and pictures from the earthquake zone, he wanted to go there himself and use the 9,000 Swiss francs he had previously collected in the Upper Engadine for a social mission.

“Nothing had prepared me for so much chaos and destruction, for the isolation and the distances. It is one thing to see the images of a catastrophe on the television screen, and another to be in the midst of them,” he wrote in his memoirs.² “Whole villages were still cut off behind the raging rivers. Endless families with their belongings in bundles wandered the countryside on foot, looking for a new life. Crying children stood in the ruins along the way, lost in their desolation. It was the first time in my life that I saw so much suffering.”

For the first time, Rüttimann realised the importance of bridges to basic survival. Without a bridge there was no access to food, no safe route to school, no access to badly needed medicine, and no way to get fuel.



The bridges unite people with each other and are indispensable for coping with everyday life. They make adequate medical care possible, and the safe route to school opens up access to education for children. (picture Toni Rüttimann)

A slightly slanted bridge and an important decision

In the disaster area between the Andean foothills and the Amazon of Ecuador, Rüttimann met a Dutch engineer who was married in Ecuador and had also come to help. They joined forces: Hugo, the engineer, had the necessary skills and also knew of a place where several hundred people desperately needed a bridge. Rüttimann now knew how and where he wanted to use his money. Together they created a 50-metre suspension bridge.

“It turned out to be a somewhat sloping bridge, but it was a useful bridge,” he recalls. A second bridge was already in the planning stage when he returned to Switzerland, six months later, to start studying civil engineering. He hoped it would give him the professional tools he needed to provide effective help later on.

“But at night, alone in my room, the images from Ecuador came back: the lost children and the screaming on the riverbank.” In the weeks to come, the question of whether he was taking the right path with his studies beset him: “You want to study here for five years? You will get used to all the comforts: good meals three times a day, a nice home, friends, girlfriend, sports, holidays. And then, after a long five years, will you still be determined enough to say, yes, now I’m ready, now I’m going to help the poor?”

At the end of the sixth week, he logged out of ETH, said goodbye to friends and

family, cleared out his savings account and went back to Ecuador. And thus began his life as a bridge builder.

“He believed in my dream of the bridge”

His second bridge was not yet finished when he met *Jesús Rodríguez*, who helped him complete the half-finished 80-metre project. As Rüttimann recalls:

“[Rodríguez] was a peón, a farm worker, employed by a farm worker, the lowest link in the chain. His job was to cut down the thicket with a machete and collect coffee. His hands were strong, his fingers scarred and bent. He was not yet thirty, though he did not know exactly how old he was, for his mother had died when he was born and his father had never appeared. As a little orphan, he had come from Colombia through the jungle across the border to Lago Agrio. Not a single day in his life had he gone to school; he had learned to write shakily by himself. He was brave and funny. He was my teacher and friend. And: he believed in my dream of the bridge.”

No child’s play

Together they moved to El Nazareno, where they built their third bridge. And

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“Bridges between people and places”

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then they started their fourth bridge, even though this seemed crazy: It was to have a 264-metre span, over the Rio Aguarico, and would free ten village communities from being cut off.

They had no more money, no more tools, no more material, not even a cable, and above all they did not know how to plan and construct such a bridge. In the end, they found some help from an oil drilling company in the jungle, which finally gave them a discarded but still reliable steel cable. But that was only one hurdle they had to overcome, because building such an extraordinarily long suspension bridge was no child's play.

Here, too, a solution was found. In the small oil capital of Lago Agrio, in the rainforest region of Ecuador, there are two 270-metre-long suspension bridges next to each other, on which a suspended pipeline carrying a large part of the national oil production crossed the Rio Aguarico.

“I spent countless hours under these suspension bridges observing, counting, and measuring,” wrote Rüttimann. Finally, the chief engineer, under whose supervision the suspension bridges had been built, offered to help him design a bridge plan. The first step was taken. Next, it was a matter of finding materials.

Tubes, support structures, cement and much more had to be begged from oil companies and cement factories, which again took almost a year. Only then could construction begin. In his memoirs, Rüttimann impressively described how much knowledge it took and how much effort it cost him, Jesús, and the entire village, until the longed-for bridge could be bless-

ed by the bishop two years later, when it was inaugurated with a big celebration.

Don't let up

That was the beginning. Over the course of the next decades, many pedestrian bridges were built, with the design and construction continuously improved upon. Rüttimann did not let up. For decades, he collected used steel cables from drilling companies in the jungles of Ecuador and Colombia, as well as in Houston, Texas, for the bridges in Central America.

Then, in 2005, he began using donated discarded steel cables from Swiss cable car companies, which have to be replaced regularly because of strict safety regulations, but which are still far oversized for the bridges. In the last 20 years, these donations have amounted to 517 kilometres of cable from 71 Swiss cableways, some of it even new, from the Swiss manufacturer *Fatzer*.

Fortunately, he no longer has to beg for supplies. For example, he receives donated steel tubes needed for bridge piers and flooring from the world's largest tube producer, *Tenaris*. The Argentinian steel company *Ternium* donates corrugated plates. Perhaps it was the humanitarian nature of Rüttimann's work that prompted them to make their donations.

Together at work

In the first 14 years, until 2001, the bridges were built in Latin America. In Ecuador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Mexico, and other countries as well, 332 bridges now lead across rivers and deep gorges. But they are not simply “delivered”. When a bridge is built, the entire community helps. Villagers organise the transport of the construc-

tion material and build the foundations – it is a community effort.

Community participation ensures that only bridges that are really necessary are built. They are not road bridges, but 1.70m wide footbridges that connect people in the immediate vicinity. Today, 435 bridges have become an indispensable help in the daily lives of more than half a million people in Latin America.

Earlier on, Rüttimann used to return to Switzerland once a year. He gave lectures and visited schools. When a Cambodian refugee approached him at an event in Switzerland in 2001 and reported that there was also a lack of bridges in his home country, Rüttimann shifted his work to Southeast Asia.

**Hard times and
40 to 50 bridges per year**

But then came a difficult time. In Cambodia Rüttimann fell ill with Guillain-Barre syndrome, which left him almost completely paralysed from one day to the next. He was in hospital for several months and, for two years, he struggled to get back into life.

Even standing and walking is not easy for Rüttimann today, posing many challenges for someone who prefers to sit on the supporting cables at construction sites while a pedestrian footbridge is being installed underneath. Despite the many difficulties, something good eventually came from the illness: During his convalescence, Rüttimann developed a computer programme to facilitate standardised, remote-controlled construction of his suspension bridges.

Today, detailed plans can be drawn up incorporating information on the terrain and the span of the desired bridge. The structure can then be welded and prepared using a modular system. This allows Rüttimann and his teams to build 40 to 50 suspension bridges a year in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar. One of them is the 777th bridge in Pay Pin Taung.

“Best build your own bridges”

Anyone who has heard Rüttimann give one of his talks understands why he captivates children, young people, and adults with his personality and humanitarian work. They imagine themselves along side him when he talks about his strenuous work and the many hardships he takes on without seeking fame or publicity. His commitment, which demands a lot of effort and a modest lifestyle, appeals to them. Listening to Rüttimann, a bridge is built between his story and themselves.

At the age of 56, how much longer can Rüttimann continue his work? “I don't



Toni (on the right) with his Myanmar colleague Aiklian. (picture Toni Rüttimann)

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“Bridges between people and places”

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think I can take it for another 15 years,” he said in an interview five years ago.³ When asked if he would retire and settle down at 65, he said that he will certainly try to continue to work for another three years.

“Because my material store in Switzerland had to be liquidated, I now have material for 170 bridges that I have distributed in Myanmar, Indonesia, and Ecuador. We are still building these bridges.” He has no shortage of material, because he is constantly receiving new requests from companies that want to provide him with cables. He can’t refuse them, and adds, “If I can hold out for one more year, I’ll build 40 more bridges. That will help 200,000 people.”

In the meantime, five years have passed. Rüttimann does not yet know when he will be back in Switzerland, but he wrote to the students who had heard about him and would now like to meet him in person. “It’s nice to hear that our bridge story seems to you to be something valuable. [...] There are now 898 completed bridges, and they are helping 2.4 million people. Better than nothing, I think. Meanwhile, you’d best just build your own bridges where and how you can,” Rüttimann offered his encouragement to the students. And he himself does the same.

A special bridge and new plans

Bridge No. 777 marked the beginning of a new chapter in Rüttimann’s life. He started a family, and four and a half years ago his wife Palin gave birth to their daughter, *Athina*. “She is a Thaidi (a Thai Heidi), happy and free here in nature, with a view from the mountain across to Myanmar, far from the usual chaos. And soon she will come with me to the first bridge building over in Myanmar,” he wrote me in an email for this article from the Myanmar-Thailand border.

But what is happening here in the West also concerns him. People are separated as if by a river from what they are actually capable of, he said in the newspaper interview: “They are constantly distracted by the daily struggle. They no longer know what a person is actually capable of achieving.”⁴

That is why he wants to use his knowledge to encourage people to think about what is actually possible. At the end of this year, he plans to sit down to write a book from his notes and edit a film series from extensive film footage. “So, material exists, I just have to assemble it properly now, plaster it and paint it.” He describes



The ropes are among the most important components for building a bridge. Everyone helps with the transport, here in Ywar Wai, Mandalay in Myanmar. (picture Toni Rüttimann)



The children also do their bit and help to provide their village with access to education, medical care, food and fuel. (picture Toni Rüttimann)

his projects as if they are new bridges – and they are. What a treasure they will be!

er Foundation, of which he was a prize-winner in 1999, and which have been reproduced for this article with the kind permission of the author. <https://www.stiftungbrandenberger.ch/index.php/de/archiv/69-1999-toni-ruettimann>.

¹ The impressive film, translated into 16 languages, can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/270969266/4479f7b445>.

² Toni Rüttimann’s personal recollections of the early years of his bridge-building days can be found on the website of the Dr. J. E. Brandenberg-

³ see <https://www.suedostschweiz.ch/wirtschaft/2018-02-18/brueckenbauer-toni-el-suizo-will-kuenftig-europaern-helfen>

⁴ see <https://www.suedostschweiz.ch/wirtschaft/2018-02-18/brueckenbauer-toni-el-suizo-will-kuenftig-europaern-helfen>