

Current Concerns

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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Switzerland's role in geopolitical change

Lecture by *Ralph Bosshard** at the 30th "Mut zur Ethik" conference in Sirmach TG on 2 September 2023



Ralph Bosshard
(picture wp)

On the occasion of my inaugural visit to the General Staff Academy of the Russian Armed Forces in May 2013, I had a similar experience to *Scott Ritter* on his inspection trip to the former Soviet Union: I discovered that Russian colonels, generals and admirals are completely normal people and do not at all correspond to the image, which is currently being published in the German-speaking press. Over the next 14 months, we considered how to defend Russia against invasion and realised that with an army then numbering 900000 men, this was a challenging task. In this respect, the training in Moscow differed from that which I had enjoyed in numerous NATO courses: there we always practiced putting down uprisings somewhere on fictitious islands in the world's oceans under the slogan "foster peace and stability".

Neutrality in the environment of hybrid warfare

You can only gain such insights if you get to know the language and local conditions. Based on this consideration, language training should actually become mandatory in the training of journalists, otherwise reporting becomes worthless. Gazettes without such knowledge can safely be used to stuff wet shoes.

One line of strategy in today's competition between powers is the promotion of organised crime, regardless of whether one calls it "hybrid warfare" or something else. But as long as, for example, the alleged pedophile *Oleh Liashko*, the allegedly corrupt and criminal former Interior

Minister *Arsen Awakow* and *Yuriy Lutsenko*, who served as prosecutor general as a non-lawyer, have political influence in today's Ukraine, even the most efficient criminal investigators will have no chance to investigate or prevent crimes, particularly against Ukrainian refugee women.

Since the turn of the millennium, questions about the relationship between politics, the economy and society have been answered differently in Russia and Belarus than in the West. This has created an ideological contradiction – largely unnoticed by the West – which is now becoming apparent in the war in Ukraine. *Francis Fukuyama's* theories have been refuted by reality.

land is indeed a small state, ranking 132nd out of 194 countries in the world. However, in terms of population, where it is ranked 100th, it is more or less in the middle. In terms of economic performance, it is one of the largest in the world, ranking 21st out of 192. As a medium-sized country with great economic performance, without a colonial past and with a long tradition of non-interference in foreign conflicts, Switzerland should actually be in a position to secure the sympathy of a large number of countries around the world. This should actually help it to overcome its image problems due to its financial centre and the envy of the war-ravaged countries of two world wars. All

"Neutrality is the attitude of sovereign states and self-confident peoples who decide their own fate and do not want to be reduced to an object of geopolitical concepts. It is the counter-concept to exceptionalism, with the help of which the USA in particular wants to turn all other countries in the world into banana republics and into territories with limited rights like Puerto Rico."

For 20 years NATO waged war in Afghanistan, not against terrorism, but against an entire society. All the *political advisors* and *gender advisors* who worked in the NATO mission and demanded that the country's residents implement all of Europe's achievements since the French Revolution such as human rights, democracy, equal rights and others within a few years are to blame for this. Now we have to stop these people from ruining other Central Asian states.

Overall, it must be noted that the use of all conceivable areas of social life and state action for the purpose of waging war, which is being carried out today, forces a discussion about the semantic content of the concept of neutrality.

Favourable starting position for Switzerland

The Swiss always like to hide their light under a bushel. In terms of area, Switzer-

of this forces us to pursue an active foreign policy. If Switzerland submits to the foreign policy dictates of the Diplomatic Service of the EU (EEAS), it will give up important advantages and only suffer disadvantages.

Abuse of neutrality

In the run-up to World War II, *Joseph Stalin* was interested in the neutrality of the Soviet Union because his ideological mindset told him that the Soviet Union should not care if the capitalist states of Germany, Italy, France and the British Empire were tearing each other apart. Furthermore, he may have hoped that he could then benefit from the moment of weakness that arises when these powers are exhausted by war. Conversely, leading circles in Great Britain may have asked themselves why the kingdom should be concerned if the National So-

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* *Ralph Bosshard* studied general history, Eastern European history and military history, completed the military leadership school at ETH Zurich and general staff training for the Swiss Army. This was followed by language training in Russian at Moscow State University and training at the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Army. He is familiar with the situation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia from his six years at the OSCE, during which he also worked as special advisor to the Permanent Representative of Switzerland.

"Switzerland's role ..."

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cialist Third Reich and the Bolshevik Soviet Union fight each other. Great Britain was primarily interested in its colonial empire and had pursued a strategy of balance on the European continent since the *War of the Spanish Succession*. Here, neutrality was abused as a vehicle, in contrast to Switzerland, which always viewed permanent neutrality as a prerequisite for credibility.

Similar considerations may have motivated the Americans at the Potsdam Conference from 17 July 1945 to 2 August 1945 to urge the Soviets to break their neutrality pact with Japan and attack the Empire of Japan three months after the end of the war in Europe. Imagine what the balance of power in East Asia would have looked like if the USA had lost a million soldiers in the invasion of Japan, as feared, while the Red Army had transferred the same number of soldiers to the Far East. The Soviet Union would have had a free hand in East Asia! Therefore, the Soviet Union had to be drawn into the war and Japan's surrender had to be brought about quickly, without major losses for the Americans. The logical consequence of this was the dropping of two atomic bombs. These events also revealed an understanding of neutrality that is not credible.

The assault rifle in your own locker

It has been repeated for decades that neutrality must be armed in order to appear credible. Actually, an easy-to-understand statement; because almost every policy has to be backed up militarily. Anyone who fails to do so is virtually inviting military intervention. The most recent case in which this happened is the autumn war in Nagorno-Karabakh of 2020. In this sense, neutrality is not synonymous with pacifism, but arises from the insight that wars that lead to self-destruction are better not waged.

Neutrality must not only be credible, but also useful, so that the neighbours of a neutral power in particular have an interest in its integrity. This also speaks for Switzerland's active foreign policy based on its neutrality.

Proponents of joining NATO repeatedly argue that autonomous defence is no longer possible today. This has been the case for centuries, because without imports of the necessary raw materials we would not even have been able to produce gunpowder ourselves. And even today, of the 194 countries in the world, only very few are able to produce everything an army needs. Furthermore, the chain of arguments between dependence on imports and NATO membership is far from closed. One can also ask oneself how such a statement

from NATO supporters can come about as long as there are no scenarios for Swiss national defence in the context of a pan-European conflict scenario.

If Switzerland is ever forced to defend itself against an aggressor, then it must persuade at least one of its neighbours to keep its access to world markets open. However, there is no requirement that someone else fight the war for Switzerland. Three of our neighbours are among the big players in world politics and have geopolitical ambitions from the Gulf of Aden to the Gulf of Guinea to the Arctic Ocean. Participating in acts of aggression that violate international law as a kind of preventive measure in order to endear oneself to these neighbours cannot be a strategy for ensuring security.

Switzerland is quintessentially European

It is well known that *Erasmus von Rotterdam*, *Paracelsus* and other important early modern scholars taught at the University of Basel; that *Jean Calvin* and *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* came from Geneva, as well. What is less known, however, is that the chief engineer of the Milan Cathedral, *Giovanni Solari*, came from Carona near Locarno and that his son *Pietro Solari* played a leading role in the expansion of the *Moscow Kremlin*. The original version of the *Nibelungenlied*, one of the oldest testimonies of the German language, was written in the monastery of St. Gallen as early as the 13th century. In the monastery of St. Gallen, pious monks, especially *Notker the German*, wrote the first commentary on *Aristotle* since ancient times in the 10th century, when the residents of Berlin still worshiped pagan idols! All in all: Switzerland is quintessentially European, but not part of the EU and NATO. This is what makes the Swiss position on current issues so interesting. It makes no sense for powers outside Europe to talk to representatives of the small EU member states, because Brussels speaks for them. As a non-member of these alliances, Switzerland can make its voice heard internationally.

Geopolitical change cannot be ignored

Quite apart from the fact that a large number of countries around the world are not taking part in the EU's sanctions against Russia, the summits of African countries with Russia and the BRICS summit in recent weeks have shown how the world feels towards Europe. At the Africa-Russia Summit on July 27 and 28 this year, 49 African countries out of 54 were represented by heads of state or government or ministers. In most of these countries, Europeans are unpopular due to their colonial past. According to reports, the Chinese are currently trying to make themselves

unpopular on the African continent. They also sometimes tend towards arrogance and a false sense of cultural superiority. Perhaps they are making the same mistakes as Europeans in the past. The Africans in particular will have no interest in swapping their hard-won dependence on the European colonial powers for one on Beijing or in opening the door to gender zealots, primarily from north-western Europe.

The BRICS summit from 22 to 24 August demonstrated great interest in this group of states, which today accounts for a share of the world's population and global economic output that can no longer be ignored. It cannot be assumed that the BRICS plus will form a tightly knit bloc, like the countries of the communist bloc during the Cold War, when belonging to a bloc was, in the eyes of many countries, a question of military survival. For many countries, however, there is now an opportunity to secure the most advantageous offer from the West and the BRICS plus. Anyone who does not take advantage of this opportunity is just stupid. And perhaps the loose cohesion of the BRICS is also an element that makes this cluster of states attractive.

In the future, world politics will be conducted in the capitals of the BRICS plus countries, and not in the eunuch choir of the G7. *Xi Jinping* and *Vladimir Putin* may settle the Korean peninsula's problems while the German foreign minister is still stuck on a broken government plane.

Conclusion

The cards in world politics are currently being redistributed, to the detriment of all those who would like to divide the world into good and evil, black and white. This is world politics for colour blind people. NATO has been remembering the *Olsen gang* in the Danish crime comedies of the eighties and nineties since the embarrassment at Kabul Airport in August 2021. In these, the clumsy gang, led by their boss *Egon Olsen*, was always ready to do crooked things and failed every time because of their own shortcomings.

As long as the war in Ukraine continues, the West will continue its process of denial of reality. And the war in Ukraine must continue because it has long since become the framework in which the third world war is being prepared. The attacks on the Kremlin in Moscow and the bases of the Russian transport and long-range aviation forces near Saratov and Pskov can also be interpreted as main tests for a (first) strike against the country's leadership and the Russian arsenal of nuclear deterrence. If there are attacks against Russian submarine bases and missile silos in the near future, then we will know what

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No accession to Sky Shield – Neutrality instead of NATO

Swiss and Austrian groups initiate a movement for neutrality and prepare actions against Sky Shield

In September and October, a series of online meetings of Swiss and Austrian activists for the defence of neutrality took place. Several groups from each of the two countries are involved. This was prompted by the joint declaration of the governments in Bern and Vienna to join the NATO missile system “Sky Shield”.

For peace activists, joining a central NATO weapons system is completely incompatible with the neutrality of our two countries. Assurances that it would merely be a “purchasing community” are not credible.

Moreover, the vast majority of Swiss and Austrians support the preservation of neutrality, whereas participation in “Sky Shield” would mean de facto accession to NATO. This would not only fundamentally violate constitutional neutrality, but would also endanger our security.

It is NATO’s nuclear missile arsenal that is one of the central causes of the war in Ukraine. Since 2008, the Kremlin has repeatedly called on the West to refrain from a further NATO advance

towards the Russian border: The establishing of radar installations and missile launch pads in Poland and Romania have been compared by the Russian side to the deployment of *Pershing-II*–nuclear missiles directed against Russia in the 1980s! In fact, the missile launch facilities themselves can easily be converted to attack facilities. Nuclear missiles and missile defence form a single system and are designed to make the US threat of a nuclear first strike credible, thus underpinning the global power claim of the US and the West. Moreover, “Sky Shield” further drives the arms spiral.

We clearly and resolutely oppose joining “Sky Shield”, because it is the path to further escalation of war. Maintaining neutrality, on the other hand, is a clear signal in the direction of peace and against the warmongering NATO alliance, whose dissolution we resolutely demand.

Our transnational neutrality initiative intends to take a joint and simultaneous action against joining “Sky Shield” in Switzerland and Austria at the next op-

portunity. All democratic and peace-loving forces are invited to cooperate in this. Signatories:

*Independent Living Austria; Linksbündig.ch; Alliance Against War – Hands Off Syria; Anti-Imperialist Coordination, Austria; Attac Fribourg; Styrian Peace Platform; Robert Glaubauf, MFG regional group Vienna; Wolfgang Friedhuber, peace activist, Graz; Christina Angerer, psychotherapist, Innsbruck; Charly Walter, interior designer, Innsbruck; Georg Becker, Vienna, retired lawyer, Unter St. Veit; Peter Weish, human ecologist, Forum Wissenschaft & Umwelt, Vienna; Hans Bieri, member of the committee of the neutrality initiative, Switzerland; Willi Langthaler, activist and author, Vienna; Martin M. Weinberger, Palestine activist, Vienna; Judith Leitner, Vienna; Gerhard Kofler, peace activist, Vienna; Franz Sölkner, Styrian Peace Platform; Nikolaus Schwartz, Civil Society Initiative; Markus Heizmann, Basel, Switzerland, (member of Alliance Against War – Hands Off Syria); Andrea Duffour, Fribourg, Switzerland (Alliance Against War – Hands Off Syria); Paul Stulz (member Attac Fribourg); Georg Prchlik, lawyer, Vienna; Edgar Hagenbichler, doctor, mandatar of the MFG doctors’ group in the ÄK Vienna; Renate Konopitzky, biochemist, member of the MFG doctors’ association; Hubert Thurnhofer, chief editor *ethos.at*; Kerstin Bartel, teacher, Vienna; Andrea Drescher, management consultant, freelance journalist, Upper Austria*
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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is really at stake. For now, the West will force Ukraine to continue the war, even if it loses hundreds of lives every day. Perhaps the same dirty game is being played in the Baltics that has been playing for years in the Middle East, where the Israeli Air Force is used to flying attacks against Syria from Lebanese airspace.

By participating in the economic sanctions, Switzerland has damaged its image as a reliable trading partner. What role can she still play? It is questionable whether it will once again succeed in assuming a bridging function, such as between the USA and Cuba and Iran or between Russia and Georgia. More than one role as a voice of reason is probably no longer possible.

Outlook

Neutrality is the attitude of sovereign states and self-confident peoples who decide their own fate and do not want to be reduced to an object of geopolitical concepts. It is the counter-concept to exceptionalism, with the help of which the USA in particular wants to turn all other countries in the world into banana republics and into territories with limited rights like Puerto Rico. The reluctance with which the Global South reacts to the advances from Brussels, Washing-

“Neutrality is not indecent. Pressuring Switzerland to participate in violent solutions after it has invested so much in peaceful options is indecent. Neutrality is also not an expression of cowardice. Switzerland remains a country that is not exposed to any military threat. Taking advantage of their secure position to spread war to other countries would be cowardly. Using the security of their situation to work on non-violent solutions is not a pacifist heroic act, but rather the contribution that the world can reasonably expect from Switzerland. We must continue to follow this path.”

ton and Berlin is forcing the West to bring neutrals on board. In this sense, the pressure currently being exerted on Switzerland is nothing other than a sign of desperation.

Switzerland was not insufficiently active in the conflict in and around Ukraine. Swiss diplomats played a key role in bringing about the *Minsk agreements* and the OSCE special observation mission in Ukraine. When it became clear that the Minsk package of measures in particular could not be implemented, Swiss diplomats offered to draw up a *road map*. But Ukraine and the West wanted to keep all options for action open – including mil-

itary ones – and pursued a “*choose and pick*” policy. Neutrality is not indecent. Pressuring Switzerland to participate in violent solutions after it has invested so much in peaceful options is indecent. Neutrality is also not an expression of cowardice. Switzerland remains a country that is not exposed to any military threat. Taking advantage of their secure position to spread war to other countries would be cowardly. Using the security of their situation to work on non-violent solutions is not a pacifist heroic act, but rather the contribution that the world can reasonably expect from Switzerland. We must continue to follow this path. •

Neutrality is humanity

by Urs Graf, Psychologist, Switzerland

In war, all human differences are taken to extremes, nuances are negated and reduced to a crude black and white scheme: “with us or against us – friend? ... or enemy?”

This is an unnatural, traumatising state of mind in which everything that divides outweighs what unites. Mistrust, fear and hatred make people sick and drive them to commit inhumane acts.

Over the last hundred years, taking a dispassionate view of warlike events has also saved our country from being dragged into the maelstrom of murderous power politics in our immediate neighbours. Instead of taking sides, our parents’ generation provided humanitarian assistance. This was to everyone’s advantage.

Those who force us to take sides today are threatening Switzerland and depriving it of its ability to contribute to a more peaceful world. It should be obvious that

the abandonment of Swiss neutrality cannot serve a fairer world order. The fact that this is not also regretted in the western part of the world does not change the matter – but it does make our situation more difficult.

Damage threatens our country through the destruction of its political culture, which has grown over centuries, if it is to be squeezed into a spiritually impoverished rest of Europe led by an undemocratic administrative juggernaut.

Switzerland will be irretrievably damaged by the continued dismantling of education, the only commodity we had in abundance (apart from perhaps water and stones).

As the latest parliamentary decisions show, there is no sign of any will across all parties to finally put a stop to the disintegration of our society by means of drugs, or to protect young people from violence

and pornography. One gets the impression that our legislature is more committed to certain business circles than to the common good.

Anyone who believes that the recent elections could bring about a turnaround in this respect must be very optimistic. In view of the meaningless slogans on the poster portraits of almost all the candidates, this is hardly to be expected.

Moreover, the elected representatives who have helped to authoritatively push through destructive “reforms” in sensitive areas such as the army and education in particular in recent years belong to all parliamentary groups. It is not clear why “Moscow should influence the elections” in favour of a particular one of them, as analysts from our Federal Intelligence Service (FIS) claim. Countering the above-mentioned dangers would be their most urgent task. •

Letter to the Editor

Money for war prevents peace

Hundreds of thousands of people have died on both sides in Ukraine so far. And the senseless killing continues unabated. What for? An oppressive question. The maltreated country will become even more impoverished and ultimately be divided. A proxy war is taking place on the territory of Ukraine. The united West is turning in blind rage against Russia, its archenemy.

But it gets much worse when you realise the following: at the end of February 2022, the Ukrainian president made a proposal for negotiations. Moscow agreed. Not so the European Union. In the meantime, it has delivered a first tranche

of weapons worth 450 million euros. In March 2022, *Volodimir Zelensky* offered talks again, and once again the Russians were open. But the EU blocked them once again. In the meantime, it provided Ukraine with a second tranche worth 500 million euros. Despite this, the negotiators in Istanbul almost reached an agreement. However, on 2 April, British Prime Minister *Boris Johnson* called on *Zelensky* by telephone to withdraw his proposals, otherwise the West would withdraw its aid. He doubled down on his visit to Kiev on 9 April. No negotiations, otherwise ...

It is important to bear in mind the facts mentioned above: It was exclusively the

West, under the dictates of the US, that prevented negotiations with Russia and favoured mass murder on both sides.

Daniel Wirz, Zug

Source: Patrik Baab, “Auf beiden Seiten der Front – Meine Reisen in die Ukraine” (On both sides of the front – My journeys to Ukraine). *Patrik Baab* is an experienced journalist who has been practising this profession for over 40 years. His research into the assassination of *Uwe Barschel*, *Olof Palme* and *William Colby* has shown that Baab is not afraid to tackle sensitive subjects. His most recent journey took him to the war in Ukraine, to both sides of the front line. This is also the title of the resulting book that has just been published.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Dissenting voices

The fact that *Current Concerns* regularly allows voices from other parts of the world to have their say is a blessing for me as a counterweight to the day-to-day one-sidedness in our media. I would therefore like to thank you for summarising the speech given by the Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso, the “land of honest people”, at the UN in September. *Bassolma Bazié*, a committed representative of his country’s independence, emphasised that “state-run lies, the pursuit of profit and power” threaten human coexistence and the basic sense of community – especially today, when the world is in turmoil. Standing up for a more just world is urgent. *Bazie* cites Libya as an example of a country plagued by the violation of every

human and international right. In his own country, the population has to defend itself in a war imposed on it against armed terrorist gangs. This civil defence is being vilified by some heads of government as a mercenary force, but it was only necessary because people had to defend their lives. Numerous European and American troops are still present in the Sahel: not to protect international law! “Let’s be honest, it’s mainly about Africa’s natural resources!” This is why the beleaguered states of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are now taking the problem of their security into their own hands.

And now to the “On our own account” of *Current Concerns* (and Switzerland’s neutrality):

Such an independent, unbiased defence of rights must also be the guiding principle of every Swiss authority. I was all the more outraged by the breach of the law in the spying on *Current Concerns* – by the Swiss Federal Intelligence Service FIS. This is a blatant violation of the Federal Constitution. The “occasion” was an article on Swiss neutrality, allegedly Russian “propaganda”. Listen and be amazed. This scandal must stop, it must be resolutely opposed (by legal means). The constitution guarantees freedom of expression and information as well as freedom of the media. The actions of the FIS are fundamentally out of the question.

Renate Dünki, Oberwangen TG

War power NATO stretches its tentacles towards neutral Switzerland

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The world order is in a state of upheaval, from a “rule-based order”, imposed by the Western powers on numerous other countries, to a community of nations with equal rights. As is well known, Switzerland has also been caught up in a large-scale maelstrom. To prevent our unique model from being bogged by the blocs of the EU and NATO and thus sunk into the chaos of war, we need to close ranks and to play ball – which is unfortunately not clear to all Swiss. The latest action against our sovereignty and neutrality is the planned opening of a NATO “liaison office” in Geneva. Although no formal request has yet been made, the Federal Council and its administration are already in their starting blocks to “welcome” the war alliance to neutral Switzerland. This was reported by most Swiss media on 11 October (for example, “Tages-Anzeiger”, “Blick”, *Handelszeitung*, “20 Minuten”, but also Austrian television ORF and *Radio Liechtenstein*).

What business does the war alliance NATO have in Geneva, the city of peace?

On the Federal Council’s homepage, one looks in vain for a reference to this absolute no-go. Answering the question of the media, the *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs* (FDFA) states that it is not a “bilateral office of an alliance with official Switzerland”, but “a liaison office between NATO and international and non-governmental organisations based in Geneva”.¹

So much the worse! In other words, it is about a centre of the Western war alliance wanting to connect itself to neutral Switzerland, bypassing our authorities, in order to tighten its net. Already in July, after the Vilnius summit, NATO announced in point 86 of its communiqué: “We are examining the possibility of establishing a liaison office in Geneva in order to further strengthen our engagement with the United Nations and other relevant international organisations.”² As if the world did not have enough experience with NATO’s “engagement” – or rather its terrible wars. And why do we, the Swiss citizens, hear about this “office” only now, when we are practically facing the *fait accompli*? Who can say they would read point 86 of a communiqué if it was not actually spelled out for them? The “Tages-Anzeiger” comments on this tactic: “The note is inconspicuous and well hidden. But for Switzerland it has political explosive power.” Yes, indeed!

Federal privileges for a NATO centre with an unknown mission?

The diligently used label “neutral” does nothing to whitewash those of the Fed-

eral Council’s actions which are contrary to neutrality. The FDFA claims that the opening of a NATO liaison office in Switzerland is “not a problem in terms of

neutrality law [...] because the defence alliance represents an intergovernmental organisation according to the Swiss Host
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Text: “Ever since we Swiss have been marching for peace as equal Pfp partners, I feel really grown up.”

NATO – a defence alliance?

mw. Many Swiss media and politicians continue to refer to NATO as a “defence alliance”, which since the new NATO doctrine of 24 April 1999 no longer applies *de iure* (paras 24 and 25) and is *de facto* obsolete due to NATO wars outside the territory of its member states. Moreover, with the war of aggression against Serbia in 1999 – without the approval of the UN Security Council – NATO also for the first time violated its own rule of conducting its operations “in accordance with international law” (para 31).

The Alliance’s Strategic Concept of 24 April 1999

para 24: “Any armed attack on the territory of the Allies, from whatever direction, would be covered by Articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty. However, Alliance security must also take account of the global context. Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including acts of terrorism, sabotage and organised crime, and by the disruption of the flow of vital resources. The uncontrolled movement of large numbers of people, particularly as a consequence of armed conflicts, can also pose problems

for security and stability affecting the Alliance. [...]”

para 25: “The Alliance is committed to a broad approach to security, which recognises the importance of political, economic, social and environmental factors *in addition to the indispensable defence dimension*. [...] (emphasis mw)

para 31: “In pursuit of its policy of preserving peace, preventing war, and enhancing security and stability [...] NATO will seek, in cooperation with other organisations, to prevent conflict, or, should a crisis arise, to contribute to its effective management, consistent with international law, including through the possibility of conducting *non-Article 5 crisis response operations*. (emphasis mw)

Sources:

NATO-Summit 1999. *The Alliance’s Strategic Concept (1999)*; https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm#:~:text=The%20Alliance%20will%20promote%20peaceful,relations%20and%20support%20democratic%20institutions.

“From a defence alliance to a war machine”. *Current Concerns* No 25 of 18 June 2012

“War power NATO stretches ...”

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State Act”. Actually, the word should have spread even in Federal Bern that NATO is no longer a “defence alliance”, at least since its war of aggression against Yugoslavia, but that it is a warring party in numerous wars outside its territory.

Switzerland created the Host State Act³ as a contribution by our neutral country to the promotion of cooperation in the world community. It lays the legal foundations for the support of the ICRC and the numerous UN organisations that have their headquarters in Geneva, but also for many other domestic and foreign cultural, humanitarian and economic organisations in Switzerland that are dedicated to the cooperation of countries and peoples in the most diverse areas, as well as for international conferences and arbitration tribunals. The law regulates “the granting of privileges, immunities and facilities” as well as “financial contributions” by Switzerland (Art. 1 para. 1) to such organisations.

If Switzerland were to grant hospitality to the NATO war alliance, this would consequently mean that its employees in Switzerland would have a free hand to fulfil their mission from across the Atlantic. That mission is unknown to us. Moreover, they would not even be subject to the Swiss rule of law, but would benefit from far-reaching privileges such as immunity from prosecution or tax exemption (Art. 3), which have been established for the ICRC and the UN organisations. Surely the Federal Council cannot be serious about that!

Critical voices in politics and the media remind the Federal Council of Switzerland’s neutrality

Beni Gafner, Federal Palace editor of the Swiss newspaper “Tages-Anzeiger”, is surprised by the Federal Council’s statement that a NATO centre in Geneva would “not affect neutrality”.⁴ Gafner states, on the other hand, that “in public, the federal government gives the impression that in the form of NATO it wants to bring another peace organisation to Geneva – a kind of aid organisation that is there for everyone, regardless of party. But this is not the case, because NATO is a defence alliance under the command of the USA – and a military opponent for countries like Russia or China.” Because the USA is “the absolutely dominant military power” within NATO, says Gafner, approval by the Federal Council of the NATO base in Geneva would “bring Switzerland dangerously close to the USA”. The editor points out that “a permanent NATO presence in our country has not been on the table so far” for Switzerland, because “our priority was to enable neutral mediation between warring parties”. Therefore, he calls on the Federal Council to thoroughly consider “what exactly a NATO presence would mean for Switzerland as a mediator”.

This can only be agreed with. Geneva, the city of peace, has so far been available as a neutral location for good offices for all states and peoples in situations of war and conflict, and this is how it should remain. There is no room for NATO’s efforts to stretch its tentacles into peace and human rights organisa-

tions. It is embarrassing that we have to remind the Federal Council of this.

For National Councillor *Franz Grüter* (SVP), President of the *Foreign Affairs Committee* (FAC-N), it is also clear that Switzerland “as an independent, neutral country” must not be a location for NATO. SP National Councillor *Fabian Molina*, too, is “critical of the opening of an official NATO office in Geneva”.⁵

However, other Swiss parliamentarians quoted in the same newspaper article⁶ offer little thought-out arguments in favour of a NATO centre in Geneva: “The NATO presence would strengthen international Geneva,” claims National Councillor *Andrea Gmür* (the Centre) boldly, while liberal security politician *Maja Riniker* openly admits: “The location would correspond to the rapprochement with NATO that the FDP (the Liberals) is calling for.” (By the way, Riniker came up with the idea of circumventing the ban on the further delivery of Swiss weapons with a con trick: We sell *Leopard* tanks to Germany, which keeps them and sends its own *Leopards* to Ukraine). The green national councillor *Nicolas Walder* takes the biscuit: if Switzerland were to offer NATO the opportunity to “make contact” with the ICRC and the UN in Geneva, this could have a “positive effect on NATO troops’ compliance with international humanitarian law”. Tell that to the marines! (Don’t talk nonsense).

It is still possible to stop!

What happens next? When asked, National Councillor Franz Grüter confirmed a newspaper report that it was up to the Federal Council to decide on the opening of the NATO centre. All they have to do is consult the Foreign Affairs Committees (FAC) of both chambers of parliament beforehand. Grüter plans to submit a proposal to stop the request in the winter session.

Swiss mandate for peace negotiations in Colombia

Good offices belong at the heart of neutral Switzerland’s foreign policy

mw. Next to the unbearable courting of NATO by DDPS head *Viola Amherd* and FDFA (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) head *Ignazio Cassis*, the urgent tasks that await a neutral Switzerland in this war- and misery-ridden world are almost lost. At least a recent press release from the Federal Council reports on Switzerland’s good offices in Colombia. In the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the rebel group *Estado Mayor Central de las FARC-EP* (EMC), “at the parties’ request, taken on an official mandate to serve as guarantor of the negotiations. The mandate is a sign of appreciation for Switzerland’s commitment to peace and its diplomatic efforts.” In addition, “Switzerland is also helping to mitigate the impact of the conflict, for example by taking humanitarian measures, engaging in humanitarian demining and providing support for rural development.” Switzerland has been supporting the peace process in Colombia already for twenty years. Ambassador *Simon Geissbühler*, Head of the Peace and Human Rights Division of the FDFA, says: “The parties’

request is a clear sign of confidence in Switzerland and its peace policy. This is also due to our long-standing presence on the ground.” (*eda.admin.ch*).

“Through its commitment to peace and security, as demonstrated by Switzerland’s support for the Colombian peace process, the federal government is implementing one of the thematic focus areas set out in the Federal Council’s Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23.”

It is good to know that this commitment has not been completely forgotten in the Swiss government’s foreign policy strategy. The Good Offices must once again be at the centre of Swiss foreign policy. As an ever-smiling woman (head of DDPS) or an eager head-nodded (head of FDFA) this may indeed not win you any laurels from the world’s powerful, but it does give you the certainty that, as a neutral country, you are doing the right thing.

Source: “Negotiations launched between Colombian government and rebels with Switzerland serving as guarantor state”. Federal Council media release dated 17 October 2023

¹ Gafner, Beni; Reichen, Philippe; Israel, Stephan. “NATO-Büro in der Schweiz: Militärbündnis will nach Genf expandieren” (NATO office in Switzerland: military alliance wants to expand to Geneva). *Tages-Anzeiger* of 11 October 2023

² Communiqué of the NATO Heads of State and Government of 11 July 2023, item 86 (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/NATOHQ/official_texts_217320.htm).

³ “Federal Act on the Privileges, Immunities and Facilities and the Financial Subsidies granted by Switzerland as a Host State” (*Host State Act, HSA*) of 22 June 2007.

⁴ Gafner, Beni. “Kommentar zum Verbindungsbüro. Vorsicht bei einem Ja zur NATO in Genf” (Commentary on the Liaison Office. Caution with a Yes to NATO in Geneva). *Tages-Anzeiger* of 11 October 2023

⁵ Gafner, Beni; Reichen, Philippe; Israel, Stephan. “NATO-Büro in der Schweiz: Militärbündnis will nach Genf expandieren” (NATO office in Switzerland: military alliance wants to expand to Geneva). *Tages-Anzeiger* of 11 October 2023

⁶ All those named here were confirmed in office in the elections of 22 October 2023.

Full-dress irrationality

Biden: Bombs and missiles for war profiteers instead of schools, hospitals and roads

by Patrick Lawrence*



Patrick Lawrence (picture ef)

Whenever Joe Biden speaks, you have to make sure your bullshit detector is switched on, to borrow Hemingway's pungent phrase. As is well-documented, our president has spent his public life making it up as

he goes along. No surprise, there was a lot of boilerplate junk in the two much-noted speeches Biden gave last week, one in Tel Aviv¹ after attending a session of Israel's war cabinet, the other² when he dropped it on the American public that they were about to spend a lot more money financing Israeli violence, war in Ukraine and provocation across the Taiwan Strait.

Listen carefully

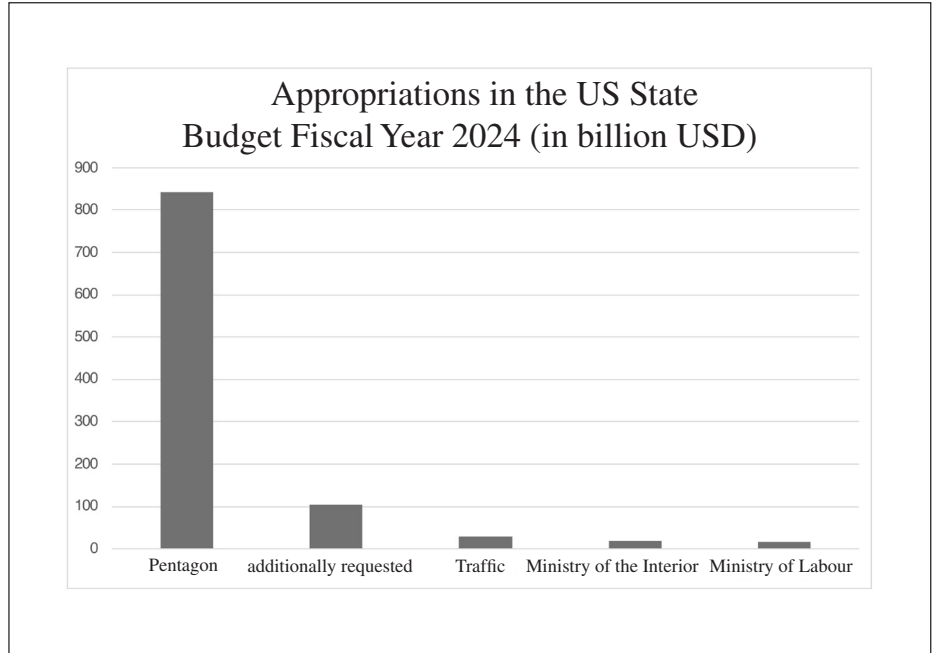
We had better listen carefully this time. Biden has sold a lot of snake oil³ off the back of his buckwagon over the past half-century. What he has on offer now is too consequential simply to dismiss. Biden is diabolically leveraging the obvious urgency of the Israel–Palestine crisis to lock us into confrontation with most of the world – or at the very least a great deal of it. Late-imperium America would darken the 21st century but for the lights others, primarily in the non–West, insist upon to illuminate our way forward from the mess US hegemony has made.

Biden's speeches – incessant lies

After addressing Americans from the Oval Office on 20 October, Biden went to Congress with a request for new aid for Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan, with assorted odds and ends bringing the total spend to 105 billion USD. Here are the passages in Biden's address that, amid perilous crises in West Asia and across both oceans, we ought to scrutinise carefully, the deceptively simplistic phrasing notwithstanding:

"American leadership is what holds the world together. American alliances are what keep us, Ameri-

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ca, safe. American values are what make us a partner that other nations want to work with. To put all that at risk if we walk away from Ukraine, if we turn our backs on Israel, it's not worth it.

That's why, tomorrow, I am going to send to Congress an urgent budget request to fund America's national security needs, to support our critical partners...

It's a smart investment that's going to pay dividends for American security for generations, help us keep American troops out of harm's way, help us build a world that is safer, more peaceful, and more prosperous for our children and grandchildren."

American leadership, everyone wants to be our friend, national security at risk, our children and their children: Biden's speech reads like a nostalgia piece when you think of how long America's purported leaders have traded in this stuff. The Tel Aviv speech gives the same impression: Israel is a democracy defending freedom and human rights, etc. We have heard all this for decades, O. K. Ukraine is also a democracy defending freedom: It is new to the repertoire, but we hear this fable incessantly, too.

It is one thing to recognise how hollow the familiar rhetoric coming out of Washington is and has long been. It is another thing altogether to realise, as we must, that it is different this time – or is as it was, say, when the U.S. escalated in Vietnam.

This is the Biden regime's cover story as it tips us into full-dress irrationality.

The veracity of the speeches

Let us parse a few phrases from the above-quoted passage for their veracity.

American leadership holds the world together and other nations welcome it. Since the traumatising attacks of 11 September 2001, America has made itself the primary source of global disorder in this century – this by common consent for some years. And America's conduct abroad has at this point earned the resentment of the global majority, whether we count this in terms of population or the number of nations critical of U.S. foreign policy.

The new budget request will fund America's national security needs. The new spending Biden proposed last Friday has nothing to do with the nation's national security, as a glance at a map will make perfectly plain, but in one respect: America and Americans will be less secure for it, not more. Beyond our shores, Israelis will be yet less secure than the decades of U.S. military support have already made them. Europeans will be less secure. The people of Taiwan will be less secure. This is the price we and the rest of the world must pay for the Washington policy cliques' insistence on prolonging U.S. preeminence long past its moment in world history. This is what I mean by the reign of irrationality.

"Imperial overstretch"

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"Full-dress irrationality"

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*The money we will spend in Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan will keep U.S. troops out of harm's way and make the world safer and more peaceful and prosperous for generations to come. As Kelley Vlahos at Responsible Statecraft⁴ put it on 20 October, West Asia is now a tinderbox in consequence of Israel's savagery. American troops stationed in Iraq and Syria – this in gross violation of international law – are already under drone and rocket attacks launched by no one is certain who. Our children and theirs will prosper in safety? Ridiculous. I haven't heard the phrase "imperial overstretch" since *Chalmers Johnson* left us 13 years ago. We are now living what he foresaw.*

Big money for wars at the expense of the citizens' quality of life

As reported last week, the U.S. budget deficit doubled in the fiscal year ended September 30, to 1.7 trillion USD—this atop the 30 trillion-plus USD in national debt Joe Biden's generation will leave those to follow. The power of the military-industrial complex – its political power, I mean – bears considerable responsibility for misshaping the American economy to produce these figures.

Now that I am onto figures, let us massage a few. Let us put some of the allocations contained in the national budget for the fiscal year that began 1 October⁵ next to the 105 billion USD the White House just proposed – bearing in mind that the U.S. spends much more on the three beneficiaries of these funds.

The Transportation Department's budget for FY 2024 is 28 billion USD, rounded up. For the Labor Department, it is 15 billion USD. The Interior Department gets 19 billion USD. These three departments have a lot to do with the way Americans live – the quality of our lives. Roads, bridges, public transport; employee training programs, worker safety, labor-management relations; mining and logging licensing and regulation, national parks, Native American affairs: The budgets for these three departments come to 62 billion USD. This is less than 60 per cent of what Biden just asked Congress to spend on arming Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan.

I am not an economist and I don't think overmuch about the federal budget, but to me what the national government spends on education is the single most important decision the federal bean counters make if we want to think about the prosperity, safety, and altogether the future of this country, our children and their children, etc. The Education Department's budget for FY 2024 comes to 90 billion USD – 15 billion USD short even of this interim spend on wars and confrontations abroad.

Money-laundering operations under the guise of high ideals

To be noted in this connection: of the \$105 billion, 61.4 billion USD goes to Ukraine. Except for one thing: Half of this 61.4 billion USD does not go to Ukraine. It goes to the Pentagon, which is to say the defense contractors.

An acquaintance told me the other day about a clever adage he saw mounted on someone's office wall: "The main thing to remember is that the main thing is the main thing." It is perfectly apropos. And the main thing to remember as we contemplate Biden's 105 billion USD is that it will go to one war the US cannot win (Ukraine), to the provocation of another war the U.S. cannot possibly win (with China over Taiwan) and to Israel's purposely disproportionate violence against Palestinians, the end-point of which we call ethnic cleansing, although you have to wonder how long until we ought to push the vocabulary to the freighted "extermination"?

"All of late-imperium America's wars: They are money-laundering operations by way of which the taxes Americans pay in the name of national security, global leadership and all the rest is recycled to the military-industrial complex behind the Chinese screen of patriotism, high ideals, duty and whatever else people such as Joe Biden come up with."

There is no calling this state of affairs rational. I go to *Julian Assange's* observation some years ago. His reference was to Afghanistan, but the thought applies to all of late-imperium America's wars: They are money-laundering operations by way of which the taxes Americans pay in the name of national security, global leadership and all the rest is recycled to the military-industrial complex behind the Chinese screen of patriotism, high ideals, duty and whatever else people such as Joe Biden come up with.

Why else would Washington spend so extravagantly on wars it cannot win and unnecessary confrontations from which it will emerge the loser? Given that the system Julian Assange identified actually works even as it claims unspeakable numbers of lives and impoverishes American life, there seems only one way to think of it: This is a textbook case of what I call the irrationality of hyperrationality.

Here and there we find indications that others see in Biden's "urgent request" the gravity his unserious rhetoric masks. The Chinese are prominent among these others.

China as diplomatic mediator in conflicts

Last February Beijing, reflecting its concern that the proxy war the U.S. wages in Ukraine would spin into a larger conflict, issued a 12-point proposal⁶ outlining the principles that should be observed to bring the conflict to an end: "basic norms governing international relations," "international fairness and justice," "equal and uniform application of international law." Nobody was called names or condemned. This was a position paper more than a "peace plan." It put China forward as a balanced diplomatic presence, not a judge or a taker of sides.

A month later China rather sensationally brokered an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia⁷ to reestablish bilateral relations after seven years of diplomatic estrangement. "China's diplomacy has pressed the 'accelerate button,'" "Global Times", the Chinese daily, wrote in a commentary afterward, "and sounded the clarion call in the spring of 2023 with a series of major diplomatic activities that bring

positive changes to a world in turbulence."

The world, and certainly West Asia, is yet more turbulent now than it was last spring. And China appears to be putting itself forward again as a diplomatic power. On Monday the Foreign Ministry put out a statement urging the same set of principles be applied to a settlement of the Israel-Palestine crisis. *Wang Yi*, Beijing's acutely intelligent foreign minister, begins two days of talks in Washington on Thursday. These will include—and good luck, Minister Wang – meetings with *Antony Blinken* and *Jake Sullivan*, Biden's secretary of state and national security adviser.

This is to be watched. With the Saudi-Iran accord last March, China took an active role in West Asian politics for the first time – an intrusion, calling this what it was, into a region where the U.S. long enjoyed unrivaled influence. Enough of the rules-based order's disorder is more than enough, Beijing seems to be saying once again.

Josh Paul's resignation

At home we have the case of *Josh Paul*, the State Department official who resigned in protest last week. Paul spent 11

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Quite different from the western war drums: III Forum on the New Silk Road Project

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Allegations of the worst kind: for some time now, western voices have been calling Russian President *Vladimir Putin* the new *Hitler* and *Stalin*. In addition, Chinese President *Xi Jinping* was the “dictator” (*Annalena Baerbock*) of a “totalitarian controlled unitary state” (*Wikipedia*). Western politicians and journalists are using the rhetoric of the Allies in the First and Second World Wars. The greatest danger threatening the “free” and “democratic” world is to be conjured up, the “enemy” is demonised beyond all measure, and one’s own policies are presented as the greatest blessing for humanity.¹

In the past, it was stated that the war entry of the US government was meant to make the world “safe for democracy” (as President *Wilson* put it during World War I), and later with containing the aggressive plague of the foreign policy of the Axis powers Japan, Italy, and Germany by means of a “quarantine” (as President *Roosevelt* put it in 1937).

Now, in a speech from the Oval Office, US President *Biden* mentioned Hamas and



Heads of delegation at the III Silk Road Summit in Beijing at the group photo. (picture RIA Novosti)

the Russian president in the same breath: “Hamas and Putin have one thing in common, they want to completely destroy a neighbouring democracy.” He said the US had a responsibility as a “great nation”: “We cannot and will not let terrorists like Hamas and tyrants like Putin win.” – Biden wants tens of billions more for arms

shipments to Israel and Ukraine ... and he is in campaign mode.

Eric Gujer, editor-in-chief of the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”, wrote in his editorial of 14 October, also mentioning Hamas and Russia in the same breath, that the “appetite for an overthrow of the balance of power” is “not limited to a single region.

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years managing arms transfers to foreign powers and concluded this time, maybe as the Chinese have, that the 14.3 billion USD allocated in support for Israel’s plan to destroy Hamas lies beyond all acceptable norms. Paul reported receiving floods of supportive mail from colleagues after he announced his resignation. He later published an opinion piece in “*The Washington Post*” under the headline, “This is not the State Department I know.” Paul wrote in part, “I was involved in many complex and morally challenging debates over what weapons to send where. What I had not seen until this month, however, was a complex and morally challenging transfer in the absence of a debate.”

This is how irrationality works at *Foggy Bottom*⁸, readers.

“Honesty, open debate and a truthful accounting”

I would be remiss without noting a final point.

More Americans than previously now make the connection between the Pentagon’s budget and supplemental spending such as Biden just requested and the decline across the board of American life. The heavy price we pay as Biden feeds us outworn platitudes is ever better understood. Is it not equally irrational that it does not occur to the majority of us to raise our voices in protest, to object to all that is done in our names, to reject the idiotic rhetoric, the cover story, and insist that those who purport to govern us and execute policy owe us honesty, open debate, a truthful accounting of what this nation does in the world?

There seem to be passages in history when to think and act rationally bears another kind of price. In our time it comes to this. The rational course is to accept this price and pay it—for our own sakes and the sakes of many, many others. We will find that it is not nearly so steep as the price of acquiescence. Josh Paul just showed us how this is done—how, depending on our circumstances, we can act on his example.

He will survive his decision, and I am very certain be the better for it. •

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/18/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-october-7th-terrorist-attacks-and-the-resilience-of-the-state-of-israel-and-its-people-tel-aviv-israel/>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/20/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-states-response-to-hamas-terrorist-attacks-against-israel-and-russias-ongoing-brutal-war-against-ukraine/>

³ *Snake oil* is the name of a substance that is touted as a miracle cure for all sorts of things, but has practically no effect. (ed.)

⁴ <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/us-troops-attacked-syria-iraq/>

⁵ https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/budget_fy2024.pdf

⁶ <http://patricklawrence.us/patrick-lawrence-what-just-happened-in-moscow-is-big/>

⁷ <http://patricklawrence.us/patrick-lawrence-chinas-great-leap-in-the-middle-east/>

⁸ *Foggy Bottom* is the nickname for the US State Department. It is located in a foggy bottom, near the Potomac River in Washington DC (ed.)

“Quite different from ...”

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[...] Western orders, whether in Eastern Europe, Africa, or the Middle East, are to be brought down.”

Such statements do not yet mean that a total war of the West against all its “enemies” is planned. – But the war-weary citizens of the Western states are to be mobilised even more sharply mentally. Even if it is only to use the authoritarian crowbar to force total obedience and eliminate independent thought and action. The political climate in our countries is being poisoned. Who still dares speaking out freely under the impending hammer of the “good guys”?

An antidote

An antidote is to explore the facts.² What are our Western governments doing, what have they been doing? And what are the supposed “bad guys” doing?

“Bad guys” have met at the III New Silk Road Forum in Beijing on 17 and 18 October – ten years after the initiative was launched – among them Serbia’s President *Vučić* and Hungary’s Prime Minister *Orbán*. The German-language media commentaries were largely disparaging. The Schweizer *Weltwoche*, however, offered the opportunity to read the opening speech of the Chinese President Xi Jinping at this forum in German translation.³

The Chinese President began by saying that the “New Silk Road” project was “focusing on enhancing connectivity, aims to enhance policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity, inject new impetus into the global economy, create new opportunities for global development, and build a new platform for international economic cooperation.”

“Planning together, building together and benefitting together”

So far, “more than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations have signed ‘Belt and Road’ cooperation documents”. The idea of cooperation was: “planning together, building together and benefitting together”.

The project represented “humanity’s joint pursuit of development for all” and was aiming towards transcending “differences between civilizations, cultures, social systems, and stages of development”. “When countries embrace cooperation and act in concert,” Xi Jinping

said, “a deep chasm can be turned into a thoroughfare, land-locked countries can become land-linked, and a place of underdevelopment can be transformed into a land of prosperity. Countries taking the lead in economic development should give a hand to their partners who are yet to catch up. We should all treat each other as friends and partners, respect and support each other, and help each other succeed. As the saying goes, when you give roses to others, their fragrance lingers on your hand. In other words, helping others is also helping oneself. Viewing others’ development as a threat or taking economic interdependence as a risk will not make one’s own life better or speed up one’s development.”

The spirit of the Silk Road is “characterised by peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit”.

Enabling good life for all people

It seeks “to deliver a good life not only to people of just one country, but to people in other countries as well. [...] Ideological confrontation, geopolitical rivalry and bloc politics are not a choice for us.” What is opposed, however, are “unilateral sanctions, economic coercion, decoupling and supply chain disruption”.

“Changes of the world, of our times, and of historical significance” are unfolding “like never before”. Xi Jinping listed eight major projects of the “New Silk Road” project, projects going beyond economic, technological, and scientific cooperation and aiming at human encounters and a “dialogue of civilisations”. He ends his speech with an appeal: “Let us advance modernization of all countries, build an open, inclusive and interconnected world for common development, and jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind.”

To be sure: not everything went perfectly with the “New Silk Road” project either. Perfection does not exist anywhere in political life. However: What the numerous participants from all over the world and the represented state presidents and prime ministers (see picture) got to hear from Xi Jinping was not “evil” at all. Or does it sound like “totalitarian dictatorship” and a threat to freedom and democracy? Or did the numerous state leaders present in Beijing all fall for Chinese propaganda?

By the way: Russian President Putin was also present, also speaking out.⁴ There is no discernible difference of opinion to Xi Jinping. On the contrary. •

¹ One of the many examples for this is a commentary in *Zeit online* from 25 October 2023. The title of the text: “*Joe Biden: on the right side of history*”. And in the lead stated: “First in Ukraine, now in Israel: Joe Biden proves moral clarity and world political leadership – against the camp of autocrats around *Xi Jinping* and *Putin*”.

² Those who want to find out more can be referred to two books: the book by *Jacques Baud*, first published in French, English edition of January 2023: “*Putin. Game master?*”. The book by *Patrik Baab* published in October 2023: “*Auf beiden Seiten der Front. Meine Reisen in die Ukraine*” (On both sides of the Front. My Travels in Ukraine) (ISBN 978-3-946778-41-7) is currently only available in German.

³ <https://weltwoche.ch/daily/symphonie-der-freundschaft-chinas-praesident-xi-jinping-eroeffnet-das-forum-zum-10-jahrestag-der-neuen-seidenstrasse/> of 18 October 2023

⁴ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72528> of 18 October 2023

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Afghanistan – sanctions violating international law strangling the desperately poor country

by Winfried Pogorzelski



Families in search of water during a strong winter in Kabul, Afghanistan. (picture © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell)

15 August is a public holiday in Afghanistan. On this day in 2021, after 20 years of supporting a corrupt government installed by the West, NATO troops left the country, leaving power to the Taliban who had previously taken control of it. Although Afghanistan is rich in natural resources, abject poverty and constant famine still prevail. It is a sign of cynicism second to none that sanctions that violate international law are still being maintained, having been imposed after the Taliban came to power and which UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for to be lifted in an urgent appeal as early as 2022. The ongoing drought is

further exacerbating the situation. Due to declining donations, the UN is rationing aid deliveries and is urgently calling for more support.

Sanctions on the back of the weakest

Swiss radio's "International" program reported last spring that Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was strongly calling on the world to recognise the Taliban government and lift paralysing US sanctions. The security situation has improved significantly since the Taliban came to power; There is no justification for maintaining sanctions against the war-marked country. He promptly faced accu-

sations from the author of the report that he had concealed the massive oppression of women as the main reason for the sanctions.

What cynicism, what hypocrisy on the back of those who are pretended to be liberated! The US' motive for invading Afghanistan was certainly not the well-being of women, but rather the tough pursuit of geostrategic interests.

This is also made clear by the following facts: The US and many Western countries summarily declared the Afghan government a terrorist organisation, which to this day justifies the fact that 7.1 billion USD from the *Afghan Central Bank's* possessions are kept at the *Federal Reserve Bank of New York* was frozen with flimsy justification that they wanted to compensate American victims of terrorism (e.g., the 9/11 terrorist attacks) and later support Afghanistan in the reconstruction. The consequences of all these measures are catastrophic, especially for those who are pretended to be helped: women in particular suffer from malnutrition and low birth rates, the number of miscarriages is high, as is the child mortality rate. The lifting of the sanctions could provide immediate relief here.

UN Secretary General António Guterres' appeal went unheeded

Half a year after the end of the military operation by the USA and its allies, on 26 January 2022, António Guterres ad-

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"For the Afghans, daily life has become a frozen hell"

wp. On 26 January 2022, six months after the Taliban took power, António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, gave a speech to the UN Security Council. In drastic words, he described the extreme plight of the Afghan people and made an urgent appeal to the world public: "At this moment, we need the global community – and this Council – to put their hands on the wheel of progress, provide resources and prevent Afghanistan from spiralling any further. [...] First and most urgently, we need to scale-up our humanitarian operations to save lives. [...] International funding must be allowed to pay the salaries of public-sector workers. From surgeons and nurses, to

teachers, sanitation workers and electricians – all are vital to keeping systems up-and-running. And they're critical to Afghanistan's future. [...] Second – and deeply connected to the first – we need to jump-start Afghanistan's economy through increased liquidity. We must pull the economy back from the brink. This means finding ways to free-up frozen currency reserves and re-engage Afghanistan's Central Bank, [...]"

Source: Current Concerns No. 5, 1 March 2022, <https://www.zeit-fragen.ch/en/archives/2022/no-5-1-march-2022/devastating-situation-in-afghanistan-hunger-blocked-national-wealth-sanctions>

"Afghanistan – sanctions violating ..."

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dressed the world public with moving words in view of the catastrophic conditions in the country (see box). Farmers, teachers, police officers, healthcare and administrative workers do not receive salaries because they were previously financed by the international community. No wonder that the banking, health, and education systems as well as the administration have collapsed. 28.8 million people are in constant need of humanitarian assistance, and almost the entire population lives in poverty; Women and girls are particularly affected.

The Brussels-based organisation *International Crisis Group* (ICG) is urging donor countries to begin negotiations with the Afghans. The war was over and so the money would go to the institutions and those affected who urgently need it. This is contradicted by the USA, which doubts the independence of the Afghan central bank. She is possibly involved in money laundering and terrorist financing... also here an unproven allegation and unacceptable interference in internal affairs.

Bitter poverty on earth – wealth under the ground:**Afghanistan's natural resources**

According to the *World Bank*, significant export income could be generated from mineral resources such as crude oil, copper, lithium, rare earths, bauxite, and others, especially since these are metals and minerals that are in high demand world-

wide for green technologies such as batteries, solar systems and wind turbines.

Not surprisingly many raw material companies, politicians, economists, and warlords were and are interested in this wealth. The *American Department of Defense* once spoke of the "Saudi Arabia of lithium". At the time, President *Barack Obama* planned to develop a mining industry; *Donald Trump* and advisers to the then Afghan government saw mining as a win-win situation for both countries: good for the Afghan economy, jobs for Americans and advantages for the US over rival China. Fortunately, the country was not plundered under Western aegis ...

In contrast to the USA, China and Russia still maintain their diplomatic missions in the country and are in contact with the Taliban, who in turn are trying to do business with the two countries.

But the matter is complicated: prerequisites for the extraction and use of raw materials are stable political conditions over a long period of time, a successful fight against corruption and a functioning economy that can, over time, build the necessary infrastructure (technologies, transport, etc.). Diverse know-how and, last but not least, large financial resources ... China has already indicated that it is waiting for international recognition of the Taliban regime.

Official talks**between Afghanistan and the USA?**

According to an article by *Russia Today*, the Taliban and the US have made contact.

The aim could be to re-establish diplomatic relations. The subject of these confidence-building measures was the lifting of sanctions and the return of blocked funds from the *Afghan National Bank*. The American representatives, it goes on to say, took note that the inflation rate had fallen and that exports of goods had increased. The human rights situation, however, remains worrying. This is certainly no cause for celebration, especially since there is a fair amount of scepticism when the USA of all places take such steps. We urgently wish that a better future begins soon for the unique country and its people. After decades of terrorisation, the West has every reason to finally play a constructive role. •

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Doha 2020 Peace Agreement: Capitulation of a superpower and new Afghan government of the Taliban

wp. On 29 February 2020, a memorable event took place: After the unsuccessful attempt to permanently install a corrupt regime in Afghanistan that was loyal to the USA and the NATO countries, the USA made a contractual commitment in Doha, Qatar, to stay out of internal affairs with immediate effect, withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and hand over power to the Taliban.

The Taliban, for their part, pledged not to harm members of NATO states. The soldiers of the Afghan National Army and the People's Militia, many of whom had been waiting in vain for months for their pay, had surrendered beforehand mostly without a fight because they no longer wanted to serve an unsuccessful regime installed by foreign countries.

On 15 August, Kabul finally surrendered. Prior to that, talks between the Taliban and Moscow, Beijing and Tehran had taken place. Both the new rulers and the neighbours expressed their interest in stabilising the situation. The development did not come about by chance: many Taliban graduated from Pakistani theological colleges, studied diplomacy and politics and were trained in military combat strategies. A generation that has grown up in the meantime wants to live in a more open society.

Source: *Baraki, Matin*. "After 20 years of civil war and 20 years of Nato war, Afghan peoples long only for peace!".

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The Bolivian model of lithium mining

Presentation by Dr. Muruchi Poma*, Germany and Bolivia,
at the 30th "Mut zur Ethik" conference in Sirnach TG on 3 September 2023



Muruchi Poma
(picture ug)

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for the invitation and say a few introductory words on the subject of neutrality, which is really very important. It was a disappointment for me that Switzerland now wants to supply weapons to

Ukraine. When Chancellor Scholz flew to Brazil and asked President *Lula* to supply weapons to Ukraine, he said very clearly to the press: "No, we won't do that!" I was really disappointed that Switzerland didn't do the same. But I now know that the Swiss will fight for neutrality!

Lithium, an important Bolivian export product

Now to Bolivia. At the moment, it is to some extent fortunate that the state not only respects the constitution, but also stands up for the interests of the majority. I would like to talk here about how the state is involved in lithium mining. This raw material, which is essential for industry, is an export product of Bolivia. I do not want to go into the technical significance of lithium here, but I assume that many people are aware that lithium is important for the production of batteries and that these are of great importance for electromobility and electric cars. One more word: The information I will give here comes largely from the press and from the collective work of the association *Ayni für Ressourcengerechtigkeit e. V.*, which we founded in Leipzig in 2012 (www.ayni-ev.de).

Bolivia has the world's largest lithium reserves

Bolivia is one of the countries with the largest share of the world's lithium resources. Until recently, it was estimated to have 21 million tons. In recent months it has become known that the figure is as high as 23 million tons. There are more than 20 salt lakes in Bolivia, and the figure of 23 million tons refers to only three



At 10,000 square kilometres, the Salar de Uyuni in south-west Bolivia is the largest salt lake in the world. (Picture ma)

or four of them. This means that the resources are considerably larger. Argentina has 19 million tons, Chile 10 million tons and Mexico 2 million tons of the world's lithium resources. The largest lithium producer today is Australia, followed by Chile, China, Argentina and Brazil. Australia produced 61,000 tons in 2022.

Bolivia, Argentina and Chile are the three most important lithium producers in Latin America. The so-called lithium triangle, which connects these countries, contains around 62% of the world's reserves. Just a side note here: These countries, and therefore also the triangle where lithium is exploited today for the countries of the North or the Far East, belonged to the *Tawantinsuyu* (Inca Empire) before the colonial era, which was divided up with colonisation.

Two models of lithium mining

There are two models of lithium mining: the state model and the private model. We know the private neoliberal model well enough. In the state model, there is the *joint venture* model, a mixture of state and private shares, and the 100% state model. The Bolivian model is 100% state-run. There are two basic conditions for the Bolivian model: Firstly, lithium as a strategic raw material is enshrined in the constitution and secondly, it is also enshrined in the mining laws (however, this provides for joint ventures for the industrialisation of lithium with majority state participa-

tion). Both were passed during the indigenous government of *Evo Morales*.

Cooperation with Chinese and Russian companies

For the countries of the North, i.e. for the buyers, lithium is considered a "critical" raw material and is also referred to as such. But for us in Latin America and Bolivia, it is a strategic raw material. And if this is stated in the constitution, only the state can exploit it or grant permission to mine the raw material for the benefit of the Bolivian state. Nevertheless, Bolivia has established business relations with international corporations, initially with the Chinese company CATL. This company is also building a battery factory in Hungary. This company already operates a battery factory in Germany, in Thuringia. And so Bolivian lithium will certainly also be exported to Europe. The Europeans can therefore not say that it only goes to China!

A second company is the *Uranium One Group* from Russia. It is a Russian company that was awarded the contract this year to mine lithium together with the Bolivian state-owned company YLB (*Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos*). This was announced at the end of June 2023. Despite all the pressure from the USA and the international press, the Bolivian government stood its ground and said: We will award the contract to whoever adapts to our

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* Dr Muruchi Poma, born in Bolivia in 1950, studied economics in Leipzig and completed his doctorate in 1985 on the subject of *José Martí's* revolutionary democratism. Publisher of the electronic newsletter *Tani Tani* in Spanish. Since 2011 chairman of the Leipzig association "Ayni – Association for Resource Justice". Publications: "Evo Morales – the biography" 2007, "Ponchos Rojos" 2008 and "Qhapaq Ñan y Socialismo".

"The Bolivian model ..."

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ideas, and if we see that Russia has made a good offer, then we will go for it. And I am very pleased to announce this here. I was delighted to hear the news! The third company is *Citic Guaon/Crig* from China. These three companies have been awarded the contract to work together on lithium exploitation. And why did Bolivia do this despite the constitutional article? Because Bolivia needs the market for lithium, because Bolivia needs the know-how for lithium mining and because Bolivia also needs know-how for the value chain.

The first special feature of the Bolivian model is that it is 100% under the control of the state, as emphasised by Bolivia's vice minister. The international companies are service providers with the right to be the preferred customer for lithium purchases. I want to emphasise this, because the question is always asked: what is the benefit of cooperation for the international companies if the lithium belongs 100% to the Bolivian state? These companies have a right of first refusal for lithium and thus the first access to this "critical" raw material in a country where large resources are available. They have thus secured one of their supply chains.

There are agreements at the moment, but no contracts with the companies yet. There is still a long way to go before they are legally finalised.

The second special feature of this model is that the international corpora-

tions will also invest in the value chain. They will not only be involved in the exploitation of lithium and simply buy lithium, but have also committed to investing in the value chain.

Low water consumption due to direct lithium extraction

Thirdly, international corporations are not only open to technology transfer, but must also actually implement it, for example in the case of *direct lithium extraction* (DLE) technology. Water loss is very different when using the two technologies. When using evaporation ponds, 200 m³ (200,000 liters) of brine are evaporated per ton of LCE (lithium carbonate equivalent). With the DLE method, the net water consumption is only 2 m³ (2,000 liters) per ton of LCE, i. e., 100 times less (<https://ctlithium.com/de/about/direct-lithium-extraction/>).

This technology is well known in Germany. In the Upper Rhine Graben in southwest Germany, a huge lithium deposit is said to be floating in thermal water deep underground. This hot water is also used to supply district heating networks. The Australian company *Vulcan Energy* is involved in projects here. With a system for optimising lithium extraction, the lithium is practically separated from the hot water and the water then flows back into the ground. The lithium chloride produced in this way is further processed in a plant for optimising lithium electrolysis,

resulting in lithium hydroxide. A similar technology will be used by the aforementioned international companies in Bolivia's salt lakes, with different results of course. Bolivia has a research team and is working on its own patents, including for DLE technology.

In the meantime, Bolivian scientists have developed their own patents for the extraction of lithium carbonate. That is very good.

CATL will use this technology to extract 25,000 tons from the Uyuni Salt Lake and 25,000 tons from the Coipasa Salt Lake. *Citic Guaon/Crig* will also work with this technology in the northern part of the Uyuni Salt Lake and is expected to produce 2,000 tons. Russia will also exploit 25,000 tons from the Pastos Grandes Salt Lake using this technology. The plan is to produce a total of 100,000 tons by 2025.

Bolivia started its lithium project back in 2009 and has now moved from a pilot plant to its own industrial plant, which is expected to produce 15,000 tons a year. They haven't got that far yet, but that is the goal.

As far as the value chain is concerned, it is known that the industrialised countries and industrial groups involved in lithium achieve the greatest profit in cathode production, cell and battery production. The chief economist at *Repsol*, *Antonio Medina*, estimates that material costs account for 90% of the total value of a battery, with cathodes and anodes accounting for 75%. The international companies in Bolivia have now committed to investing in these areas as well. This is good news for Bolivia and for Latin America. We recently read in the press that the Chinese only wanted to exploit lithium for their own purposes like the Europeans and North Americans. That is simply a lie. No, in this case the Bolivians have insisted that they have to earn money from it themselves. This is news that signals the beginning of the end of brutal colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Lithium mining in Argentina and Chile

Now a comparison with the state model in the other countries, Chile and Argentina. There are currently two large private companies in Chile: *Abermale* from the USA and *SQM (Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile S.A.)* from Chile. The latter is made up of two companies: from Chile and China. According to the literature, the Chilean entrepreneur is *Pinochet's* son-in-law. The Chinese company *Tianqi Lithium* has a 22.77% stake in SQM. The collaboration began in 2018.

There are several international companies working on lithium extraction in Argentina. These include *Alkem* (Australia), *Livent* (USA), *Lithium Americas* (Canada),

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Economic sovereignty over resources

gl. Bolivia has experienced an impressive development over the last 16 years. *Evo Morales* and his party, the *Movimiento al Socialismo MAS*, were elected as the first indigenous president of a South American country in 2006. Since then, the gross domestic product has quadrupled and the number of people living in relative poverty has fallen from 60% to 3%. In 2014, UNESCO declared illiteracy in Bolivia to be eradicated.

Social programmes and investments in education and health were central to the government's programme, with close cooperation and exchange with Cuba and Venezuela. From the outset, the Morales government pursued the goal of gaining and maintaining economic sovereignty over the country's resources. This required well-trained specialists. Around 100 students were sent abroad to receive the necessary training. Bolivia has large natural gas reserves and the world's largest lithium deposits.

Back in 2006, the government nationalised all oil and natural gas reserves. Joint ventures with foreign companies are only possible if the Bolivian state-owned company *YPFB (Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos)* holds a majority stake. This goal of sovereign-

ty has been consistently pursued to this day, with the support of a large proportion of the population.

In 2022, the Minister of Hydrocarbons and Energy, *Franklin Molina Ortiz*, drew a positive balance sheet after 16 years of nationalisation. The revenues had enabled a policy of wealth redistribution, infrastructure had been improved and the quality of life of millions of Bolivians had been enhanced. Bolivia's economy continued to grow in 2023 despite global crises such as the Ukraine conflict and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the inflation rate is comparatively low.

The current President *Luis Arce* is continuing *Evo Morales'* economic model, the "Modelo Económico Social Comunitario Productivo". At the summit meeting of the BRICS group in Johannesburg, Arce presented the Bolivian model and emphasised the similarities with the BRICS group, the "shared vision of an international order based on equality, complementarity, solidarity, respect for sovereignty and self-determination of peoples within the framework of horizontal multilateralism".¹ Bolivia has applied to join the BRICS group.

¹ <https://amerika21.de/2023/08/1265538/wirtschaft-bolivien-waechst>

On the value of words or when words judge

How to misuse a problem to manipulate opinions

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and curative teacher

Recently, I found an article in a newspaper about new regulations by the Chinese government to limit internet use by children and young people. It was titled “Maximum 40 minutes a day – in China, the state regulates how long children are allowed to surf the internet”. A few weeks earlier, China’s guidelines on the consumption of online games had already been reported.¹ I was very pleased that the newspaper reported on this development. For a long time, China was referred to (often with an envious look) as the country of the digital revolution. “Maybe a role model for us in this respect?” I asked myself before I started reading. From previous research, I knew that the Chinese authorities had been working for several years to counteract the negative consequences of media use among children and young people through appropriate measures.²

Restricted internet use

Currently, a law is planned that regulates internet access for children and young people. For children up to the age of eight, a maximum of 40 minutes per day is planned. Children and young people between the ages of eight and sixteen should have one hour of online time per day, and for those between the ages of sixteen and eighteen it would be two hours per day. Accordingly, online game companies must offer a youth mode. Citizens and entrepreneurs had the opportunity to express their opinion until 2 September. The date when the law is to come into force is still open.

Online games – a source of danger for gambling addiction

As early as 2021, one could read in the media that the Chinese government wanted to limit the online gaming time of children and young people. On the one hand, the increase in gaming addicts was recognised as a problem, as were health problems such as short-sightedness and obesity and the focus of children’s and young people’s attention on gaming.

At the time, the business newspaper “Economic Information Daily”, part of the state news agency *Xinhua*, had clear words on the subject, characterising video games as “*spiritual opium*” and “*electronic drugs*” that would prevent children from learning and alienate them from their own culture³ (a formulation it later relativised). It demanded that gaming platforms take social responsibility and not simply chase profits. With a new regulation, children and young people under the age of 18 should therefore only be allowed to play games on Fridays,

Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, for one hour at a time from 8 pm to 9 pm. The providers of these games were obliged to set up appropriate access restrictions and to ensure through the registration mode that the users registered with their real names and their age. Online companies that do not implement these measures should be prosecuted by law.

Social media – Protection from certain contents

Another regulation concerned the time of use of social media. In China (and also here), *TikTok* is currently very popular, which only works with a running camera. *TikTok* is a Chinese company, but *TikTok* China looks completely different from *TikTok* here. In China, brutal images and porn are absent, as are the challenges popular with children and young people. The new regulation limits the daily usage time for children under 16: After 60 minutes of daily use, the screen goes black. The registration mode prevents children from circumventing these regulations. It is done by video call with an ID presented. For children who do not yet have one, a parent must do this and hold the birth certificate up to the camera. It is therefore difficult to cheat when setting up an account or to set up an anonymous account. Users are registered with their name, birthday and all other details, and it is no problem to switch the offer of pictures and films accordingly – and to protect the children and young people.

“Challenges” and war videos are banned in China

Many adults in this country are hardly aware of what is being presented to children and young people in the form of the above-mentioned “Challenges”. These are instructions for dangerous or even pornographic “tasks” that they are supposed to document on film and post online.

A particularly disgusting example was (in our latitudes), topical a year ago, the so-called *blackout challenge*. It was an instructional video on how to strangle oneself with a certain knot that – done cor-



Spellbound in front of the screen! Today, every society faces the urgent task of how to protect its young people from the negative consequences of digitalisation.
(picture wikimedia commons)

rectly – was supposed to come undone the moment the person fainted. This challenge had claimed a few lives around the world. The most recent fatality was an eight-year-old girl in England in front of a running camera, i.e., it was broadcast live. Such challenges are forbidden in China, and Chinese children are not allowed to see war videos because the programme’s algorithms have to be switched accordingly.

It is also little known that with the start of the Ukraine war, the war raged more blatantly on *TikTok* than on other social media (such as *Twitter*). War videos appeared that violated international law and the *Geneva Conventions*. Thus, the names of fallen soldiers could be read unpixellated on their uniforms. Chinese children do not get to see such videos (in our country, they are only deleted when someone indicates them. Until then, however, they were clicked on by countless people).

And what about us?

So much for the facts: China regulates access for underage children and young people to online games, social media and the internet. It drew the consequences from the experiences made in this technophile country in the previous years.

If you keep your eyes and ears open, you will be confronted with the same problems that China is facing with its regulations. Digital media are everywhere, even among the youngest children. They are exposed to cyber-bullying, sexual harassment, violent videos, war games. Resulting mental disorders and gambling addiction are serious problems that hinder

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the healthy development of children. In our country, they belong to the fields of work of psychologists and paediatricians and initially not to state action to protect children and young people as in China. The need for action is huge. By the way: In 2021, video games and gaming “generated” a turnover of 1.32 billion Swiss francs in Switzerland. By 2026, an increase to 1.79 billion Swiss francs is forecast.⁴

Controlling opinion through manipulation techniques

All the more astonishing is the tone with which the Chinese efforts to protect their children and young people are reported in this country. The two articles talk about “control”, “draconian measures”, “will of those in power”, “educate politically”, “consolidate ideologically”, “nationalist culture”, “moral keeper of the grail”, a “state leadership as moral authority”, a “conservative world view of the Chinese head of state and government *Xi Jinping*”, etc., and measures that are “unlikely to be very effective”. Obviously, objective reporting has been replaced by opinion control with a manipulation technique known in the literature as “framing”. This means that a certain frame of interpretation is given to an issue so that it

appears in the desired light, even if there were other possibilities. In this case, the aim seems to be to make Chinese regulations appear authoritarian, conservative and encroaching. An alternative possibility would be to see the government’s efforts as an attempt to protect the psychological and physical development of the growing generation.

Of course, it is likely that there will also be loopholes in these regulations and people looking for ways to circumvent them. Just as, for example, speeding drivers in our country try to avoid punishment with speed trap apps, thereby endangering themselves and others. No one would want to lift the speed limits because of this. On the contrary: it is a good sign for a society when it looks for solutions to problems. Especially on the internet, many things are not yet regulated. As a reminder, we are dealing with a very young technology. The first smartphone came in 2007, so these devices are only 16 years old, not even of age yet, and today they are already in the possession of young children. The task at hand is therefore to counter this anarchistic state of affairs with rules and laws and appropriate parental and school education. Our countries that pride themselves as Western democracies could well compete with China’s efforts and by taking appropriate measures! Wouldn’t that have been a concrete election campaign issue?

By the way: Chinese corporations

One of the largest Chinese internet companies is *Tencent*. It produces online games for the global market. Of course, the requirements and laws of their government do not leave them unscathed. But here, too, a solution is being considered: *Tencent*, together with the online provider *Alibaba* and other companies, is to produce improved computer components, so-called computer chips⁵, which are currently in great demand and should make China independent of foreign imports. A substitute market for the profits made at the expense of children and young people! •

¹ “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” of 17 October 2023 and “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” of 1 September 2023

² cf. Kreiss, Christian. “Social media and excessive internet use also harm economic capacity”; In: *Current Concerns* No. 22 of 31 October 2023. <https://www.zeit-fragen.ch/en/archives/2023/nr-22-17-oktober-2023/social-media-und-zwanghafte-internetnutzung-schaden-auch-der-wirtschaftlichen-leistungsfahigkeit>

³ A characterisation reminiscent of the Opium War, which began the period of China’s subjugation to the economic interests of major Western powers. A description that should not simply be shelved.

⁴ <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/221310/umfrage/prognose-der-umsatze-mit-video-games-in-der-schweiz/>

⁵ A computer chip contains millions of microscopic electronic components called transistors that transmit data signals. They are found in our everyday appliances from microwaves to toothbrushes.

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Posco (South Korea) and *Ganfeng-Lithea* (China). Three projects are currently producing: that of *Livent* in the province of Catamarca, that of *Orocobre Ltd* and *Toyota* in Jujuy and that of *Exar (Lithium Americas and Ganfeng)* also in the province of Jujuy. It is not the states that are the real exporters, but the companies that export lithium from these countries. The largest buyers of this lithium are Asia, i.e. China, Japan and South Korea. This is where the technological development in this field is taking place – not in the USA and not in Europe. We Europeans need to realise this. Many still believe that we are at the cutting edge of scientific development. Unfortunately, this is not the case; we still have a lot of work to do and, above all, we need to put an end to neo-colonialism.

The state also has a say in Argentina and Chile

Nevertheless, I would like to make a few qualifications with regard to the predominance of private companies and would like to point out the state involvement of Argentina and Chile. Argentina has left a window open for this by firstly enforcing that international companies must provide a percentage of 5–20 % of production for in-

dustrial production in Argentina. A small state-owned company called Y-TEC was founded for this purpose. It is to produce cells and batteries. This battery production is to be made available for cars in Argentina, including in rural areas. Argentina is a huge country, and if you want to have energy, you have to connect the central energy supply with the remote locations. This is expensive, but with battery production and solar systems, it can be done quickly. This part has been developed in Argentina. I hope that this will continue to develop. Argentina doesn’t want to go any other way.¹

In addition, the Argentine model provides for provincial governments to participate in the projects of international corporations to the tune of around 3–8 %. This is very little, but the central government of Argentina is not satisfied with this. This is because it runs counter to the interests of the state as a whole that the governors of these provinces want to do it themselves. There is strong protest from the indigenous population, they don’t want that, they want the water and land there to remain untouched. There are major conflicts in the provinces.

In the case of Chile, there is great hope at the moment, as the current *Boric* government announced its national lithium strategy in February. Boric has said that

from 2030, the two international companies mentioned will participate in the state-owned company as a kind of *joint venture* with a 51 % share for Chile and 49 % for the companies. There was and still is a lot of shouting from the neoliberals, Chile has a tradition of neoliberalism since Pinochet, but the head of government has said clearly: as long as I, Boric, am in government, the lithium will not benefit individual companies or individuals, but it must belong to all Chileans. Just as the Mexican president has announced: This strategic raw material must benefit all Mexicans. In this case, all Chileans too.

Chile’s national lithium strategy also stipulates that international companies should invest in the value chain, similar to Bolivia. In addition, the aim is that international companies should also work with the new DLE technology, direct lithium extraction, due to the loss of water. Thank you for your attention. •

¹ On 22 September 2023, after my presentation, *amerika21* announced: “The subsidiaries of the state-owned oil company YPF, Y-Tec and YPF *Litio*, have now signed a letter of intent with Düsseldorf-based *Eusati GmbH* to advance state-owned lithium production and processing.”