

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Eastern Congo: The war continues, and so does the suffering of the civilian population Neighbouring states now fear regional expansion

by Peter Küpfer

cc. Singaporean scholar and diplomat Kishore Mahbubani has once again pointed out that Africa's problems are also Europe's problems (foreignpolicy.com, 18 February 2025). European colonialism and neo-colonialism are largely responsible for the murder and plundering of Africa – to this day. The fact that millions of sub-Saharan Africans have been fleeing to Europe for years is one of the bitter fruits of European Africa policy. Europe would be well advised to take an interest in the actual conditions in Africa and to support the African states and peoples in solving their problems. This also applies to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

According to official and media reports, including from the UN, the ICRC and spokespersons for the civilian population, the intervention army, consisting of the terrorist group M23, its affiliated regular Rwandan troops and other associated mercenary formations (ADF-*Alliance du Fleuve*), is advancing according to plan. As the spokesman for these troops, a senior Congolese politician formerly close to

the *Joseph Kabila* government, has repeatedly stated publicly, the war aims of the well-equipped and systematically advancing alliance is much broader than just Eastern Congo. Its troops are to advance as far as Kinshasa (more than a thousand kilometers to the west) and once again “liberate” the Congo. Acting President *Felix Tshisekedi* was not pursuing the interests of the Congolese, but those of individual international interest groups. The publicity-loving commander has not revealed which interest groups are financing his own well-equipped mercenary army.

Following the capture of the northern provincial capital of Goma, Bukavu, the provincial capital of South Kivu, has now also fallen into the hands of the aggressors with virtually no resistance. There were apparently fewer casualties among the civilian population, while the attack on Goma, according to the ICRC, left around 800 civilians dead and around 1400 seriously injured. Artillery shells were used in the attack on Goma, hitting schools, hospitals and the army camps of improvised tent bivouacs in the vicinity of the city. In the days

before the attack on Goma, tens of thousands of refugees (the ICRC put the number at over 100,000 since the start of the renewed fighting around and in Goma) from the shelled settlements north of the city had hoped in vain for protection. They have once again fled during and after these attacks. Where did they go? In the meantime, the mercenary formations are in control of the situation and the civilian population is defencelessly at their mercy. The regular troops of the Congolese army have retreated, sometimes in panic. Once again, a state of lawlessness prevails for the civilian population, which has been plagued by war for thirty years, now again in South Kivu. Violent attacks against the civilian population, massive looting of stores and mass rapes are reported from both “conquered” towns (see box).

Unspeakable conditions prevail

The shelling targeted the airfields in both cities in particular, which are now no longer usable by any aircraft. As a result, the populations of both Kivus are cut off from

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Will the global West finally take effective action to stop the killing in eastern Congo?

pk. According to the East Congolese independent radio station *Radio Okapi* (which was set up with the help of Swiss development assistance at the beginning of the Congo crisis in the 1990s), Western governments have clearly condemned Rwanda's actions in recent days and in some cases have also taken corresponding measures.

The British government, for example, has cancelled its regular financial support for Rwanda's economic development.

Belgium and France have proposed a joint package to the EU member states “with more consequent sanctions than the previous ones” against Rwanda. These include the potential cancelling of the European Critical Raw Materials Act concluded with Rwanda.

The United States has blocked the American assets of two key figures in this war. These include the second man in the Rwandan hierarchy, *James Kabarebe*, the

main strategist and long-time de facto commander of the Rwandan forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and *Lawrence Kanyuka*, the civilian spokesman of the Rwandan mercenary formation M23, which is leading the renewed campaign. He is considered to be the brains behind Rwanda's plundering and commercialisation of valuable raw materials.

At the opening of the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday, 24 February 2025, the EU Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, *Kaja Kallas*, declared the EU had suspended its consultations with Kigali on Rwanda's “defence concept”.

All these measures are tied to the demand in the Security Council's final document of 21 February that Rwanda must withdraw its troops and their allies from the territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the opening of the meeting, the Congolese Prime Minister, *Judith Suminwa Tuluka*, emphasised the intolerable situation of the civilian population, particularly in the two conquered cities of Goma and Bukavu. Goma is without drinking water and electricity. The troops were actually causing bloodbaths. She stated both, the number of new homeless refugees and the number of fatalities were alarmingly higher than those previously mentioned. She also vehemently advocated sanctions. Declarations have not been sufficient for a long time.

However, it is more than questionable whether sanctions can suddenly bring peace in this long-running war (with implication, toleration and even support for Rwanda by all the states mentioned here). The decisive factor is the honest will to enforce international law.

Democratic Republic of Congo: “The risk of escalation throughout the sub-region has never been higher”

Statement of Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at Human Rights Council Special Session on the topic ‘Human Rights Situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo’ on 7 February 2025 in Geneva (excerpts)

“Mr. President, Minister *Muyaya*, Excellencies,

I have been following the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo closely for many years, and it worries me enormously.

I have been to Goma at least five times, in various capacities. During my visit to the country in April 2024, I met victims of this terrible conflict. Among them were women who had suffered sexual violence.

My office has long been sounding the alarm about this crisis, and I am deeply disturbed to see the violence escalate once again.

Since the beginning of the year, the M23 armed group, supported by the Rwanda Defence Forces, has intensified its offensive in the provinces of North and South Kivu. Tensions are currently rising in South Kivu.

If nothing is done, the worst may be yet to come, for the people of the eastern DRC, but also beyond the country’s borders.

There have been attacks by the M23 and their allies, with heavy weapons used in populated areas, and intense fighting against the armed forces of the DRC and their allies. [...]

Once again, civilians are trapped in a spiral of violence in this overwhelming conflict.

Since 26 January, nearly 3,000 people have been killed and 2,880 injured. The real figures are likely much higher. In Goma on 27 January, two hospitals were bombed, killing and wounding many patients, including women and children.

I am horrified by the spread of sexual violence, which has been an appalling feature of this conflict for a long time. This is likely to worsen in the current circumstances. According to judicial authorities, during the prison break from Muzenze Prison in Goma on January 27, at least 165 female prisoners were raped. Most of them were subsequently killed in a fire, the circumstances of which remain unclear. My team is also currently verifying multiple allegations of rape, gang rape and sexual slavery, throughout the conflict zones.

Hundreds of human rights defenders, journalists and members of civil society have reported to my Office that they have been threatened or are being pursued by the M23 and Rwandan forces. We have also facilitated the protection of judicial authorities who were in danger.

I am also very concerned about the proliferation of weapons and the high risk of forced recruitment and conscription of children. [...]

More than 500 000 people have been displaced since the beginning of January. This is in addition to the more than 6.4 million already displaced. [...]

It is also essential to analyse the political economy of this conflict. I have always been struck by the fact that the population in the eastern DRC is suffering terribly, while many of the products we consume or use, such as mobile phones, are created using minerals from the east of the country. We are all implicated. [...]

The M23, Rwandan forces and all those supporting them must facilitate

access to humanitarian aid. Air, land and lake routes must be reopened to establish humanitarian corridors and guarantee the safety of humanitarian actors.

[...] I also welcome this week’s appeal by the *International Criminal Court* to all parties concerned to submit information on the situation in the DRC.

I reiterate the United Nations Secretary-General’s call to the Rwanda Defence Forces to cease all support for the M23 and to withdraw from the DRC.

The military path is not the answer to the political, social, and economic challenges which are at the root of this conflict, including the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

In line with the principle of due diligence, States must ensure that any support, financial or otherwise, does not fuel serious human rights violations.

Corruption within state institutions must be tackled; such institutions must be rendered efficient; and social cohesion must be restored in the country. [...]

The Congolese people have been suffering terribly for decades. I express my full solidarity with the victims, families, and human rights defenders.

How many more innocent lives must be lost before sufficient political will is galvanized to resolve this crisis?

All those with influence must act urgently to put an end to this tragic situation.”

Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/02/hc-turk-drc-risk-escalation-throughout-sub-region-has-never-been-of-7-February-2025>

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all aid supplies. Mass looting of food stores and warehouses is being reported from Bukavu, perpetrated by the occupying forces, but also by their own troops and desperate civilians. According to a recent Western media report from Bukavu, a spokesman says that large sections of the population have been suffering from hunger for some time. Normal life in Eastern Congo has long since collapsed under the permanent siege and food prices have risen massively.

In Goma, volunteers were unable to recover the bodies of civilian victims. There were not enough body bags available, so many civilian victims of the attack on the city were left lying around. In the meantime, the ICRC and UN experts on the ground fear the spread of cholera and other epidemics.

Spokespersons for the civilian population, but also the President of Kenya, who advocated negotiations between the Con-

golese and Rwandan governments before the latest attacks, and the President of the neighbouring small state of Burundi fear that the war could spread regionally.

Western and European complicity in the thirty-year drama

As UN reports have testified for more than thirty years, so far without any consequences, one of the main reasons for the suffering of the Eastern Congolese population is the fact that so-called “rare earths” are abundant here. They are considered “strategic” raw materials, i.e. indispensable for high-tech products, especially weapons. The merciless predatory behaviour of certain governments and their lobbies is directed at them. Tantalite, cobalt, lithium, etc. – without these rare raw materials, no cell phone, no car battery, no electronic computer – but also no drone and no remote-controlled weapon. Critical voices are now growing in the Europe-

an Parliament, pointing to an unresolved conflict in the passive West. While the EU Commission and its President point out at every opportunity that the EU is acting on the basis of the “rules-based order”, a year ago it signed a tantalite supply contract with Rwanda’s head of state *Kagame* that favours them. As everyone who wants to know now knows, Rwanda does not have a single mine of this kind on its territory. The coveted high conductor has been ripped from the Congolese for thirty years under the above-mentioned conditions. Through its contract with one of the main perpetrators of the suffering in eastern Congo, the EU is actively aiding and abetting massive war crimes and crimes against humanity. As with diamonds, this coveted commodity, its suppliers in Rwanda and the hands of its exploiters in our hypocritical West have the blood of those people who have had and still have the misfortune to live near such deposits. •

German parliamentary elections – a review

The elections have once again demonstrated the poor health of Germany's democracy

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

As a German-Swiss dual citizen, I am watching the federal elections of 23 February with a heartfelt but also rational distance. I very much hope German politics to improve – more freedom and justice for my fellow Germans in terms of domestic policy. In terms of foreign policy, more German efforts to live in peace with all countries in the world. However, I didn't expect much from the election result either.

The approximate distribution of votes had already become apparent in the weeks beforehand. If the CDU/CSU and SPD formed the new coalition government, it would not come as a surprise. But it would also be no cause for relief or even joy.

Election results ...

Nevertheless, there are results worth reflecting on. For example: voter turnout was higher than it had been for almost 40 years: 82.5 per cent. The last time it was higher was in 1987 with 84.3 per cent. Election researchers say that the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and *Die Linke* in particular benefited from this. More “dissatisfied” citizens voted. But it can also be put another way: more and more citizens not only want a different policy, they are also expressing this – this time with their vote.

Or the markedly different election results in western and eastern Germany: the AfD achieved 18 per cent of the vote in the west and 32 per cent in the east – and is now by far the strongest political force there; *Die Linke* achieved 7.6 per cent in the west and 13.4 per cent in the east; the *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* (BSW), the *Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance*, 3.9 per cent in the west and 9.3 per cent in the east. These three parties, often marginalised by the majority of the West German power elites and media, together achieved an absolute majority of votes in East Germany: 54.7 per cent.

Or: Many young voters aged 18-24 voted for *Die Linke* or the AfD: 25 per cent for *Die Linke* and 22 per cent for the AfD. Together, that is almost half of all young voters.

Or: 23 directly elected MPs in their constituencies cannot enter the Bundestag because their party did not win enough second votes (for the party) in the constituency. This is the result of a change in electoral law that gives more weight to parties than to personalities.

... and demoscapy

Demoscopy attempts to explain election results. Voters are surveyed extensively



Election rally before the 1848 elections to the National Assembly in the German Confederation. (contemporary image/ma)

on election day.¹ The questions are sometimes manipulative. Nevertheless, the results are interesting. They reflect voters' perceptions without examining the causes of these perceptions.

Some things are easy to understand. For example, that 82 per cent of respondents are dissatisfied with the outgoing federal government – a level of dissatisfaction never before seen in the history of the Federal Republic. Or: that things are rather unfair in Germany. This is the opinion of 54 per cent in the West and even 67 per cent in the East of the country. Or the concern that “we will not have a stable government after the Bundestag elections” (top of the list of concerns with 68 per cent) and that “democracy and the rule of law are in danger” (in second place with 65 per cent). Or that “you will be marginalised on certain issues if you speak your mind” (53 per cent). Or that “prices are rising so much that I can't pay my bills” (also 53 per cent).

The influence of the media ...

The survey results show that the worries are not the same for everyone, but vary greatly depending on the voting decision. This also applies to “worries” that – realistically speaking – are unfounded and are more likely to be due to the mood created in the country by the political power elites and the media. For example, that “we are defencelessly at the mercy of Trump and Putin” (65 per cent in total, with strong fluctuations depending on the election decision). Or that “Russia's influence on Europe continues to grow” (64 per cent overall, again with strong fluctuations depending on the election decision).

However, Russophobia, as has been shown once again, is not as pronounced

in eastern Germany as in western Germany. The following survey result fits in with this: while only 28 per cent in West Germany think it is good “that the BSW is a party that wants to achieve a good relationship with Russia”, the figure in East Germany is 45 per cent. But even in the East, there is no majority in favour of good relations with Russia. If you add to this the fact that 47 per cent of respondents across Germany – by a wide margin compared to all other candidates – would consider the SPD politician *Boris Pistorius* to be a good Federal Chancellor, then you wonder how this can be explained, because Pistorius wants to massively arm Germany, make the Germans and Germany fit for war and has struck a harsh tone against Russia since taking office as Federal Minister.

In my opinion, such survey results show the fatal consequences of a daily and synchronised elite and media campaign against another country and its political leadership.

... Propaganda and irritations

This leads to my most important question: Where do we stand in Germany today (as elsewhere in our Western countries) when the question of the rationality of today's voting decisions is raised? Can we still assume the responsible citizen who – well informed and sufficiently educated – makes the best electoral decision for himself, but also for the common good?

This does not mean that only one party is electable. In politics, there is usually not just one “right” decision. There are always equally valid alternatives. But there are also political decisions that are obvi-

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ously not only against the common good, but also against one’s own interests. Even *Ernst Fraenkel* and his theory of pluralism formulated after 1945, which struggled with the classic concept of the common good and assumed the necessity of different, opposing parties and interest groups based on different interests – and had a decisive influence on political science thinking in the German post-war decades – assumed that the diversity of possible political decisions must be within a framework based on natural law. A frenetic Yes from a “majority” to the question “Do you want total war?”, for example, cannot simply be accepted. This can only be explained by massive propaganda and total mental and spiritual irritation.

How democracy is being undermined

The right to vote is a fundamental political right. Citizens have fought hard for it, even in Germany. What a movement went through the German Federation of the time, when in 1948 adult men could elect a parliament, the *National Assembly* in *St Paul’s Church* in Frankfurt, for the first time in German history!

But we also know from the USA and other countries how, since World War I, influential people such as *Edward Bernays* and *Walter Lippmann* have not only been thinking about this but have also been advising and influencing the power elites on how to cheat democracy. By misusing psychological insights and manipulating the “masses”, elite rule was to be secured – even though they are formally still democracies.

If, as is the case with Russia for example, there is virtually only one elite and media opinion, then it is to be expected that the majority of citizens will accept this opinion without scrutiny – especially if it is orientated towards “those at the top”.

Social media’s deleterious effects

And as far as the voting decisions of young voters are concerned: The majority of young voters rely for their news, information, and communications almost entirely on social media. Thoroughness, careful consideration, and depth of argument come up short. Representatives of the *Die Linke*, the *Left Party*, proudly declared on election night that their party’s quite successful re-entry into the Bundestag, which had been considered impossible just a few weeks previously, was due primarily to the very successful use of social media. Peace has no constituency in the new Bundestag

I would have liked *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* to enter the Bundestag. It includes an above-average number of personalities with genuine peace concerns. Just a few weeks ago, this new party was polling at almost 10 per cent of the vote. The BSW and the personalities who have appeared in public in favour of the alliance have not changed in these few weeks. But in media headlines about the BSW, one negative headline followed another.

This was not the only reason for the BSW’s poor performance. But here, too, the impression remains that media have improperly influenced voter behaviour – especially in western Germany. Here, too, our fellow citizens in eastern Germany were more vigilant in guarding against attempts to manipulate voters’ sentiments.

This and much more suggests that Germany will not simply change for the better through more new parties and more elections. It needs more: Wouldn’t it make sense to raise the country’s political culture to a different level? A political culture that is orientated toward what makes democracy possible in the first place, starting with the family as the ‘nucleus of society’, through the upbringing and education of our children and young

people and more human interaction, to the revival of political ethics oriented toward the social nature and dignity of human beings.

Image of man and political culture

In talks held in 2005 between the Japanese scholar *Daisaku Ikeda* and the former Soviet President *Mikhail Gorbachev*, which have been published in book form, there is much worth thinking about. I append two quotations from this book to conclude these reflections:

From Gorbachev:

[U]nder no circumstances can we allow suspension of our illusions to undermine faith in the reason and conscience of the people from whom we derive our substance. A politician without faith in the creative powers of his people is dead. He himself becomes incapable of all creativity and of achieving anything great. (p. 32.)

And, referring to Tolstoy, this from Ikeda:

Lev Tolstoy believed that equality permeates all human culture and that there can be no morality, no religion, and no creativity without it. I am profoundly convinced that, in addition to being pragmatically constructive, the sense of organic equality with one’s own kind is important to good spiritual health. Nothing is more destructive than the tendency to preach, reprimand, and pontificate. Respect for your partner as an equal evokes the best aspects of his spirit and awakens him to candor and creative impulses. (pp. 31–32.)

¹ <https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2025-02-23-BT-DE/index-content.shtml>

² Gorbachev, Mikhail; Ikeda, Daisaku. *Moral Lessons of the Twentieth Century: Gorbachev and Ikeda on Buddhism and Communism*. I.B. Tauris/ Bloomsbury, 2005. ISBN 978–3–451–33279–1

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Five wars in one

The Ukraine war and the historic defeat of the West

by Patrick Baab

Patrick Baab



Patrick Baab is a political scientist and publicist. His reports and research on secret services and wars do not match the propaganda of countries and media corporates. For 25 years, he has been reporting from Russia and also from Great Britain, the Balkans, Poland, the Baltic States and Afghanistan. He has written various books including "Im Spinnennetz der Geheimdienste. Warum wurden Olaf Palme, Uwe Barschel und William Colby ermordet" (In the spider net of secret services. Why were Olaf Palme, Uwe Barschel and William Colby murdered) (2017), "Recherchieren. Ein Werkzeugkasten zur Kritik der herrschenden Meinung" (Researching. A toolbox of criticism of the prevailing opinion) (2022), "Auf beiden Seiten der Front" (On both sides of the front) (2023) and "Propaganda-Presse. Wie uns Medien und Lohnschreiber in Kriege treiben" (Propaganda press. How the media and wage clerck have brought us into wars) (2024). More information can be found on his homepage: <https://patrikbaab.de>. The text published here is the revised version of a lecture which Patrick Baab held on 15 February 2025 for the readership of *Zeit Fragen/Current Concerns*.

(picture Patrick Baab)

The dream is over – or Europe's rude awakening

The phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on 12 February was a bombshell. They are once again talking to each other as equals, and a meeting is planned in Saudi Arabia. The US President declared that he would be able to meet with Putin before the end of the month.¹ On 18 February, he said on *CNN* that he did not want the Europeans at the negotiating table. Trump verbatim:

"I will not negotiate with anyone who wants to prolong the conflict. I will not negotiate with anyone who sends more weapons. I will not negotiate with anyone

who tries to push through more ammunition initiatives. I will not negotiate with anyone who tries to prolong the conflict. I will negotiate peace, although this word is obviously heavily censored in the EU."²

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met his Russian counterpart Lavrov in Riyadh. The most important points: 1. ceasefire, 2. new elections in Ukraine, 3. peace agreement. Besides, Russia and the USA are also planning joint energy projects in the Arctic. It will be possible to lift the sanctions with the signing of the peace agreement. Diplomatic relations will be normalised.³ Both sides are trying to avoid a direct confrontation. Rubio explained that the Europeans would certainly be involved at some point, as after all, they had imposed sanctions.⁴ It is clear that pressure from Washington is required to lift the sanctions, as a unanimous decision will have to be reached in Brussels.

At the *Munich Security Conference* in mid-February, the speeches had been rewritten overnight, as one participant sardonically reported to me. The Swiss newspaper "Tages-Anzeiger" speaks of a "radical change of course".⁵ The media and German politicians speak of "a betrayal".⁶

Much remains vague at present. But one thing is clear: the West has lost the war in Ukraine. Warmongers in politics are brought back to harsh reality, and degenerate propaganda media are being roused from their war hysteria like a sleeping drunk sobered up with a bucket of cold water.

US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has ended the delusion that had kept the war going. The key points:

1. Ukraine will not get back the territories it lost. This is an "unrealistic goal".⁷
2. Ukraine's NATO membership is off the table.⁸ This is also "not a realistic outcome of the negotiations". So this is clear: Ukraine will remain neutral.
3. The USA will not grant Kiev any security guarantees. There will be no US troops in Ukraine. They see the Europeans as having an obligation and not NATO under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.⁹ Washington wants to Europeanise the war and its consequential costs.

The war in Ukraine will thus end with a historic defeat of the West. The Russian Federation will emerge victorious. There is hope for peace in the largest and bloodiest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War. There is still fierce fighting everywhere along a front line of more than 1,300 kilometers. On the

Ukrainian side alone, 600,000 soldiers are believed to have been killed, on the Russian side more than 100,000.

At least as many people have been seriously injured, have lost arms and legs, have been blinded and mutilated, their jaws have been shot off; they have been left crippled, badly marked for the miserable rest of their lives. Some of these seriously injured people are treated at the *Charité* hospital in Berlin.¹⁰ Have you ever seen a picture of them?

This too is cognitive warfare: withholding the true face of war from the public. Propaganda and censorship are two sides of the same coin.¹¹ The smoke blanket of censorship, which has destroyed the democratic process of opinion-forming and thus caused irreversible damage to democracy, is part of the madness and war hysteria into which the ruling party cartel and its accomplices in the media have led us.

Today I will try to assess the geopolitical situation. In doing so, I will also take a look back. Because if you don't know the past, you cannot assess its consequences for the future. This is a core problem of current European politics.

I don't want to hide the fact that in this, I represent a minority position in political science, at least in German-speaking countries. On a global scale, however, things look somewhat different.¹²

For the perspective you get in our leading media is largely due to NATO propaganda and is limited to the NATO countries led by the US, the EU, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. These countries today represent less than 20 per cent of the world's population.

In my considerations, however, I follow renowned and internationally recognised academics such as the geopolitical expert Glenn Diesen from Oslo¹³, the foreign policy expert from the University of Chicago, Professor John J. Mearsheimer¹⁴, and the US economist Professor Jeffrey Sachs¹⁵ from Columbia University in New York. I also draw on the British historian Richard Sakwa¹⁶ and the Swiss military analyst Jacques Baud¹⁷ as well as the French historian Emmanuel Todd¹⁸.

I start with an examination of the current situation in the war in Ukraine and then try to explain the background and the effects of what is happening.

Military situation in the Ukraine war

Ukraine is currently being destroyed in the largest European war since the end of the Second World War. The country has lost around 20% of its territory, its econo-

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my is in ruins and millions of people have left the country: While the population was 52 million in 1991, Ukraine now has 28 million inhabitants. The country has suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties, and of course, there are millions of refugees and internally displaced persons.¹⁹

The territorial losses are painful and make reconstruction difficult because the resources from the Donbass will be lacking. Yet the alternative is not to lose the territories incorporated into the Russian Federation or to recapture them, but to lose these territories or to lose even more.

The American and European ideas of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia through the proxy war in Ukraine now seem like ash in the mouths of Western politicians. This proxy war of the NATO West against Russia on the ground in Ukraine, of which former British Prime Minister *Boris Johnson* spoke,²⁰ is ending in disaster. The Kremlin regards NATO membership of Ukraine as an existential threat, just as the USA would not accept Russian military bases or missiles in Mexico. Ukraine will remain neutral. Moscow has thus prevailed.

Attempting to challenge the largest nuclear power only reveals the West’s megalomania and its inability to realistically assess the balance of power. Once again, the sleep of reason has produced monsters. We can now keep dreaming and dismiss the normative power of facts as Russian propaganda, but this will only lead to more destruction. The loss of reality of Russophobic fanatics in the political and media elite of the West is the main reason for the high death toll.

The number of those killed and seriously injured, i. e., what the British and Americans call ‘casualties’, exceeded the million mark on the Ukrainian side on 1 September 2024. The actual figures are top secret on both sides. However, conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of obituaries. According to this, more than 500,000 Ukrainian soldiers had already been killed at the beginning of September.²¹ Other estimates put the number of casualties at 650,000 by mid-2024.²² Former CIA analyst *Larry Johnson* puts the total number of casualties at 1.2 million; if you include the seriously injured, he comes to three million, a whole generation of young Ukrainians.^{22a}

The figures on the Russian side are not quite as high. The anti-government portal *Mediazona*, which is financed by the oligarch *Khodorkovsky*, has also analysed obituaries and death notices. On 13 September 2024, its analysts came up with 69,059 casualties, plus 19,547 mercenaries from the private military company *Wagner* who were killed in Bach-

mut’s meat grinder alone – as is known from the statistics on payments to surviving dependants.²³ This results in a death toll of around 90,000; adding the casualties of the DNR and LNR militias, the figure is around 120,000.²⁴ The large disparity in favour of Ukraine is due to the fact that the Russians have 5–10 times more artillery, rockets and drones, depending on the section of the front. Military analysts estimate the ratio of casualties to be 8:1 in unfavour of Ukraine.²⁵ By the end of December 2024, the UN High Commissioner had recorded at least 12,456 deaths among the civilian population, including at least 669 children.²⁶

The Kursk offensive, which began with the planning of NATO, turns out to be a dead end for the Americans and their NATO satraps. What was unimaginable for me just a few years ago: German tanks are once again standing on the sites of a German war of annihilation with more than 27 million dead Soviet citizens. With its advance near Kursk, Ukraine was trying to open up a new front in order to force the Russians to withdraw troops from Donetsk and thus slow down the Russian advance. Secondly, it was a bargaining chip for possible negotiations. Thirdly, it wanted to achieve a PR success and show the West that the initiative had not been lost in order to mobilise new support. Fourthly, it was an attempt to play a game of vabanque to force the West to become directly involved so that the front in the Donbass would not collapse and the path to Dnipro would be open for the Russians.²⁷ Fifthly, according to the former top officer of NATO, General *Harald Kujat*, the Ukrainian offensive was aimed at capturing the Kursk nuclear power plant and thus gaining the potential for nuclear blackmail. This attempt failed.²⁸ Between 35,000 and 55,000 casualties remain on the Ukrainian side alone, depending on estimates.²⁹

The Ukrainian troops’ fighting morale is at rock bottom. In the first four months of last year alone, 19,000 proceedings concerning desertion were initiated.³⁰ The rapprochement between Trump and Putin has increased frustration and resignation among the elites, as in peace talks Kiev, like the Europeans, will at best sit at the side table. On the other hand, the Ukrainian population is hoping for an end to the dying.³¹

The overstretched Ukrainian front will be on the verge of collapse if the Russian army completely captures the Pokrovsk railroad junction west of Donetsk. Because behind this there is but steppe – and therefore nothing that could protect the infantrymen from constant drone attacks.

The assessment of the situation can be summarised as follows: Ukraine has been led to the slaughter. Germany is the big-



ISBN 978-3-946778-41-7



ISBN 978-3-910568-11-2

gest economic loser. We will all foot the bill. But there is much more at stake. We are eyewitnesses of the primal catastrophe of the 21st century: a new Ukrainian division; a self-inflicted defeat of NATO, a tectonic shift in geopolitics, a worldwide economic war and a global attack by predatory capitalism on dependent employees and on the middle class. This war will affect the lives of people across Europe for many decades to come. Peace will cost us even more dearly than war has done.

Susan Watkins of *Leeds Beckett University* in the UK wrote an article entitled “Five Wars in One” in the September-October 2022 issue of the *New Left Review*. In this, she discusses the dimensions of the Ukraine war. She gains her analytical tools by looking at the Second World War as a war of imperialist powers, as the

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Chance of confusion – turning point?

by Urs Graf

Since the inauguration of the new administration in Washington, confusion has reigned among the Atlanticist elites of Western Europe. For decades, they have followed the more or less discreet instructions from overseas – and now they are being ordered from there: “*Machine arrière!*”. And in his Munich speech, the new Vice President Vance even criticised them for their obedience.

It would go beyond the scope of this text to trace how the situation in Europe criticized by Vance has developed since the First World War. The Europeans cannot be exculpated, but the American influence is unmistakable. The United States, the victor in both world wars, rose to become the sole superpower. Its narrative was so widely adopted in Europe that it almost eclipsed everything that preceded it. The NATO alliance, founded in 1949, exemplified the *Pax Americana*. However, whether this state of affairs can truthfully be described as a “Pax” – at least in a legal sense – remains debatable. Since then, “all fish came from Lutetia” (i.e. Paris, the Roman Empire’s transalpine regional centre), as it is said in the Asterix comics. Whether this state of affairs – when viewed in the cold light of day – can be described as a ‘pax’ is another question, namely a question of international

law. Its beginnings lie in the tradition of European humanism, which drew on ancient Greece and was gradually developed from the beginning of the Renaissance onwards – despite all the wars and acts of violence throughout history. The people of Europe were thus given a yardstick for their actions, even if, unfortunately, it was often not adhered to. Historical milestones include *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (1467–1536), and the *Westphalian Peace* treaty of 1648 in Münster and Osnabrück. The Congress of Vienna was convened after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, and in 1907, The Hague hosted discussions defining neutrality rights. The *Charter of the United Nations* of 1945 was another milestone in this long development. It contains the principles of international law that prevented European states from participating in the Iraq war in 2003. At the time, US President G.W. Bush railed against the “*stinky old Europeans*”.

The *conditio humana* – a constant in cultural history

Throughout history, forms of living together and state structures have changed time and again. What has persisted since time immemorial is the *conditio humana*. We Europeans are called upon to recognise human

nature and to help it flourish, in the spirit of the ancient Greeks’ “become what you are”.

Without the sense of caring that characterised even our earliest communities, humankind would not have survived to this day. Compassion beyond one’s own clan enables peaceful coexistence and forms the foundation of cooperative and democratic communities. The structures and institutions of our states, which make up our political culture, must take this fact into account. The state derives its legitimacy from this, and in the same way, all office-holders are accountable to their constituents, the “*Staatsvolk*” (constitutive people).

It must (finally!) be about the fair provision of people with essential goods, and not about defending privileges for anyone. That would provide sufficient guidance for the time ahead.

Ultimately, it comes down at all levels of human cohabitation to whether people want to work together at eye level to solve the tasks at hand or whether they want to assert themselves, force others out of the competition and/or otherwise dominate them. We are all too familiar with the latter. The situation of humanity demands a rethink. And there are many voices today that are clearly articulating this.

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Soviet Union’s defensive struggle against the German invasion, China’s anti-colonialist war of liberation against Japan and the subsequent social revolution, the anti-colonialist liberation struggle in Indochina, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and the Philippines, as well as the partisan war against the Nazis and Hitler’s Wehrmacht in Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Belarus, Ukraine, France and Italy.³²

These reflections have inspired me to think about the five wars in Ukraine. But I will structure them differently than Susan Watkins did:

1. the Ukrainian civil war after the coup d’état on the Maidan
2. the Ukrainian-Russian fratricidal war between the coup government in Kiev on the one hand and, from April 2014 the republics of Luhansk and Donetsk and from 24 February 2022 the Russian Federation, on the other hand.
3. the geostrategic war for USA supremacy
4. the global economic war and the European suicide
5. the war against the population of the western industrialised nations.

Those who know nothing, must believe a lot. Most people in Germany know lit-

tle about Ukraine. This is exactly where the propaganda comes in. So for a start, leave behind what the leading media present to you on a daily basis. Follow me for a moment in my attempt to separate press propaganda from the facts. For there is, as *Franz Josef Strauss* once put it, “a normative power of the factual, but no fact-replacing power of the phraseological”.

The Ukrainian civil war after the Maidan coup

Western observers see the events on the Maidan in Kiev in the winter of 2013/2014 as a crossroads between a dictatorship along the lines of Belarus or the overthrow of President *Yanukovich*. They see the Maidan as a revolution, a transformation from below that has led to a democracy, with some shortcomings, but in which “full freedom of expression prevails”.

Whenever Maidan eyewitnesses with whom I have spoken hear this, they can only laugh sarcastically. Because the truth tells quite a different story. But in Germany, anyone who reports the truth about the Maidan is censored, banned from their profession and threatened by the Ukrainian secret service – with the connivance of German authorities and the German judiciary. I am also being subjected to all three of these measures.

I wrote about the actual events in my book “On both sides of the front”. Together with *Régis Le Sommier*,³³ I am one of the few people who have done research on both sides of this war.³⁴ As a result, I was portrayed by *T-Online* and by my own broadcaster, *NDR*, as Putin’s election observer at the referendums in Donbass in September 2022; *NDR* wanted to take legal action, and the Ukrainian secret service put me on the “*Mirotvorez*” death list. In Germany, the truth is punishable by law today, the press has degenerated into a NATO propaganda company and the academic precariat presents itself as the bearer of censorship.

For those who prefer to consult a scientific study, I recommend that by *Ivan Katchanovski* from the University of Ottawa. Based on a thorough evaluation of autopsy reports, court transcripts, eyewitness accounts and ballistic investigations, he comes to the conclusion that the killings on the Maidan were staged by Ukrainian fascists and Western governments, in order to overthrow a democratically elected government and bring about a pro-Western regime change.³⁵ He sees the events on the Maidan in 2014 as the cause of the start of the civil war in Donbass, the Russian interventions in Crimea

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and Donbass, the annexation of Crimea to Russia and the escalation of the conflict between Russia and the West, including the invasion of and war with Ukraine since 2022.

Protesters were trained in so-called *Tech Camps* by US non-governmental organisations and the US Embassy to organise mass protests via social media. Non-governmental organisations were funded by USAID, US foundations, and diplomats from Poland and Lithuania. The protesters reportedly received thermal underwear, food, tents, heaters, and table tennis tables. They were rotated to the Maidan every fortnight and then replaced. For their presence, they received payments amounting to twice the average salary. The weapons on the Maidan originated from the looting of police armouries in western Ukraine, specifically in Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk, where the far-right *Svoboda* party was particularly strong. US historian *Nikolai N. Petro* has argued that right-wing extremists and fascists in western Ukraine were planning to unleash a civil war should the coup on the Maidan fail to achieve its objective of overthrowing President Yanukovich and his government.

According to *Nicolai Petro*, "During the Maidan, the *Right Sector* amassed a significant arsenal of weapons and gathered approximately 10,000 fighters. The formation of volunteer battalions was not a response to a Russian invasion but rather reflected the prior consideration that violence would be necessary to consolidate and defend the overthrow. As the spokesperson for the *Right Sector* expressed just before Yanukovich's removal, 'our group is fully capable of fighting through a civil war.'³⁶ This implies that even if the Maidan had failed, Galician ultranationalists were prepared to forcibly enforce a coup.

The extent of Western support for the Maidan coup plotters is evidenced not only by the intercepted phone call between *Victoria J. Nuland*, then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the US Department of State, and *Geoffrey R. Pyatt*, the US Ambassador to Ukraine, released on 4 February 2014. Aside from disparaging remarks about the Europeans – "Fuck the EU" – the conversation clearly indicated that Washington was working towards a coup and wanted to bring opposition leader *Yatsenyuk* to power. On 13 December 2013, *Nuland* stated before the US-Ukraine Foundation that the US had invested over 5 billion US Dollars in the forces backing the coup. Further details emerged from *Nuland's* testimony before the US Congress on 9 May 2014, where the presence of fascists on the Maidan was also discussed.³⁷

'Not interested in nonsense'

Douglas Macgregor (picture ma)

"Moscow is not interested in any agreement that allows NATO troops specifically French or British to take up residences under any circumstances whether they're peace peacekeepers or anything else in Ukraine. [...] And if president *Trump* really wants this agreement to work, he needs to go back and carefully examine *Putin's* words. [...] President *Trump* needs to get out of this notion of putting anybody in Ukraine who's not Ukrainian and stay away from it [...]. Talking about deals regarding Rare Earth minerals to somehow or another pay us back for a war that we did everything in our power to cultivate and launch. For a war that we subsidised, for a war that that persisted far longer than it ever should have because of our influence is a disaster. I think he should be much more mindful of the human losses, recognise this country is now wrecked, recognise that Russia has also paid a price for its victory and back away from this. Stop talking about deals that are going to compensate us for something good. We didn't do any

good. We did the opposite and then finally I'm not sure about this Rare Earth business and how much is actually present I've seen several reports that suggest there's very little over there now there may be other kinds of minerals maybe lithium and some other things. I don't know. But at this stage I think it's both in bad taste as well as ill advised to talk about that sort of thing in public.

I know that President *Trump* takes great pride and being very transactional but this is transactional in the extreme. [...] The Russians are deadly serious people they don't bluff. Neither do the Germans. I think the Russians in particular at this point in time are not interested in nonsense. They're not going to take any sort of strategic hedge that President *Trump* or anyone else thinks they're creating seriously. They want an end to this. They're willing to sign an agreement with us. They're interested in a security architecture for Europe, Russia and the United States. We need to take that very seriously. This should be seen as a strategic inflection point in the history of Europe and frankly the world. And we should treat it appropriately, very seriously. Sit down and work it out however many months it takes because this could set the stage for decades of prosperity and peace and stability."

Source: Douglas Macgregor, former US Army colonel and political scientist, in an interview for the geopolitical podcast "Judging Freedom" on 26 February 2025; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCOPQQ4Yn-Y>

According to Russian sources, the Maidan received as much as 20 million US Dollars per week in direct monetary support. The US and EU reportedly maintained continuous contact with both right-wing extremists and fascists. *Ivan Katchanovski* reported that, like in a marketplace, negotiations took place over the number of murders deemed necessary for Western governments to compel the elected President Yanukovich to relinquish his office. The agreed figure was around 100, which they achieved.³⁸ Such interference in another country's internal affairs is a violation of the prohibition on intervention and thus breaches international law.

This marked the beginning of the first phase of the Ukraine war – a civil war phase. By mid-March 2014, US mercenaries from the security firm *Academi*, formerly *Blackwater*, were active in the Donbas. This meant that the US was involved from the onset of the Donbas conflict. The deployment of mercenaries violates the prohibition on the use of force under Article 2, Paragraph 4 of the UN Charter, rendering it illegal under international law.

The wave of violence on the Maidan, the violent overthrow, and marauding ultranationalist and far-right groups across Ukraine led the ethnic Russian population in eastern Ukraine, together with local police and defected Ukrainian soldiers, to form self-defence militias and establish their own state structures. As of mid-April 2014, they were supported by volunteers around former FSB officer *Igor Girkin*, known as "Strelkov" – a total of 52 men. In response to the involvement of US mercenaries, the Russian General Staff dispatched mercenaries from the "Slavianski Corps" to aid the insurgents. According to US military analyst *Scott Ritter*, *Wagner* was founded in Donetsk on 1 May 2014.³⁹

By April 2014, the central government in Kyiv had launched the so-called anti-terror operation against the insurgents in the Donbas. On 6 April 2014, Ukraine's interim President *Oleksandr Turchynov* ordered the creation of an "anti-crisis task force" to address "all those who take up a weapon with anti-terror measures [...]"⁴⁰ This was in response to the occupation of administrative buildings in Kharkiv,

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Donetsk, and Luhansk by pro-Russian activists. Therefore, 6 April marked the start of the Donbas war by the coup government in Kyiv. On 2 and 8 May 2014, massacres perpetrated by far-right paramilitaries occurred in Odessa and Mariupol.

On 7 and 27 April 2014, separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk declared their own people's republics. In May 2014, the rebels conducted referendums in their controlled territories to gain extended independence or autonomy, against which Putin had advised. Such secessions are debated under international law, but are generally possible legally, even against the will of the mother country, as noted by the *International Court of Justice* in The Hague on 22 July 2010 regarding Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence: "International law contains

no prohibition on declarations of independence."⁴¹

Therefore, the illegal war was not initiated by the Russian Federation in February 2024, but by Ukraine in April 2014. By the end of 2021, according to international organisations, more than 14,000 people had been killed, including 3,400 civilians.⁴² The OSCE concluded that 75 % of civilian casualties were at the hands of the Ukrainian army.⁴³ This constitutes genocide and is a criminal act under the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* of 1948.⁴⁴

Putin did not recognise the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk until February 2022. He obviously did not want to get drawn deeper into the conflict. However, Russia supported the separatists logistically, economically and with arms deliveries. The extent of direct military involvement is unclear. Military analyst Jacques Baud

assumes that there was no intervention by regular Russian forces.⁴⁵

Conversely, NATO has been massively arming Ukraine since the Maidan coup. Joint military manoeuvres and US instructors were used to achieve 'inter-operability' as quickly as possible. Here are a few comments on the purpose of these measures:

Pierre de Gaulle, grandson of the French president General *Charles de Gaulle*: the war "was triggered by the will of the Americans and NATO and is largely maintained by the European Commission".

Alain Juillet, head of the French foreign intelligence service DGSE under President *Jacques Chirac*, says the Americans provoked the war: "Clearly." Since 2014, they have done everything they can to ensure that Russia slips into the war. NATO

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Who will definitely win the war in Ukraine ...

by *Daniel Kersfeld*, Argentina

As the conflict with Russia begins to cool with Washington's direct intervention, the banks and in particular the "vulture funds" are playing a key role. They are impatiently waiting to cash in (and above all earn money) for the services provided in Ukraine, while at the same time they are beginning to plan the economic future of this country to their own advantage. *BlackRock*, the world's largest investment fund company with around 12 trillion dollars in assets, *PIMCO* (*Pacific Investment Management Company*), the sixth largest international investment company in the world, and *JP Morgan Chase*, the world's largest bank, form a powerful financial conglomerate based in the United States. It has remained loyal to Ukraine in recent years in return for lucrative contracts.

The relationship between Kiev and *BlackRock* dates back to 2014, when the investment fund became one of the most important creditors of Ukrainian government debt following the pro-Western coup against then President *Viktor Yanukovich*.

However, this connection was to deepen under the current government of *Volodymyr Zelensky* and especially since the start of the war against Russia in February 2022, when other companies specialising in profit maximisation and financial speculation with constantly new extortionate practices also became involved. This was after they had taken over part of the gigantic foreign debt of almost 170 billion dollars agreed with the *IMF* and the *World Bank*.

When the war was already underway, *BlackRock* and *PIMCO* agreed to suspend the interest charge for two years. At the beginning of 2024, the agreement was extended for another year on the condition

that *Zelensky* would commission these companies to raise private investment for post-war reconstruction. The "vulture funds" took a leading role in this new economic development by advising various companies interested in making quick profits in Ukraine and charging them for this activity.

In the midst of the Davos Forum last January, *Zelensky* held secret meetings with the most important chairmen and CEOs of multinational companies to conclude risky deals totalling tens of millions, avoiding the public eye. Always coordinated by the allied organisations, the President met with the heads of international finance companies such as *Bridgewater Associates* and *Carlyle Group*, with companies focusing on real estate investments such as *Blackstone*, with IT centres such as *Dell* and with steel conglomerates such as *ArcelorMittal*.

The influence of financial companies at peace negotiations is indisputably great, to such an extent that they already have their own plan for post-war Ukraine, which goes far beyond quick privatisation and onerous contracts in the public sector.

With the support of *Donald Trump's* administration, the main interest of the investment funds is the early establishment of a "reconstruction bank", based on their own experience as venture capital firms and managed internationally. This project is far removed from the Marshall Plan 2.0 proposed by the main European capitals, which would favour certain companies in the defence, transport or industrial sectors in Ukraine. All the signs are that Europe is being side-lined in this first phase of di-

Although they consider *Zelensky* to be their most important ally and there would be no major legal or political obstacles to recovering the amounts owed, the creditors of the Ukrainian bonds have already instructed the law firm *Weil Gotshal & Manges* and the consultancy firm *PJT Partners* to prepare a possible legal dispute in view of the conflicts that could arise in the near future.

After all, the end of the war is not what was expected in the United States, let alone in Europe, where NATO is on its knees in the face of a victorious Russia. Furthermore, unpredictable but significant changes could occur in Ukraine in the coming months, especially if there are major reshuffles on the political and military stage. Most importantly, a large group of bondholders represented by "vulture funds" hopes to receive 23 billion dollars from the restructuring of Ukraine's debt, which will be initiated immediately with the start of the post-war period.

In the meantime, *BlackRock*, *PIMCO*, other investment funds and a growing number of companies, banks and multinationals are hoping to realise greater economic gains from an extremely weakened and war-weary Ukraine. Provided, of course, that their favoured partner, *Volodymyr Zelensky*, remains at the head of the state and agrees to repay all debts in full, including through the largely uncontrolled transfer of natural resources and land to various commercial enterprises. •

Source: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/804688-ucrania-una-paz-mediada-por-los-fondos-buitre> of 18 February 2025

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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has teamed up with Ukraine "to wage war against Russia. Without NATO, Ukraine would be dead."

Günter Verheugen, long-standing EU Commissioner and Vice President of the European Commission from 2004 to 2010: In the war in Ukraine, "it is not about what is best for Ukraine. It is much more about the strategic weakening of Russia".⁴⁶

**War of brothers:
the Ukrainian-Russian conflict**

On 21 February 2022, Russia recognised the newly established states of DNR and LNR. In doing so, Moscow saw itself as acting in accordance with international law. Once a state is recognised, binding international treaties can be concluded, including mutual assistance obligations. In doing so, Moscow also abandoned the *Minsk I* and *Minsk II* agreements, which, according to former German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* and former French President *Hollande*, had only served to give Ukraine time to rearm. They were binding under international law by virtue of a UN decision. Former Inspector General of the Bundeswehr General Harald Kujat therefore speaks of a clear breach of international law.⁴⁷

Former US weapons inspector and retired colonel Scott Ritter assesses: "[...] Ukraine and its Western partners simply bought time until NATO could build up a Ukrainian military that could take Donbass in its entirety and drive Russia out of Crimea."⁴⁸

However, there are also direct causes for the start of the second phase of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The Ukrainian troop strength in Donbass in 2015 was 121,500 men. By February 2022, the number of soldiers had grown to 209,000. Including reservists, Ukraine had 1,198,600 men under arms.⁴⁹ Former US Secretary of State *Anthony Blinken* made it clear in a December interview with the *New York Times Magazine* that the US had anticipated a war and therefore secretly provided Ukraine with massive arms in September and December 2021.⁵⁰ Thus, the *Biden* administration deliberately brought about the war instead of accepting the Kremlin's offer of negotiations. Ukrainian military officials report that Ukraine has planned an attack on Donbass.⁵¹

As early as 20 September 2018, the Ukrainian parliament approved constitutional amendments that would make the country's accession to NATO and the EU its most important foreign policy goal. On 7 February 2019, NATO accession was enshrined in the constitution – a clear violation of Ukraine's 1992 Declaration of Independence and the 1994 *Buda-*

pest Memorandum.^{51a} Beginning in 2014, Ukraine passed language laws that banned Russian films and the import of Russian literature, introduced language quotas for broadcasters, gradually abolished the use of Russian in schools and made Ukrainian the obligatory language in all areas of state and public life. All these measures were contrary to international law.⁵² In the meantime, monuments and street names of Russian poets and thinkers have been replaced by the names of fascists like *Stepan Bandera*, and book-burnings are taking place.

On 24 March 2021, President *Zelenskiy* signed a new military doctrine that declared Russia the main enemy and aimed to regain control over Crimea and Donbass. In response, Russia also massed troops on the borders with Ukraine. On 31 August 2021, the USA and Ukraine signed a Strategic Defence Agreement. This was followed on 10 November 2021 by a bilateral strategic partnership agreement with a strong anti-Russian focus. On 15 December 2021, Moscow launched a last-ditch attempt to prevent the escalation. Specifically, Russia proposed an agreement in a legally binding treaty based on the principle of indivisible security, renouncing the use of foreign territory to launch an attack on the United States or Russia; renouncing the conduct of military operations by NATO in Ukraine; renouncing further expansion of NATO to the east; and renouncing the stationing of weapons and military in those countries that have joined the alliance after 1997.

NATO Secretary-General *Jens Stoltenberg* told the European Parliament on 7 September 2023 that Putin had sent a draft treaty in autumn 2021 "that they wanted NATO to sign, promising to refrain from further NATO expansion [...] And that was a condition for not invading Ukraine. Of course we did not sign that [...] So he went to war to prevent NATO, more NATO, near its borders."⁵³ *Stoltenberg* here states the real reason for the war: the eastward expansion of NATO, despite all promises to the contrary.

According to political scientist *John J. Mearsheimer* from the University of Chicago, the decisive factors for the Russian invasion in February 2022 are the USA and NATO. He writes that "the USA and its allies provoked the war. Of course, this is not to deny that Russia invaded Ukraine and started the war. However, the main cause of the conflict is NATO's decision to include Ukraine in the alliance, which was seen as an existential threat by practically all Russian political leaders as an existential threat that must be eliminated. However, the NATO expansion is part of a broader strategy aimed at turning Ukraine into a Western bulwark on the border with

Russia. Bringing Kiev into the European Union (EU) and to promote a colour revolution in Ukraine – in other words, to transform it into a pro-Western liberal democracy – are the other two pillars of this policy. The Russian leadership fears all three pillars, but it fears the NATO expansion the most. To counter this threat, Russia launched a pre-emptive war on 24 February 2022."⁵⁴

He gives seven reasons for this: 1. There is no evidence from before 24 February 2022 that Putin wanted to conquer Ukraine; 2. There is no evidence that he wanted to install a puppet government in Kiev; 3. He did not have nearly enough troops – only 190,000 men – to conquer Ukraine; 4. Putin tried to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis in the months before the war began, which NATO Secretary General *Jens Stoltenberg* has confirmed; 5. Immediately after the start of the war, Moscow approached Kiev to start negotiations to end the war, which actually took place in Belarus and Istanbul, but were stopped by the West; 6. Apart from Ukraine, there is not the slightest evidence that Putin wanted to attack other Eastern European countries; 7. Hardly anyone in the West claimed before the start of the war that Putin had had imperial ambitions since coming to power.

Once again, the French historian *Emmanuel Todd*: Ukraine "was armed in order to attack Russia. Putin's attack was a defensive invasion [...]. If NATO had refrained from making Ukraine part of its military apparatus, this war would not have happened."⁵⁵ We are therefore dealing with a proxy war that has geostrategic and economic causes.

**Phoenix in a nosedive: The
geostrategic war for US supremacy**

The USA, NATO and the EU have been involved in the war in Ukraine from the very beginning. This can be seen not only in Western involvement in the Maidan, but also in the so-called *Orange Revolution* of 2004. The West's cronyism with Ukrainian fascists was already conspicuous during the era of President *Yushchenko*.⁵⁶ The aim was to draw Ukraine into the Western orbit by any means necessary, to encircle Russia and bring about regime change in Moscow, as well as to open up new sales markets, extended workbenches and raw material depots.⁵⁷

For years, the United States has tried everything to build up Ukraine as a battering ram against Russia. This includes the CIA's presence in the Donbass with at least twelve secret locations.⁵⁸ The rearmament of Ukraine continued during Donald Trump's first term as president from 2017 to 2021. This is also Trump's war.

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The last battle of the Cold War just took place in Germany

by Fyodor A. Lukyanov*



Fyodor A. Lukyanov
(picture Wikipedia)

This year's *Munich Security Conference* attracted as much attention as it did 18 years ago. Back then, it was *Vladimir Putin* who caused an uproar; this time, it was US Vice President *J. D. Vance*. Though separated by nearly two decades, these two speeches share a critical theme: both challenged the transatlantic order built on the legacy of the Cold War. And in both instances, the Western establishment failed to offer a substantive response.

In 2007, Putin's warning about NATO expansion and Western overreach was largely dismissed as the grievances of a declining power. A few voices urged caution, but the prevailing sentiment in Washington and Brussels was complacency – Russia, they believed, would ultimately fall in line. The consequences of that miscalculation are now plain for all to see.

Today, the US Vice President has thrown down a different kind of gauntlet. His speech signaled a deep ideological rift within the West itself, one that Western European leaders seem unprepared to confront. In response, French President *Emmanuel Macron* has called for an emergency summit to establish a common position. But is the EU truly grasping the scale of the challenge? The early reactions suggest not. There remains a hope, however misguided, that this storm can simply be waited out.

Retaliation, ideology, and a changing World Order

There are several explanations for Vance's remarks in Munich. The most immedi-

ate is payback. Western European leaders have spent years openly disparaging *Trump* and his allies, assuming they could do so without consequence. Now that *Trump* is back, they are facing the reality that their words have not been forgotten.

But there is a deeper ideological divergence at play.

In many ways, Vance's critique of Europe echoes the grievances that led the settlers of the New World to break from the Old World centuries ago: tyranny, hypocrisy, and parasitism.

He and others, like *Elon Musk*, are unapologetic about interfering in European affairs – something liberal ideologues have long justified in the name of promoting democracy. Now, the debate over what democracy truly means has expanded beyond the US to the entire transatlantic alliance. This ideological struggle will shape the West's trajectory in the coming decades.

The third and most significant factor behind Vance's speech is the broader transformation of global power dynamics. The world has changed. While it is still too early to define the new order fully, one thing is clear: the old ways no longer work. Demographics, economic shifts, technological competition, and military realignments are all reshaping the global balance.

At the heart of this transformation is a key question for the West: Should it finally end the Cold War as it was defined in the 20th century, or should it continue the struggle under new conditions? Western Europe's answer, so far, has been to cling to the confrontation – largely because it has failed to integrate former adversaries in a way that secures its own future. The US, however, is increasingly signaling a willingness to move on. This shift is not unique to *Trump*; every American president since *George W. Bush* has, to varying degrees, deprioritised Europe in favor of other regions. *Trump* has merely been the most explicit about it.

Western Europe's dilemma: clinging to the past or facing the future

What will Western Europe do in response? For now, it appears committed to preserving the ideological and geopolitical framework of the Cold War. This is not just about security; it is about preserving its own relevance. The EU is a product of the liberal world order, and it requires a defined adversary to justify its cohesion. A familiar enemy – Russia – serves this purpose far better than an unfamiliar one like China.

From this perspective, it is logical to assume that some may even seek to esca-

late tensions to a point where the US has no choice but to intervene. Whether the bloc is actually capable of provoking such a crisis is another question entirely.

For the US, the situation is more complex. On one hand, moving beyond the old Cold War framework would allow Washington to focus on what it sees as the real challenges of the future – China, the Pacific, North America, the Arctic, and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East. Western Europe has little to offer in these theaters. On the other hand, completely abandoning the continent is not on the cards. *Trump* is not an isolationist; he simply envisions a different model of empire – one where the US extracts more benefits and assumes fewer burdens.

Vance's call for Western Europe to "fix its democracy" should be understood in this context. It is not about spreading democracy in the traditional sense, but about improving governance in what the US increasingly sees as a dysfunctional province. In fact, Vance's stance on European sovereignty is arguably even more dismissive than that of his liberal predecessors, who at least paid lip service to transatlantic unity.

The last battle of the Cold War?

Vance's speech in Munich was not just another rhetorical salvo in the US-Europe dispute. It was a milestone in the evolution of Atlanticist thought. For decades, the transatlantic alliance has operated on the assumption that the Cold War never truly ended.

Now, the central question is whether to finally put an end to it and start a new one on different terms.

The EU's current strategy – preserving confrontation with Russia as a means of securing its own coherence – may not be sustainable in the long run. If the US steps back and prioritises its own interests elsewhere, Brussels will have to reassess its position. Will it continue to rely on a Cold War-era framework that no longer fits the modern world, or will it finally acknowledge the shift and adapt accordingly?

For now, the transatlantic divide is widening. The choices made in the coming months will determine whether this rift leads to a permanent fracture – or the beginning of a new geopolitical order where Western Europe finally learns to stand on its own.

Source: Russia in Global Affairs of 21 February 2025; <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/last-battle-cold-war-lukyanov/>; with kind permission of the author.

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Washington and London deliberately accepted a civil war with the coup on the Maidan, accompanied and orchestrated the war against the separatist republics and prevented a possible peace in spring 2022 after the Russian invasion.⁵⁹ They are therefore jointly responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths. The bottom line is that the West's strategy of sacrificing Ukraine for a regime change in Moscow has failed.

Today, we are witnessing a tectonic shift in geopolitics. Against this backdrop, President Donald Trump's strategy paradoxically looks like the continuation of US policy by other means. The changes in the Washington administration are shifting the focus of imperial strategies of exploitation and domination from the competitors to the satraps: Ukraine is to be forced to give up rare earths worth 500 billion dollars; the EU is to pay the costs of the war alone; Denmark must accept that Washington is accessing the resource-rich and strategically important Greenland; Trump is publicly considering reoccupying Panama; Canada's national independence is being called into question; an investor close to Trump has announced that he will buy up the Nordstream pipeline out of insolvency proceedings, which would allow the USA to control Germany's energy supply. Washington consolidates its sphere of influence, renounces the rest of the world and focuses on its main rival, China.

A look back: On 9 February 2007, Vladimir Putin warned at the Munich Security Conference against establishing a unipolar world order of the West under the leadership of the USA at the expense of Russia and most other states in the world: "I think that for today's world, the monopolar model is not only unsuitable, but impossible at all. Not only because in today's world, especially in today's world, neither the military-political nor the economic resources are sufficient for a single leader. But what is even more important – the model itself proves to be impracticable because it has no basis and cannot be the moral basis of modern civilisation."⁶⁰

Putin's speech 18 years ago marked the first clearly formulated rejection of the unipolar system under US domination. This concept of unilateralism was developed after the end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet system and was first formulated by *Paul Wolfowitz* in 1990.⁶¹ In Munich in 2007, Russia triggered the beginning of a geopolitical revolution. Other states such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa joined in and today form a group that is striving for a multipolar world. The war in Ukraine and the defeat of the West catalysed this process.⁶²

However, historians see the actual causes for the war in the decline of the West and the USA in particular. After the Second World War, they still accounted for 45 % of global industrial production; today they only account for a maximum of 27 %. In 2000, 66 % of global trade was still transacted in dollars; in 2022, it was only 47 %, and in the first quarter of 2023 it was only 40 %. At the same time, foreign exchange reserves in dollars fell from 71 % to 60 % in 20 years. In 2022, 140 million out of 340 million Americans were considered poor or low-income.

The same applies to the entire West: in 1980, the West had an 80 % share of the global economy and the rest of the world contributed 20%. Today, the emerging countries account for almost 70 % of the global economy, while the West has just over 30%.⁶³

Emmanuel Todd: "If Russia wins, the imperial system of the United States will collapse [...] If Russia survives, keeps the Donbass and Crimea, if its economy continues to function and it can reorganise its trade relations, with China and India – then America will have lost the war. And as a result, it will lose its allies. That is why America and NATO will continue [...] Its main cause is the crisis of the West [...] The West has lost its values and is in a spiral of self-destruction [...] Russia is in the process of redefining itself as a culturally conservative, technologically advanced great power."⁶⁴

The Norwegian historian Glenn Diesen writes: "The Ukraine war was a predictable consequence of an unsustainable world order and became a battleground for the struggle for the future world order between global hegemony or a Westphalian multipolar world. The goal of defeating Russia militarily, economically or politically through global isolation has failed. NATO reacted with continuous escalation and theatrics. Since it is an accepted fact that Ukraine has been increasingly ruined by unimaginable suffering and its military objectives have not been achieved, the only possible solution to the conflict is for the West to recognise Russia's legitimate security interests and thus defuse the security dilemma. The difficulty arises from the fact that this would end the era of liberal hegemony."⁶⁵

Back in 2016, long before the Russian invasion and in the midst of the war between the Ukrainian and separatist republics, the British historian Richard Sakwa said in his book "Frontline Ukraine" that the war in Ukraine was the "suicide of Europe".⁶⁶ European integration has turned out to be a pipe dream. Confronted with the task of healing the wounds of the Cold War and building the foundations of a united continent, the EU has failed spectacularly. The European Union degen-

erated into a money-raising machine for NATO. Now it can continue as a bankrupt.

In the meantime, there is already open talk in the United States that the Europeans will have to pay for the consequences of the war. The World Bank estimates the cost of reconstruction at 411 billion dollars.⁶⁷ *Bloomberg* even speaks of a trillion dollars.⁶⁸ According to the *German Economic Institute*, this would burden the European Union's budget with a three-digit billion sum: based on the current multi-year budget from 2021–2027, experts estimate the costs to be around 130 to 190 billion euros; and the war is not over yet.⁶⁹ Germany is the EU's largest net contributor. This means that the costs of the war and the burden of reconstruction will fall on German taxpayers.

Germany has already spent almost 150 billion euros on the war in Ukraine, money that is lacking in education, pensions, health, infrastructure, housing and the social sector.⁷⁰ Massive cuts in the social sector will be the result. The billions needed to finance schools and universities will be lacking. The skills gap, particularly among young academics, will increase and we will move towards an "age of idiocy", as my friend *Ramon Schack* has called a book. The infrastructure will gradually disintegrate. Thousands of bridges in Germany are already dilapidated and there is a lack of investment in roads and railways. This increases logistics costs for companies and makes it more difficult to find good young talent.

Elsewhere, Emmanuel Todd reiterates his view that Russia is waging a "defensive and preventive war": "This war has [...] become existential for the United States. Just like Russia, they cannot withdraw from this conflict, they cannot let go. That is why we are now in an endless war, in a confrontation whose outcome must be the collapse of one or the other."⁷¹

The head of the US State Department, Marco Rubio, has now clearly formulated a change of course for Washington in an interview that can also be found in full on the *Foreign Office* website and can therefore be said to be programmatic in nature:

"I think that [the Westphalian system of sovereign states] was lost at the end of the Cold War, because we were the only power in the world. Thus, we assumed this responsibility of sort of becoming the global government in many cases, trying to solve every problem. [...] So it's not normal for the world to simply have a unipolar power. That was an anomaly. It was a product of the end of the Cold War, but eventually you were going to reach back to a point where you had a multipolar world, multi-great powers in different parts of the planet. We face that now with China and to some extent Russia [...] So

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now more than ever, we need to remember that foreign policy should always be about furthering the national interest of the United States and doing so, to the extent possible, avoiding war and armed conflict, which we have seen two times in the last century be very costly."

Marco Rubio has thus admitted the failure of unilateralism. He confirms the diagnosis of my late friend *Jonathan Schell*, who had already described the concept of the unipolar world in 2003 as a path from cooperation and partnership to military intervention and wars of aggression in violation of international law, as an imperialist policy with which Washington is taking the path of arrogance and ignorance and thus "setting the stage for a catastrophe".⁷²

The global economic war

The USA and its European satraps believed they could bring Russia to its knees with economic sanctions. I still remember *Annalena Baerbock* saying: "These sanctions will ruin Russia!" The West has frozen foreign assets of the Russian Federation worth almost 300 billion euros, major Russian banks have been banned from the SWIFT payment system, Russian companies cannot buy high-tech or dual-use products in the West, energy companies such as *Shell*, *BP* or logistics companies such as *Maersk* have left Russia. These sanctions were not decided by the UN and are therefore all in violation of international law.

In the meantime, these people have become quite meek after German research institutes have also determined that the sanctions have boomeranged.⁷³ The economic campaign against Russia has failed. It has led to rising energy, commodity and food prices in the West. US companies have lost more than 300 billion dollars as a result of the sanctions – too much for Trump.⁷⁴

By blowing up the *North Stream* pipeline, which investigator *Seymour Hersh* attributes to Washington, Germany has fallen into the energy trap. Russia's economic power was criminally underestimated. The Russian Federation has overtaken Germany in the production of steel and aluminium – both essential materials for war – and has caught up with the United States.⁷⁵ According to US military analysts, Moscow also has a clear lead in terms of military capabilities.⁷⁶

In Germany, almost 40 per cent of the population have no (significant) assets at all, which puts them under massive financial pressure in a crisis situation such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the explosion in energy prices in the wake of the Ukraine war and inflation. On the other hand, private wealth is concentrated in so few

hands that the five richest German business families (*Albrecht/Heister*, *Boehringervon Baumbach*, *Kühne*, *Quandt/Klatten* and *Schwarz*) together own around 250 billion euros, which is more than the poorer half of the population, i. e., far more than 40 million people. Of the 250 billionaires, only one comes from East Germany. However, poverty is still more widespread there and, at around 30 per cent, a much larger proportion of employees work in the low-wage sector than in western Germany.⁷⁷

Russia's economy is growing in the new markets of Eurasia and the Global South. Only the USA, Canada, the 27 member states of the EU, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the Bahamas, South Korea and Taiwan sanction Russia, as well as Turkey on certain points.⁷⁸ According to my calculations, that is currently 40 states. The United Nations has 193 member states. The remaining 153 continue to trade with Russia.

The American historian *Nikolai Petro* from the Long Island University has pointed out that the sanctions are failing to have the desired effect for two reasons: Firstly, Russia has had experience in dealing with sanctions since 2014 and has strengthened its domestic economic resilience. Secondly, 153 countries remain partner states of Russia. This makes it possible to circumvent the sanctions across the board.⁷⁹ They have to, because many African countries are dependent on Russian grain imports. The West's sanctions against Russia have made grain prices 30% more expensive, producing a mountain of African corpses. It is not Russia that is isolated, but the West. The *European Council on Foreign Relations* found the phrase: "United West, divided from the rest."⁸⁰

By the end of 2022, Russia had become China's second-largest supplier of crude oil. India is also an important oil customer. The country only produces 10% of its domestic demand. But 34% of the remainder of India's oil consumption in 2023 came from Russia. At the same time, the eastern trade routes are being expanded. New nuclear-powered icebreakers are being built in the shipyards of St. Petersburg, making it possible to transport oil and gas to China and India via the northern route all year round. A contract between the Russian atomic energy agency *Rosatom* and China's *Hainan Yangpu new Shipping Co. Ltd.* regulates the construction of new ice-going container ships. According to *Rosatom*, more than 3 million tonnes of transit goods will be shipped there in 2024. Progress is also being made with the expansion of the 7200-kilometre *North-South Transport Corridor* (INSTC), which will run from St. Petersburg to ports in southern Iran and on to

Mumbai. These transport routes bypass Europe and shorten the standard routes through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal by less than half. This reduces the transport time from Moscow to Mumbai from 40 to 60 days to 25 to 30 days. This reduces transport costs by 30 per cent. Progress also made on the western route through Azerbaijan. Rail freight rates there rose by 30 per cent in 2023. The rail link between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf was opened in June 2024.⁸¹ At the same time, the routes from Europe to Asia through the Suez Canal are becoming more dangerous. The Houthi rebels in Yemen are threatening cargo ships in the Red Sea in response to Israel's genocide in Gaza. Moscow has prevailed in the trade war with the West.

However, the consequences of the economic war are having a different impact on the USA and Europe. Ukraine is the biggest loser of this war, an entire country, hundreds of thousands of people are being sacrificed on the altar of geopolitical and economic interests. The second loser is Germany.

The Munich-based *Ifo Institute* registered a decline in the business climate in the automotive industry in August 2024: it fell by 6.2 per cent to minus 24.7 per cent, a veritable "nosedive" in sentiment, according to *Ifo* expert *Anita Wölfl*. There is a lack of orders, especially from abroad.⁸² Due to the high energy prices, 37 per cent of industrial companies intend to relocate their production to other countries. Leading economic institutes are warning that Germany's growth forces are dwindling.⁸³ In a study by the *Swiss International Institute for Management Development* (IMD), the German economy is losing out on almost all location factors.⁸⁴ The credit agency *Creditreform* has registered more company bankruptcies than it had for almost ten years.⁸⁵ The German Economic Institute sees high net outflows of direct investment from Germany and speaks of deindustrialisation.⁸⁶ China and the USA are emancipating themselves from German exportism. Its being decoupled from cheap Russian energy is affecting Germany's industry. The *Leibnitz Center for European Economic Research* and *Creditreform* calculate in their closure report that 176,000 companies closed down last year. As the main causes, they see high energy and investment costs, interrupted supply chains, staff shortages and political uncertainty. All of this together is a "toxic cocktail" for the economy.⁸⁷

At the meeting of the *Eurasia Society* on 28 August 2024 in the Russian Orthodox Church, Wintersteinstr. 24, Charlottenburg, *Michael Schumann*, Chairman of the Board of the *Federal Association*

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for *Economic Development and Foreign Trade BWA* in Berlin, said, "We work according to the Noah's Ark principle: when the deluge of anti-Russianism and sanctions against Russia comes, we put the most important companies on a ship, batten down the hatches and wait on Noah's Ark until the tsunami is over." Given the key economic data, it is however doubtful whether the German economy will recover quickly.

The elites of the West have wandered into a maze with a dead end, and instead of coming to their senses, they are driving the population deeper and deeper into the Ukraine war. This, too, has economic reasons. During a visit to Kiev on 6 September 2024, US Secretary of State *Lindsey Graham* made it clear that Ukraine was sitting on trillions of US dollars worth of raw materials that were "good for the US economy" and that Ukraine was fighting so that the US would not have to do so.⁸⁸ CDU member of the Bundestag *Roderich Kiesewetter*: "If Europe wants to complete the energy transition, it needs its own lithium deposits. The largest lithium deposits in Europe are in the Donetsk-Lugansk region [...] So here we additionally have completely different goals in the background."⁸⁹

The Deputy Head of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, *Dmitry Medvedev*, posted on 30 August 2024: "According to freely available data, the total value of Ukraine's former mineral resources is estimated at almost 14.8 trillion dollars, but 7.3 trillion dollars of these are now in the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics. This means that almost half of the former Ukraine's national wealth is located in the Donbass! The resources of the Crimea, Zaporozhye and Kherson regions, which have also reverted to Russia, are estimated at a further 821 billion dollars. All this corresponds to almost 63% of the former Ukraine's coal deposits, 42% of its metal deposits and 33% of its rare earths and other important materials, including lithium. In order to get their hands on the coveted mineral resources, the Western parasites shamelessly demand that their protégés wage war to the last Ukrainian."

But it is not just about those resources that could halt the downward trend of the western industrialised nations' rate of profit and support the strategy of decarbonisation.⁹⁰ It is about the continued existence of the dollar economy. This is precisely why the US will continue to try to contain Russia. The dollar is considered the world's reserve currency. That is why the US Federal Reserve can issue unlimited dollars. This is because every nation

needs dollars and must hold dollar reserves in order to trade and, above all, to purchase commodities such as oil and natural gas. This is why the USA can export its inflation: The entire world functions like a sponge, soaking up this inflation and enabling the US government to run up huge deficits and finance an astronomical military budget, as well as allowing a tiny proportion of the population to enrich themselves excessively. States wishing to leave the dollar economy will suffer the fate of Libya, Iraq, Iran or Venezuela.

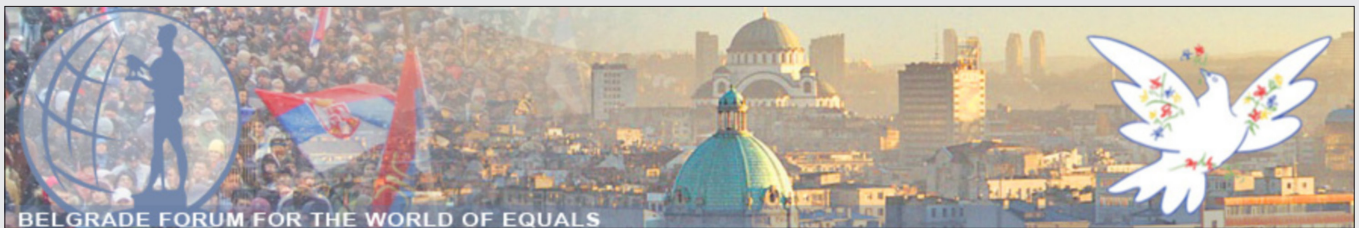
This is where Russia comes into play. Because Russia is a threat to the proliferation of the US dollar. Russia has become astonishingly resilient over the past 20 years and cannot simply be brought to its knees by military intervention. Russia is reducing the size of the dollar sponge. And the smaller the sponge, the more difficult it will be for the US to finance its deficit and maintain its economic hegemony.⁹¹

Here you can see – from different perspectives – the actual reasons for the war. Emmanuel Todd assumes that, in this respect, the third world war has already begun. However, this global conflict is taking a different course from the one the West would like. He names ten major surprises of this war in Ukraine, and, "the

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'Camp Bondsteel' must be closed

Statement by the Belgrade Forum for a World of Equals,
on the occasion of 23 February – Global Day of Action to Close Foreign Military Bases



Ever since its foundation, the *Belgrade Forum for a World of Equals* stood fast against foreign military bases, because they have always been, and keep on being used as an instrument of subjugating and destabilising nations and states and smothering democracy therein, under the pretext of preserving peace and spreading democracy. Foreign military bases are but an anomaly remained from the Cold War and NATO's expansion to the East and its hegemonism, as the image of the unipolar-formatted world order. They are the biggest polluters that have also served as undisclosed prisons and transit stations for illegal drug trafficking, spreading prostitions, and the like.

The Belgrade Forum expresses our full solidarity with all fellow fighters against foreign military bases, and calls for a global accord on the closure there-

of. The Forum recalls that many of those bases were erected illegally, in disregard of the democratic will of the peoples in the countries of their stationing.

The same also applies to US *Camp Bondsteel*, one of the largest military bases in the world, located in the territory of Serbia, more precisely, the Serbian Province of Kosovo and Metohija. It was built 26 years ago, in the aftermath of NATO's criminal aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999. However, no previous construction approval was requested, either from Serbia or from the UN Security Council, since this particular part of Serbia has been temporarily placed under the UN Security Council's mandate.

This is why the Belgrade Forum seeks the closure of *Camp Bondsteel*.

The *Belgrade Forum for a World of Equals* welcomes the statement by US

President *Donald Trump*, announcing withdrawal of military resources from Europe, and expects not only mere renouncing of erecting fresh new bases, but also the closure of the existing ones.

The Belgrade Forum holds that the new US administration has no interests in upkeeping the compromised, aggressive, and arrogant policies of former administrations led by President *Clinton* with *Nuland* and *Albright*, and by Presidents *Obama* and *Biden*.

The dismantling of *Camp Bondsteel*, if anything, would be an indicator of commitment to have the issue of Kosovo and Metohija resolved in a manner that is peaceful, just, balanced and in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the UN Charter, and the OSCE Final Act.

Belgrade, 19 February 2025

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tenth and final surprise is just materialising. It is the defeat of the West. One might be surprised by such a statement when the war is not yet over. But this defeat is certain, because the West would rather destroy itself than be attacked by Russia."⁹²

The United States will resist a further economic nosedive – even at the expense of its vassals. In the Ukraine war, they have not prevailed militarily against Russia. This is why Trump has also spoken to Putin about the dollar economy – and why he is increasingly aiming for cooperation rather than confrontation. The fact that the Europeans look stupid in the process is an entirely desirable collateral damage.

The war against the population

When I talk about a war against our own population, I am guided by an idea of the writer *George Orwell*. He explained in his dystopian novel "1984": "... war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact. The word "war" itself has therefore become misleading. It would probably be accurate to say that war has ceased to exist because it has become a permanent state."⁹³

As *George Orwell* writes in his prophetic novel "1984", "all modern wars are primarily for this purpose."⁹⁴ This means that war is not primarily directed against the external enemy. It is about the surveillance of one's own population and the expropriation of the middle class and of dependent employees.

We are not dealing with a battle over Western values or the rules-based order. As the US economic analyst *Martin Armstrong* has pointed out, this is a political emergency. The power elites of the West need a war because they have maneuvered themselves into a maze with a dead end.

If we take the coronavirus crisis into account, we can say with the Dutch historian *Kees van der Pijl*: "What is happening before our eyes is the gradual replacement of Western liberalism by an authoritarian state and social structure." All in the name of the virus or the fight for Western values against the dictator Putin. "The state of war declared in spring 2020 actually serves to secure the existing order."

Already with the war on terror after 9/11, "the promise of the American dream soon evaporated and was replaced by the politics of fear, a form of government based on frightening the public. With the *Patriot Act*, democracy was scaled back several notches. Orwell's assessment of permanent war as a means of securing the existing social order had come true."⁹⁵

The coronavirus crisis has led to a massive increase in the expropriation of the middle class. As the now published RKI files show, the measures were not medically or virologically indicated, but politically indicated and were enforced by politicians. The massive restrictions meant that many smaller companies had to give up. The services were taken over by large chains or digital groups. In this way, the profit margins of the big players can be secured at the expense of the small ones. This process will accelerate as a result of the war in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed by the West. The population is becoming impoverished and showing a reluctance to consume. People feel that they will have to foot the bill for the war.

Medium-sized companies are feeling the effects of this in particular. The situation is different for DAX companies: the tax exemption of disposal gains in 2002 under Chancellor *Schröder* led to German banks selling their industrial holdings and investing in structured securities. This paved the way for the financial crisis. The industrial holdings were taken over by foreign, particularly US, financial investors. US financial investors are now involved in almost all German DAX companies. They help decide on management and bonuses. A corporate strategy that goes against their interests is therefore virtually impossible.

Relocating production capacity to the USA or China is merely a calculation exercise for such large corporations. They have to secure dividends for shareholders in the long term. Medium-sized companies, on the other hand, are more localized. They will feel the consequences of a misguided policy more severely.

The war in Ukraine is a single program to promote the arms industry at the expense of the population. In Germany, the SPD and FDP are calling for an increase in arms spending to 3% of gross domestic product, or 135 billion euros. The Greens are calling for an increase to 3.5%, which would be 160 billion euros and a third of the federal budget. The AfD demands 5% of GDP and therefore half of the federal budget of 470 billion euros per year for armaments. This can only be financed through cuts in pensions, healthcare, education and infrastructure. At the same time, we are watching Germany and the EU disintegrate.

While the EU is pumping billions into Ukraine, more than one in five EU citizens is homeless, applying for emergency accommodation or queuing at charities for a bowl of soup. More than 20 percent of the population is affected by poverty and homelessness, according to the Lebanese newspaper "Al Mayadeen" – almost 100 million people out of a population of 450 million.⁹⁶ The European press has hard-

ly reported on these figures from the EU Commission.

The most dangerous thing, however, is that in July 2024, Federal Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* signed a contract for the stationing of new US medium-range missiles in Germany, the only NATO country, from 2026. This means that Germany will increasingly become the focus of Russian hypersonic missiles such as *Oreschnik*, which can be equipped with nuclear warheads. This increases the risk of nuclear annihilation for the German population, as it means that those responsible in Moscow will also define Germany as the primary target of a pre-emptive strike.

The war in Ukraine is therefore a transatlantic raid by corporations against their own people. Wealth is being taken from the pockets of dependent employees and the middle classes and distributed to US arms companies, financial investors and agricultural corporations. This accelerates the process of impoverishment. What's more, it holds the population of Germany in particular hostage to the misguided policies of the warmongers.

Prospects: A ceasefire, but no peace

The United States continues to fight for its global supremacy. However, the focus has changed. The confrontation with Russia is no longer in the foreground, but limited cooperation for mutual benefit. The vassals are not asked. Trump tells Ukrainian President Zelensky that he has to accept territorial losses and initiate new elections as soon as possible, which could mean his political and possibly even his physical end. The USA is abandoning Ukraine – the Moor has done his duty. The Ukraine project is over. Europe is no longer a priority for the USA.⁹⁷ It is now turning all its strength to its main rival, China. The development and markets for artificial intelligence are to be unleashed.⁹⁸

Russia will reject any ceasefire that allows Ukraine and the West to take a breather and then resume the fighting. It is the consequence of a lost war that the victor dictates the conditions. If you want to be successful at the negotiating table, you must first win on the battlefield. What the Kremlin wants to achieve is a pan-European peace order based on the principle of indivisible security. This is not possible in a unipolar world in which the leading power dictates the conditions. Mutual security is only possible in a multipolar world.

EU governments can now clean up the mess they have manoeuvred themselves into. After the *Munich Security Conference*, they announced that they would provide peacekeeping forces for Ukraine. Moscow is unlikely to accept this, since the Kremlin regards the UK and EU as de

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facto warring parties.⁹⁹ This means that Ukraine will not receive any significant security guarantees.¹⁰⁰ Like Ukraine, they will at best be sitting at the side table during negotiations.

But if European politicians decide to support Ukraine unilaterally, as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has indicated, they will have to do so without Washington.¹⁰¹ They are welcome to buy the weapons they need from the US. But this would only mean the continuation of a policy based on a fake morality. The formulation of an “unprovoked war of aggression” is a propaganda fairy tale. Rather, Russia has repelled the illegal war of aggression of the coup government in Kiev and its Western backers.

The change of course does not mean that there will be a return to international law. The example of Gaza shows that power-political measures are no longer disguised with the phraseology of the “rule-based order”. The law of the jungle applies, and there is no need for double-talk. Imperial strategies as the highest form of finance capitalism are simply executed. Allies are degraded to backbenchers, vassals who can be used at will for US interests. This also means that the concept of German free-rider imperialism has failed: letting the US go first in order to get a piece of the loot for themselves.

Now the servility of Europe’s transatlantically corrupted elites is taking its toll. The renunciation of any foreign policy independence, or, as *Robert Habeck* has explained it, “servant leadership”, is proving to be a dead end. Now the responsible politicians have to pass the costs of the “world’s most avoidable war” (Richard Sakwa) on to their own populations. Across Europe, but especially in Germany, a process of impoverishment will begin that will result in significant social upheaval and distribution struggles, and even civil unrest.

Even the last disinterested person will then realise that the ruling party cartel has gone bankrupt. As a result, fuelled by Trump supporters, the development will go entirely in favour of parties like the AfD in Germany. At the *Munich Security Conference*, Vice President *J. D. Vance* called for the fall of the firewall and for European politicians to follow the voice of the people.¹⁰² He reminded the audience that the greatest threat is not Russia, but the erosion of civil rights and the destruction of democracy.¹⁰³ A meeting between US Vice President *J. D. Vance* and German Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* on the sidelines of the *Munich Security Conference* was not planned, but one with the CDU/CSU chancellor candidate *Friedrich Merz* was.¹⁰⁴ From 2016 to 2020,

Merz was chairman of the supervisory board of the subsidiary *BlackRock Asset Management Deutschland AG*.¹⁰⁵ This makes it clear where the journey is headed: With an AfD brought into line with the transatlantic agenda at the side of the CDU, financial capitalism is to be unleashed and comprehensive social cuts pushed through. With a Chancellor *Merz*, Germany would be the second country in Europe after Ukraine – where a consortium of *BlackRock* and *JP Morgan* already manages the national debt – to fall into the hands of financial locusts.

The dismantling of civil rights and democracy, however, is irreversible. The war has accelerated the shift towards surveillance capitalism. Comparisons with National Socialism are inappropriate here. For one thing, the dictatorship of finance capital is not a national strategy of conquest, but is being rolled out globally. Secondly, it is a “blocked conflict”¹⁰⁶: the seemingly free availability of online services sedates the population in surveillance capitalism, and a strong labour or civil rights movement, as in the Weimar Republic, no longer exists as an organised political force. The transformation into a façade democracy, into a “reverse totalitarianism”, is also a product of the West’s disintegration.¹⁰⁷

Europe and especially Germany are falling into the slipstream of the economic development. We are not only becoming the backyard of the USA, but also the backyard of Russia, which will no longer reverse its turn towards Asia; because it is about billions of investments that have to pay off. The people of Europe, especially in Germany, will pay the costs of a war that they did not want to prevent. The lack of civil courage, especially in Germany, the propagandistic blindness and the sluggish agony of large parts of the population also contribute to the decline. For not only those who cause the disaster are responsible for it, but also those who did not want to prevent it.

If one tries to take a comprehensive view, the world no longer coincides with the global illusions of the West. Washington’s hegemony is no longer realisable. The West’s defeat in Ukraine is sealed, and the conflict is gradually shifting to other theatres. As with the fall of the Roman Empire, asymmetric wars are therefore breaking out on the peripheries of the empire. In a decades-long war of attrition, the USA will overstretch the forces of its satraps and gradually wear down its own.¹⁰⁸

Geostrategic analyst for “Asia Times”, *Pepe Escobar*, writes: “In this situation, the hegemonic power behaves like a drunk in a bar who is refused another drink. Chaos and violence are inevitable [...] The US is an empire with military

bases around the world to enforce its economic and political interests at gunpoint. No nation has fought as many wars as the United States in its 248-year history. The exploitation of its allies and the rest of the world through financial extortion, which relies on the arbitrary definition of the dollar as the primary global reserve currency as a means of applying financial pressure, is another mechanism of coercion and neo-colonial exploitation of resources. But American hubris and the delusion of absolute power will come to a bad end. The empire is fragmenting and failing. This is leading to an existential crisis. The United States and its allies are no longer the economic power they once were. A tectonic shift is unfolding away from the control of the world economy by the Western minority towards a fairer and more peaceful international order.”¹⁰⁹

For the time being, however, this remains a pipe dream. Donald Trump wants to get rid of the war in Ukraine and Europeanise it, but he is sticking to the concept of “Make America great again”. It is therefore a continuation of US imperial policy by other means. He respects the transition to a multipolar world and is realigning his own sphere of influence at the expense of his vassals. But the conflicts we are experiencing are only just beginning. They exceed the capabilities of the incumbent US president. This is because it is a struggle of historical and global dimensions. Trump’s proposal, in times of such upheaval, to pursue nuclear disarmament together with Russia and China could become the most important initiative of a US president in recent decades if he can prevail against the military-industrial complex. Perhaps it can help save the world from a nuclear catastrophe.¹¹⁰

To summarise:

1. The West has lost the war in Ukraine. Washington is saying goodbye to Europe and resigning itself to the multipolar reality. The US is focusing entirely on the fight against China. Washington is Europeanising the war.
2. Ukraine will be divided. The areas that have been incorporated into the Russian Federation will remain Russian. Moscow is claiming 30 per cent of Ukrainian territory, but will have to relinquish Odessa and Kharkiv.¹¹¹
3. Russia’s turn towards Asia is irreversible. The West will not succeed in splitting Beijing and Moscow.
4. Trump will force the EU to accept Ukraine and pay for the reconstruction. As a result, the EU will bleed financially and fall apart. Europe will become the backyard of the world economy and geopolitics, both economically and politically.

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5. The economic decline of the West is unstoppable in the long term. Foreign Minister *Baerbock* lets the cat out of the bag and mentions a new EU arms package for Ukraine worth 700 billion euros, which is to be decided after the election.¹¹² With this, the EU has decided to go down with the sinking ship.¹¹³
6. The West is divided. The US will partially withdraw from Europe, but will maintain NATO as an instrument to discipline and control the Europeans. In the future, the EU alone will contain the Russian Federation.
7. The European elites continue to refuse to face reality. Provocations such as those of Annalena Baerbock, to deliver the¹¹⁴ the *Taurus* and attack Russia's hinterland, could prompt Moscow to launch a preventive strike and cause a nuclear catastrophe.
8. We are further away than ever from a pan-European peace order based on common, indivisible security.
9. We have corrupt, incompetent and uneducated politicians and a depraved academic class who do not know what war means to thank for this.
10. The German people are dozing their way to their doom.

The five wars being waged on Ukrainian soil culminate in a historic collision of the West's relegation battle. NATO turns out to be a paper tiger and the EU will break apart. The battle for Kiev will be the catalyst for the downfall of the only world power, the United States, and for the disintegration of Europe – if there is still a future for our politicians in view of the nuclear destruction potential and their “apocalypse blindness”¹¹⁵. *Paul Valéry's* reference 100 years ago that Europe is only the “Cape of Asia”¹¹⁶ is becoming increasingly relevant. The wrong decisions of transatlantic corrupted elites, who are willing to ruin their own countries for a pat on the back from Washington, have contributed to this decline. It is time for these people to be replaced and held accountable. I want to hear handcuffs clicking.

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⁸ “The United States does not believe that Nato membership for Ukraine is a realistic outcome of a negotiated settlement.” *ibid.*

⁹ “Security guarantees must be backed by capable European and non-European troops. If these troops are deployed as peacekeepers at any point, they should be deployed as part of a non-Nato mission and should not be covered under Article 5 [...] To be clear: As part of any security guarantee, there will not be U.S. troops deployed to Ukraine.” *Ebd.*

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¹⁸ Todd, Emmanuel. La Défaite de l'Occident. Paris 2023. Todd, Emmanuel: Deutschland entscheidet, ob in der Ukraine Frieden einkehrt. Berliner Zeitung vom 21.7.2024, <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/geopolitik/emmanuel-todd-deutschland-wird-entschieden-ob-in-der-ukraine-frieden-einkehrt-li.2236539>; Todd, Emmanuel. La Défaite de l'OTAN sera une Victoire pour l'Europe. Le Journal du Dimanche, 14.1.2024, <https://www.lejdd.fr/international/emmanuel-todd-au-jdd-la-defaite-de-lotan-sera-une-victoire-pour-leurope-141189>; Todd, Emmanuel. La Troisième Guerre Mondiale a commencé. Le Figaro. 13.1.2023, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/emmanuel-todd-la-troisieme-guerre-mondiale-a-commence-20230112>

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Current Concerns

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box 247 CH-9602 Bazenhaid

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

Account: PostFinance:

IBAN CH91 0900 0000 8764 4472 4

BIC POFICHBEXXX

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“To heal a world” – 160 years of Red Cross and Red Crescent photography Exhibition at the House of Photography in Olten

by Diana and Winfried Pogorzelski



Junior Red Cross volunteers from the Spanish-American War of 1898. (picture ICRC Archive)

Six hundred impressive photographs from 160 years of humanitarian aid are on display at the House of Photography as part of the “International Photo Festival Olten” until 4 May. This gives visitors a comprehensive overview of a huge cultural heritage that has been little researched. Visitors will gain an unforgettable insight into the numerous aid missions of the Red Cross and Red Crescent—as they are also confronted with great human suffering.

Many of the photographs were taken by well-known photographers such as *Werner Bischof*, *René Burri*, *Susan Meisellas*, *Henri Cartier-Bresson* and *Alexis Cordesse*, but also ordinary Red Cross employees. The exhibit includes personal photos taken by migrants and private individuals, as well as members of the *Magnum Photos cooperative*. This exhibition is the result of more than two years of research in the collections of the *Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge (MICR)*, the *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* and the *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)*.

The history of photography begins with its invention in 1839 and its development is linked to the history of the Red Cross.

Twenty-five years later, in 1864, *Henry Dunant* from Geneva founded the Red Cross which, from its beginning, relied on photographers to raise public awareness of international and humanitarian crises. Photography made it possible to show pictures of the misery of numerous people from all over the world. In this way, it was possible to mobilise more and more people to make donations and thus help to alleviate great suffering.

The pictures in the exhibition are organised by theme and purpose: Images as a direct appeal for support for the Red Cross, portraits of individual people in need, photos of aid missions, and pictures of numerous victims of political conflicts and natural disasters. There is a profound psychological and emotional impact.

The exhibition extends over three floors: on the ground floor, impressive photographs from the First and Second World Wars are on display, showing the whole spectrum of hardship and misery during the war, as well as posters appealing for donations for relief operations (e. g., for children in need). Photographs from the history of the Red Cross are shown on a large screen in alternating sequence.

On the second and third floors we see pictures of victims of famine in Russia

(1922) and later images of starving people from Africa. Photographs show people making prostheses for amputees, refugee children during the Second World War, and earthquake victims in Greece, India, and Pakistan. There are images of refugee camps and prisoners as well as documentation of the work of ICRC delegates (including in Lebanon, Yemen, Liberia, Haiti, Sudan and Iran).

In the same part of the exhibit, a small group of images recalls the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their previously unimaginable destructive power. There are pictures of the war in Yugoslavia (1991–2001), of victims of the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in the Congo (1994), and of Red Cross operations in the US prison camp at Guantánamo.

The diversity and extent of ICRC aid missions still being tirelessly carried out all over the world today is impressive indeed. “The exhibition sheds light on a rich photographic heritage that is preserved in our country. It reflects all the challenges of international humanitarian law and encourages us to rethink our view of the images of conflicts and natural disasters that we see in the news every day,” says *Pascal Hufschmid*, Museum Director of the ICRC

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Demonstration by women whose family members have been imprisoned, Gaza 2005. (picture Alan Meier)

Letter to  the Editor

The ICRC Museum must not be closed

As a Swiss citizen, I am vehemently opposed to this plan. *The International Red Cross Museum* in Geneva is of national importance. It embodies the principle of Swiss neutrality and supports the project of diplomatic relations with other countries. It is a unique museum in Switzerland, accessible to every citizen. Especially now, at this difficult time, when the whole world is in turmoil, with the wars in the Middle East and the Ukrainian and Russian conflicts, it must remain open. Instead of spending 12 million taxpayers' money on an inconclusive peace conference on the Bürgenstock, it can be invested in something more useful, such as humanitarian aid, neutrality, and international law. It is an outrage to want to move the ICRC museum from Geneva to Abu Dhabi. I therefore support the National Council motion to preserve the ICRC museum.

Georges Bösch, Sirnach TG

“To heal a world’ ...”
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Museum in Geneva and co-curator of the exhibition.

Isabelle Bitterli, Director of the House of Photography, guides visitors through the exhibition, beginning with an overview of the development of photography and using examples to demonstrate how photographs

from different periods are designed to inform the viewer and appeal to their emotions at the same time. The comprehensive exhibition catalogue provides a good summary of the numerous exhibits and their history in images and text. The exhibition is expected to be extended beyond 4 May until at least 8 May (the day commemorating the end of the Second World War). •

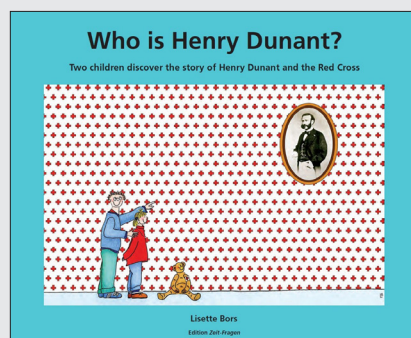


The book introduces the topic to young readers or listeners in a way that is relevant to their everyday lives: The colourful illustrations tell the story of the encounter between six-year-old Lisa, her cousin René, their grandparents and Amira, a refugee girl from Iraq.

The fact that her father is missing and that a search is being conducted with the help of the Red Cross arouses the children's interest and leads into the second part. In it, the grandfather tells his grandchildren the story of Henry Dunant and the founding of the Red Cross. Supported by numerous photo documents, the grandfather brings history to life in an entertaining and exciting way in conversation with the children.

The historical information has been carefully checked with experts from the SRC, ICRC and Société Henry Dunant and is also very informative for adult readers.

Available in German, French, Italian, Spanish and English



ISBN 978-3-909234-08-096

96 pages, 21 pictures and 28 illustrations

To be ordered from:

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CHF 26.- / EUR 20.- (plus shipping costs)

Switzerland's humanitarian tradition

In the midst of power blocs that are massively arming themselves, neutrality is needed now more than ever before. At a time when wars are being planned between major powers, manoeuvres are being held everywhere (e. g., the German Bundeswehr is training in the South Pacific), and massive armaments are being deployed, there is only one way forward for Switzerland – to continue to put its neutrality at the service of its humanitarian tradition. The invaluable work of the Swiss Red Cross since 1863 is unrivalled. The ICRC can only fulfil its difficult task in conflict situations if it enjoys the trust of the warring parties. Only a strict policy of neutrality without ties to power blocs can guarantee this. Switzerland is a nation of will and without the tradition of non-violent conflict resolution, Switzerland would no longer exist. Bringing parties to the table and working out solutions as equals is part of Switzerland's DNA. Thanks to its long tradition of “good offices”, Switzerland is also better placed than almost any other country to provide neutral, trained mediators.

Marianne Bürkli, Bronschhofen SG

A “sad hippopotamus” and why its story is food for thought, notably these days

by Eliane Perret

Sometimes it is little things or incidents in everyday life that make us reflect, and this is particularly necessary today, when a confusing flood of news about changes in the current world situation and about war and peace make it difficult to reflect calmly and in depth. In times like these, it is worth reflecting on the foundations needed for us to live together in harmony. Fortunately, books for children and young people, in particular, often focus on this kind of reflection. They often give their young readers a deeper insight into how people live together; they appeal to them emotionally and encourage them to think about what contribution they can make (according to their age) to living together in peace and freedom. These authors are committed to an ethic that sees every person as a valuable part of the human family from the moment they are born. Especially in the first years of life and school, (picture) books can support and guide children’s personal development and their attitude to life in adulthood.

Strange trends and fashionable temptations

Unfortunately, such books have become rarer and we often have to fall back on out-of-print, older books (thankfully, many are passed on from one generation to the next). Incidentally, it is a pause-giving sign of the times and the zeitgeist with its false theories that today, many picture books, as well as books for children and young adults, offer unrealistic fantasy stories or advocate ideologies by means of which they tempt their young readers into a way of life that leads them away from their fellow human beings onto a path through life that is lonely and unhappy.

I was lucky once again. In the “treasure trove” of discarded picture books in a small-town library, the illustration of a book cover caught my eye, to which the title “The Story of the Sad Hippopotamus”¹ did not seem to fit at all – and which therefore aroused my curiosity. But indeed – the hippopotamus was really sad, as I discovered in the first few pages of the book, as it constantly compared itself with its colleagues in the same environment and as it mercilessly judged itself as the most meaningless and superfluous animal in the world. It also wanted to do (supposedly) exciting things like its friends: wander as far as the zebra, roar as loudly as the lion, bite like the crocodile, splash water like the elephant, sneak around quietly like the leopard or eat from the tree-tops like the giraffe. But the hippo wasn’t



A symbol of peaceful coexistence: it can only succeed on the basis of equality for all – power strategies and indifference to the fate of others stand in sharp contrast to this. (picture in the book)

able to do any of these things, which was enough to drive anyone to despair. I am – it thought sadly – just a boring hippo lying in its boring waterhole and eating boring reed grass.

There was to be an end to this: “I’ve seen nothing of the world, just this dull old waterhole.” The hippo climbed out of the water and set off. The animals he had become friends with bravely confronted him, each in its own way. But it was all in vain – so what now?

Identify and empathise

A story like this encourages young (and older!) children to think, and the humanised animal characters in particular make it easier for them to identify with the protagonists of the story, to empathise with their life situations and to recognise a connection to their own human environment. For us adults, such stories are a heart-warming opportunity and a bridge to the pleasure of talking to children and young people and “philosophising” with them, as they themselves like to say: What is on the hippo’s mind? How could we help him? What do I like about it and what is it particularly good at? And what about me? What would I also like to be able to do, know and learn? Who can teach me? And who am I basically?

Simple and at the same time sophisticated

I was naturally delighted to have found another picture book that deals with the pressing questions of children and young people in a playful and sensitive way, addressing fundamental issues of human coexistence. Many children and young people in particular have great doubts – often hidden behind cool posturing – when it comes to themselves and their lives, and they ask themselves: Who am I, what do I have the ability to do, what significance do I have in my social environment, and what should I become? Children and young people are constantly faced with these kinds of questions as they develop their personalities, individually determined by their family situation and the cultural and social circumstances in which each young person is seeking their way in life. However, adults can or must also think about this. They have an important task in this development process, which may seem simple but is also very demanding. It is simple because it arises from human nature, and demanding because it requires a clear view, especially today when there are so many educational ideologies floating around.

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"A 'sad hippopotamus' ..."

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My friends need me

The hippopotamus had tried many things, but the land was not really its element. Who could, who would help? Its animal friends realised that none of them would be able to bring the hippo back to its waterhole on their own, even though they loved visiting him. They got together and carried it back together – a good idea! Isn't that also called for in human coexistence? Joining forces, not just looking out for our own interests – or should life continue to be about just a few exploiting their power, indifferent to the fate of their fellow human beings, as is the order of the day in the neoliberal world order? That is why the problem of the assembled animals is also a human issue! They realised what was at stake and said: "We need you right now. Who will eat the reeds and keep the waterhole clean so that all the animals can drink?" And they offered to show the hippo everything he would like to learn – roaring like the lion, spraying water like the elephant, sneaking like the leopard ... The giraffe even bent down a treetop to let him taste the leaves. It was a meeting of equals. The hippo understood and felt that he was a valued member of a larger community and was making (as he wanted to make) an indispensable, important contribution to his friends. "If you live by a waterhole, you're never really alone. The others may be able to do exciting things – but nobody can eat reed grass as well as I can," it explained, reconciled to its life. The longed-for leaves that the giraffe offered it were no longer to its liking – no wonder?

From a psychological point of view, this process can of course be classified as an individual cognitive process through which the hippopotamus can experience and strengthen its sense of self-efficacy. It realises its own importance and thus takes an important step in its development.

However, the story becomes the occasion for an in-depth, age-appropriate discussion with children about the meaning of life and living together.

Even youngsters ask – who am I?

When I looked at the picture book, it was not only younger children who crossed my mind, but also many young people I had met in the course of my work at school and in the field. Several of them had had great difficulties in their first years of school, either in learning or because their behaviour had prevented them from having quiet and peaceful lessons. A different school environment had become necessary. These youngsters, in particular, were very much confronted with the question of their own im-

portance and their impact in their peer group. Their previous stumbling blocks were an additional complication and burdened their feeling of being a valuable fellow human being. But they had set out on their journey (which required their courage as well as pedagogical skill on the part of the teachers) and were searching for their value and identity. Many still had great self-doubts, which some of them expressed superficially by criticising their appearance: too tall, too short, too fat, too thin, nose too wide, eyes not violet blue, hair like chives ... But it was always noticeable that they were looking for and needed us as adults to stand calmly and confidently by their side in this challenging phase of their lives.

In the past, lacking role models, guidance and support, some of the young people had been avid visitors to the latest influencers' *YouTube* channels, which had increasingly taken them away from their peers and from the real world. They had uncritically and credulously admired the digitally embellished facades of their idols, who led their followers to believe they were living a seemingly happy (though empty) life. In comparison with the embellished photos on the media portals the youngsters visited, they could only feel meaningless and superfluous (like the sad hippopotamus), and that is how they judged themselves. For example, *Eva*, who always struggled with her figure and thought she was infinitely stupid, and *Mirko*, who cursed his pretty curly mop of hair and therefore tried to straighten it with lots of hair gel, or *Nadia*, who had even set up her own *YouTube* channel and spent a lot of time altering her photos with Photoshop and filters in anticipation of admiring followers (afterwards you looked in vain for her own endearing charisma). In the meantime, I appreciated them all as great young people who – if not always openly and enthusiastically – allowed us adults to guide them to reassessing and changing many things.

"Best friends" –**honest, helpful, reliable ...**

It was interesting to see which values were important to "my" adolescents in their relationships. From their point of view, what makes the "best friends" they dreamed of? I wanted to find an answer to this question by talking to them. I was amazed at what they wanted from friends, despite being constantly bombarded by the media's fabricated, highly acclaimed idols: Best friends should be helpful, reliable, honest and funny and – happy when someone was good at something. Just like in the "story of the sad hippopotamus" ... That was only to be encouraged! I knew that getting there would require a lot from these adolescents, because friendship

needs equal give and take. But they addressed the core aspects of human existence: the deep desire for an inner home with fellow human beings in their immediate and wider surroundings. Until then, they had experienced too little for them to be able to support themselves in interpersonal relationships and in this way to find an inner orientation as to what their lives should look like.

And if you think further, they thus articulated their need for protection against that interfering intrusion into the most personal areas of their lives that has become commonplace today. Their insecurity and their struggle for recognition had repeatedly led them to reveal too much about themselves online, without realising that this was taking away their right to their own personal sphere – so they had a legitimate need to protect themselves.

Coexistence in harmony and equality

What is obvious when living together with children and young people also applies to us adults. It is about the feeling of social connectedness – about secure interpersonal relationships, as has been proven many times by scientific research. They are the basis of mental health and a prerequisite for the development of a strong, individual personality.

It is not only children and young people who have a deep desire to get together with others and have friends (even if this is sometimes concealed behind a strange demeanour or even behaviour that seems to be mentally disturbed). At the end of the day, it is all about trusting your fellow human beings and of feeling secure of being a valuable fellow human being, even if you have a different opinion than others. This is not always easy because you may have to accept that the other person will make disparaging remarks or even break off the relationship if their opinion doesn't get through. Overcoming these hurdles is not easy (and not just for children and young people). However, especially in our times, it is necessary, in order to withstand political temptations, see through power strategies and keep a clear head. This requires the internalisation of universally valid values of one's own culture, towards which we orientate ourselves, as the young people called it. It is just as important to know and appreciate the achievements of previous generations and to respect the achievements of other cultures. Only in this way is it possible to live together as equals in peace. It can start with a conversation – perhaps inspired by (picture) books, for example about a sad hippopotamus. •

¹ Norlin, Arne and Anderson, Lena. *Die Geschichte vom traurigen Nilpferd*. (The story of the sad hippopotamus.) Munich: Bertelsmann 1993