

Escalation, De-escalation and Perhaps— Eventually—an End to the War?

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Abstract

The war is back in Europe. While at the beginning of the year we had to ask ourselves if we were at the start of a second Cold War, the question four months later is if Europe is heading for a catastrophic war. Russia's aggression brought back war to Europe and escalation as in the times of the Cold War, even worse since the Ukraine is faced by extinction. February 24, 2022, the day of the Russian invasion, is called a watershed, a turning point, since the European foreign and security policy of the last three decades are in shambles. It is, of course, a Eurocentric perspective that disregards the many ongoing wars in other parts of the world. How will this war possibly end and how can we get out of this escalation spiral? What is a possible path to de-escalation? The massive arms build-ups and mutual threats are reminiscent of the times of the Cold War. Can we learn from that time? Some aspects are similar today but there are decisive differences. It looks like the major powers are trying to chop the globe into spheres of influence again. It seems that there can be no return to intensive economic interdependence, a cornerstone of détente. But in the medium- and long-term, a Helsinki II process is important: a political project that pursues predictability of the nuclear arsenals, arms control and the return to an adherence to international law.

Putin's War in Ukraine: The Great Game Changer

"February 24, 2022 marks a turning point in the history of our continent. With the invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Putin has cold-bloodedly launched a war of aggression..."¹ German Chancellor Olaf Scholz made clear with his statement in the German Bundestag that the German and European Union concept of foreign and security policy of the last three decades has come to an end. Europe's Russia policy, strongly influenced over decades by Germany's concept of *Ostpolitik* and détente, has failed and NATO's defence policy has been shaken to its foundations. After the first watershed, which East and West experienced with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this is the second major turning point of the last seven decades, but with reverse consequences. The end of the Cold War heralded an era of rapprochement and agreements on the sanctity of European borders. The war of aggression taking place today is the exact opposite. This "watershed" narrative is, of course, a Eurocentric perspective. It ignores the many ongoing wars in many parts of the world: in Syria, Tigray, Mali, Yemen, to name only the most obvious cases.

The currently completely changed political narrative illustrates how fundamental this break is:

[F]our weeks ago, would anyone in Germany, except notorious right-wingers, have applauded if someone wanted to 'fight to the end'? Would have anyone paid serious admiration to elected representatives of a modern state, appearing in front of the camera in combat green T-shirts, unshaven and overnights, so that they can also believe their continuous commitment to their country and their struggle...? Who would have thought that terms like 'bravery', 'fatherland', 'hero', etc. etc. could suddenly not only be said, but positively understood?

The social-psychologist Harald Welzer expressed with these words his astonishment in mid-March at views about war that were thought to be long-outdated in Europe.²

What a shock! The war is back in Europe. The possibilities of a peaceful settlement of disputes, which formed the core of the policy of détente and the Helsinki Act of 1975, were thrown away by the unjustifiable Russian aggression. Observers of the security situation in Europe and globally have recently experienced a déjà-vu. Before the war, the situation escalated, as during the Cold War. Russia has sparked a hot war with its invasion of Ukraine and, after it failed to achieve its war aims quickly, its forces increasingly relied on brutality and bombed cities without regard for civilians. President Vladimir Putin put his nuclear weapons on alert. As a result of the strategy of his armed forces, he has to put up with the accusation of being a war criminal.

¹ Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the German Bundestag. <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/882434/63345d000dff4dac33355f3669e7eec2/20019-data.xml>

² Harald Welzer, in the weekly magazine Stern of 16 March 2022. <https://www.stern.de/politik/ausland/harald-welzer-warnt-vor-einer-neuen-rhetorik-des-krieges-in-deutschland-31701834.html>

NATO is increasing its military presence in the Central European and Baltic countries with new "battle groups" and modern weapons systems, right on Russia's border. It supports Ukraine with arms supplies, military aid, intelligence, humanitarian aid and much more. Just a few weeks ago, it would have been unthinkable that additional financial resources of this magnitude (in Germany alone a special fund for the armed forces of over €100 billion) would be made available with the stroke of a pen. Other governments have decided to quickly go beyond NATO's aim of spending two percent of their Gross Domestic Product on defence.³ With the war in Ukraine, an era already years in the making has come to culmination that is again clearly oriented towards military confrontation.

At the moment, the top news is about the result of this war and conflicting claims about the responsibility. Information and disinformation about intentions, videos of casualties, destroyed houses and weapon systems are used and interpreted to speculate about Russia's next move. Disinformation campaigns and (fake) images often accompany wars: That was the case in the Balkan wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan or in Vietnam during the time of Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon. Mao Zedong famously spoke about the "political power growing out of the barrel of a gun", but he also called on journalists to turn "words into weapons."

What were the reasons for this rupture in Russia's relations with the West? Put simply, there are two contradictory explanatory patterns. On the one hand, many political analysts today claim that it was a mistake to have de facto denied Ukraine and Georgia NATO membership in 2008. According to this political narrative, if these countries had also been included in NATO's eastward expansion, Russia would not have dared to start this war. The counter-position is that NATO's eastward expansion has prevented the "common house of Europe" propagated by Mikhail Gorbachev. His concept was based on a security architecture for Europe that included Russia. "The philosophy of the concept of a common European home rules out the probability of an armed clash and the very possibility of the use or threat of force, above all military force, by an alliance against another alliance, inside alliances or wherever it may be."⁴ Interestingly, Vladimir Putin used similar language in a speech in the German Parliament in 2001 (in perfect German): "Without a modern, lasting and stable international security architecture, we will never create a climate of trust on this continent, and without this climate of trust, no unified Greater Europe is possible. Today we are obliged to say that we should part from our stereotypes and ambitions in order to ensure together the security of the people of Europe and of the whole world."⁵

While supporters of détente policy believed Putin, the majority of today's critics assume that this was naïve and a deception already back then. The leading politicians in the West were misled for years. President Putin was obviously interested in changing or revising

³ I called this "panic politics" in a comment in the Journal IPG, since the dire state of the German armed forces is only to small part the result of lacking finances. <https://www.ipg-journal.de/rubriken/aussen-und-sicherheitspolitik/artikel/panikpolitik-5793/>

⁴ "Europe as a Common Home", Address by Mikhail Gorbachev at the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 6 July 1989, https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/gorbachev-speech-7-6-89_e3ccb87237.pdf.

⁵ Vladimir Putin on September 25, 2001, https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/geschichte/gastredner/putin/putin_wort-244966

what he considers NATO's "encirclement" and demanded security guarantees from the US or NATO. He saw an opportunity to at least partially revise the losses incurred in the period of weakness after 1990. Now, he has increasingly alienated Russia internationally. He wants not only to wipe out Ukraine as a state by waging this war but also tries to create a completely different world order than we have experienced over the last three decades.

However, the Russian president's responsibility for the highly escalated situation must not prevent us from soberly analysing the escalation of this conflict in order to find ways out of the crisis. On the one hand, the Ukrainian people are in a very critical situation, but resulting from Western military support there is also the danger of an escalation dynamic that is difficult to control. The asymmetry in distributing "political responsibility" leads to feeling morally superior on the part of the West, always considering one's own actions to be rational and normatively justified. As important as one's own moral self-assurance is, it is just as important to consider what conflict research teaches us about the tripwires of escalation.⁶

Escalation theorists (Kahn, 1965) described an escalation ladder in the 1960s and tried to offer governments options for decisions at every stage of escalation. They proceeded from the controllability of the escalation. However, these escalations unfold dynamics that can lead to undesirable results on both sides. This becomes particularly problematic when nuclear powers are involved (Schelling, 1960). Richard Jervis (1983), with his concept of "deterrence and perception" on the basis of numerous empirical cases, has described how misperceptions can lead to conflicts that can no longer be controlled. Wars of the past (e.g., the Vietnam War) demonstrate how high the psychological hurdles for de-escalation are. Even in hopeless and desperate situations, escalation is often still seen as a way to achieve military victory.

At the moment, we are clearly in a phase of increasing escalation. The escalations in the Ukraine war are taking place in different fields: verbal, political, economic and military.

- On the verbal level, propaganda and disinformation in Russia lead to a completely different picture about the causes and the course of the war than in Ukraine and the West.
- Politically, the escalation is mainly carried out in the attribution of blame for the war and war crimes. Incidentally, the justified accusations against the Russian leadership for war crimes would have a more solid moral basis if they had been raised just as vehemently and consistently against Western leaders responsible for the destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Economically, sanctions are at the heart of the escalation. The highest possible level of escalation (SWIFT, stop of raw material export and import, complete decoupling of economies) has not yet been reached.

⁶ I refer here to a Toda Global Outlook publication that I wrote together with Tobias Debiel on 15 March 2022, <https://toda.org/global-outlook/escalation-and-de-escalation-in-the-ukraine-war.html>

- Militarily, the level of "limited annihilation strikes" has been reached, which Friedrich Glasl (2011, pp. 127-128) described as stage seven in his nine-stage conflict model. And the threat of nuclear weapons brings closer the final stage ("together into the abyss").

How Will The War End?

For a reversal of the escalation and an end to the war, it is not unimportant to imagine possible ways in which this war can be ended. Different scenarios are conceivable.⁷

- It is still conceivable that Russia will win militarily and install a puppet government in Ukraine.
- Possibly Russia will concentrate on controlling parts of Eastern Ukraine.
- A third scenario, closely linked to the first, assumes that Ukraine will capitulate due to both the massive deployment of Russian forces and the destruction and suffering in Ukraine.
- There could also be a stalemate with both warring parties fighting a long-lasting war of attrition.
- A fifth scenario foresees the successful defence of Ukraine through the courage of Ukrainians and Western logistical support. The Russian armed forces would be defeated despite their quantitative superiority.
- It cannot be completely ruled out that the war will escalate and NATO, already a party to the war through its assistance to Ukraine, will become involved on the battlefield. Even the danger of nuclear war is not completely ruled out, despite the continuing balance of terror.
- The current Russian government could be overthrown because it has completely miscalculated its war aims and the reaction of its own people.
- After all, the war could be ended through negotiations.

It is difficult to assess which of these scenarios is the most realistic and what are the first steps in achieving a possible end to the war. With the Putin government in power, it is completely impossible that international relations will return to the times of détente before and after the end of the Cold War. Too much political confidence and expectation has been lost. The attempt to build a partnership with *Ostpolitik* has failed. In the long term, the West will not only have to protect itself militarily from Putin's regime, but will also have to shape its political and, above all, economic relations differently. Nevertheless, Ukraine, the rest of Europe and the US, in whatever political framework, will have to negotiate with the Russian government to end the war or to aim at least for a ceasefire.

⁷ Six of these eight scenarios were mentioned by ZDF heute, April 4, 2022, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/ukraine-krieg-szenarien-kriegsverlauf-100.html>

De-Escalation and Détente: Outdated Concepts?

In the current situation, there is no sign of de-escalation and a new policy of détente is not up for discussion at all. Given Russia's aggression and the renaissance of geopolitics with the demonstration of power between the US and China, the conditions for a cooperative global policy do not seem particularly favourable. The history of the policy of détente shows, however, that the conditions for its success in the 1970s and 1980s did not seem to be promising either. Nevertheless, at that time numerous arms control treaties generated upper limits for weapons, and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 agreed on a set of principles containing agreements on national sovereignty, the sanctity of borders, respect for human rights and economic, technical and cultural cooperation.

Despite the nuclear threat, mutual assured destruction, the bloc confrontation, the division of Germany, the so-called iron curtain and ideological competition, it was possible to reduce tensions—at least to some extent—and to come to treaty arrangements. Similarly, today, the situation, which presently looks like an indissoluble confrontation, should not lead to relying primarily on or even exclusively on military means.

One aspect should be highlighted: It was not only concepts of détente that were at the heart of foreign and security policy towards the end of the Cold War. NATO's Harmel Report of 1967 (Harmel, 1967) proposed a dual strategy of military strength on the one hand and lasting NATO-Warsaw Treaty relations on the other. Helmut Schmidt, as German Chancellor, spoke of the “two legs” of defence and détente (Schlotter, 1990, p. 103). The most concrete expression of this view was NATO's double-track decision in 1979. It provided for deploying medium-range missiles in Europe as a means of deterrence and it called for negotiations on the restriction of nuclear armament. Whether détente between East and West was possible *because of or despite* the double-track decision is still controversial.

Notwithstanding the ongoing war and the confrontational situation, it is worth recalling this concept, namely, a consideration of not only military power or superiority but also the need for negotiations. But it takes two to tango. Is President Putin prepared for serious negotiations or dialogue? Despite all the difficulties and reservations, attempts at dialogue must not be omitted, because military intervention, whether through troop deployment or arms deliveries, even with stabilising or deterring intent, almost always has an escalating effect according to the well-known pattern of action and reaction, which was already described after World War I (Richardson, 1935; Rapoport, 1957).

Whether the goal of deterrence can be achieved by military means—as the double-track decision insinuated and as is presently presumed—is highly questionable given the existence of nuclear weapons and the risk of a second strike. The use of the weapons, abundant on both sides, could mean destruction not only for Ukraine but for Europe as a whole. But if you want to deter militarily, you have to be prepared to actually use the weapons. NATO has repeatedly declared that it is not prepared to directly engage in battle. Obviously, it is a fine line between credible deterrence and sliding unintentionally into war.

It is problematic that today there are no longer any functioning communication and arms control forums in which hostile counterparts could exchange ideas. The constant phone calls

between Western politicians and President Putin cannot hide this shortcoming. Such channels existed during the Cold War, since the end of the 1960s with nuclear weapons and from 1973 for conventional armaments. Although the negotiations at that time were slow, with dishonest statements trivialising a country's own armament efforts and exaggerating those of the enemy, there were at least various arms control forums to prevent accidental wars (Lutz, 1981).

Such forums would also be necessary today, not only to end the war in Ukraine, but also to stop the uncontrolled arms race at all levels in the longer term and to de-escalate. At the moment, only escalation seems to be on the agenda, but regardless of the further course of the disputes, serious negotiations will be necessary at some point, even if the Russian president is currently regarded primarily as a war criminal. A ceasefire or even peace is hardly possible without negotiations.

What Is Different Today?

Mutual threats and massive arms build-ups are reminiscent of the time of the Cold War. Is this historical analogy valid? What is similar today and how does today's situation differ from the East-West conflict?

First, a "hot" war: The most important difference is that during the Cold War period, the outbreak of a hot war was prevented. The Helsinki Final Act codified that peaceful coexistence should be the core in East-West relations and that the borders in Europe are not changed by force. Now Russia has started the war and it is primarily because of NATO's reluctance that it has so far been limited to Ukraine.

Second, the boundaries between war and peace: The clear boundaries between war and peace are blurred today, more than before 1990. The separation between military and civilian action is no longer clear and often we can see grey zones of conflict. For years, we could observe a trend for "hybrid" wars – warfare just below the threshold of "hot" war (Hoffman, 2007). Cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, the use of paramilitaries, mercenary or private military companies (Wulf, 2005) etc. are now part of the repertoire of conflict parties. Developments in information technology has added possibilities for transactions in the grey zone. Covert operations, psychological warfare, subversion of political systems and information operations have existed before, but today they are new in form and effect (Morris et al., 2019); their consequences are more threatening, as they can paralyze or destroy a country's infrastructure. Hardly anyone expected a war of aggression since nuclear and modern conventional arsenals make large-scale warfare unattractive and dangerous. The risks are enormous. Thus, most observers assumed that Russia's massive troop deployment at the Ukraine border was a bluff. It was presumed that, rather than risking a full-scale war, Putin would act in "hybrid" fashion, similar to the Donbass since 2014.

Third, competition of two opposed systems: The Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union and their respective allies has correctly been described as a systemic conflict: communism, socialism and a planned economy versus a liberal, democratic, capitalist social

system. This dispute, which was decided by the implosion of the Soviet Union, was for decades a competition in which not only client states in the then so-called Third World were sought. It was also a bloc confrontation. Each of the two blocs were held together internally by a hegemonic power. An outbreak was hardly possible in the East. This was demonstrated by the suppression of the uprising in Hungary in 1956 as well as in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the proclamation of the Brezhnev Doctrine of the limited sovereignty of the socialist countries. In the West, breaking out of the alliance was not advisable since it questioned US security guarantees.

It was indeed also an ideological dispute. Socialism resonated in Western countries and seemed attractive to some as an alternative to capitalism. Today, governments and intellectuals alike continue to emphasise the need to defend Western values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights against authoritarian systems. But these authoritarian systems only attract the interest of dictators because of their battered image. They do not possess enough "soft power" to be appealing. The population of Russia (or for that matter of China) may be brought to consent by economic development, social or even forceful control. But the authoritarian systems are neither attractive for liberal societies, nor is it decided how sustainable is the trend towards authoritarian regimes. Demonstrations and applause for the Chinese or Russian social system do not take place in Western countries – unlike the teachings of Mao Zedong or socialism as an alternative many decades ago. The Russian system, especially economic development, is in no way attractive.

*Fourth, communication and arms control:*⁸ From the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 until recently, the antagonists behaved calculably. The communication channels were maintained to prevent a nuclear confrontation by mistake. Today, as mentioned above, there is a lack of binding forums. Previously, arms control and confidence-building measures accompanied the dangerous build-up. Today, most arms control treaties have expired or been terminated. Actually, the agreement, labelled as the "hot wire", was the beginning of détente. Nixon and Kissinger concluded at the time that, due to the existence of nuclear weapons, the systemic conflict between East and West by military means would lead to mutual annihilation. Kissinger formulated in 1974: "The challenge of our time is to reconcile the reality of competition with the imperative of coexistence."⁹ In practice, the US government effectively abandoned its containment policy and accepted global bipolarity. Firmly agreed communication structures between the US and the USSR were intended to prevent an inadvertent war. Ultimately, this was the beginning of a relationship that made it possible to conclude arms control treaties and to integrate the Soviet Union into a network of agreements. Most of this is gone now.

Fifth, world order: With the end of the Cold War, the bipolar confrontation that had existed until then, no longer exists. The world is no longer divided into two blocks, each with a superpower and its satellites. Now, sometimes multipolar and sometimes non-polar relations dominate, although occasionally the power competition between the US and China

⁸ I refer again to the Toda Global Outlook publication that I wrote together with Tobias Debiel on 15 March 2022, <https://toda.org/global-outlook/escalation-and-de-escalation-in-the-ukraine-war.html>

⁹ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v38p1/d45>

is reminiscent of the bipolar East-West confrontation. Today it is not about a bloc confrontation (East against West), but about a socio-political confrontation: democratic versus authoritarian. The West's quest for US-led hegemony has proved unattainable and the ideas of the "end of history" (Fukuyama, 1992)—that there was no alternative to the Western model—proved to be a misperception (Brzoska, 2022). The inglorious twenty-year Afghanistan mission with its catastrophic end exemplified this even to the staunchest admirers of US leadership.

The long-existing world order is dissolving, and a number of powers feel strong enough to seek their own advantage and expand their zones of influence – even regional powers such as, for example, Turkey, Brazil, India or Saudi Arabia. It is still an open question what consequences Russia's present political and military actions and the West's aim at isolating Russia internationally will have on the world order.

Sixth, economic relations: Economic relations are fundamentally different from those during the Cold War. The interdependencies are much more intense. Russia's role as a supplier of raw materials and energy for Europe is more important today than it was during the Cold War. Deterrence was deliberately integrated into a policy of desired economic interdependence. As early as 1977, the American political scientists Keohane and Nye emphasised the importance of interdependence for power relations. Put simply, their argument was that countries which are closely intertwined economically are more inclined to cooperate than to carry out conflicts militarily. At best, interdependence is an insurance against military adventures. But close economic interdependence can also mean dependency and vulnerability, as we see now. Interdependence was also the core of Germany's *Ostpolitik* and détente, which is linked to the names of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr.¹⁰ This concept was intended to ease the East-West confrontation, particularly between the two German states. The West German political leaders were confident "that our world is the better, the stronger one in a peaceful sense, which will prevail..."¹¹ It was about the rapprochement of the blocs, ideally even about overcoming the bloc confrontation. Brandt's *Ostpolitik* wanted to overcome the confrontational course by taking the opponents' interests into account. The political concept "change through rapprochement", explicitly included economic interdependence, "change through trade". This concept has boomeranged now in the case of Russia and it requires a sober analysis of the positive and negative effects it has had. Today's economic relations with Russia, with Europe's dependence on gas, oil and coal, show that an unacceptable dependence with a high potential for blackmail on both sides has emerged. The positive role of economic relations, as we now know, was wishful thinking in the case of Russia.

¹⁰ Willy Brandt, Nobel Lecture, 1971, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1971/brandt/lecture/>

¹¹ Egon Bahr in a speech in 1963 at the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_de&dokument=0091_bah&object=pdf&st=&l=de.

Interdependence with China

The present experience with Russia raises the question of whether this must have repercussions for the US, the EU and other countries with regard to their economic relations with China. The policy of economic interdependence and the expected political positive effects did not work in the case of China either. US President George Bush said in 1991 after the end of the Cold War: "No nation on Earth has discovered a way to import the world's goods and services while stopping foreign ideas at the border. Just as the democratic idea has transformed nations on every continent, so, too, change will inevitably come to China."¹² This was more or less mainstream expectation at the time.

China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. This was associated with the hope that external influences could overcome obstacles to internal social reforms. The quarterly publication of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Finance & Development prognosed changes in China beyond the economic consequences: "And, without question, it will have to increasingly adhere to the rule of law" (Adhikari and Yang, 2002, p. 25).

When the 2008 Summer Olympics was awarded to Beijing in 2001, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) argued that it could improve human rights in China. The country would liberalise and open up because the world public would now be watching China closely for the next seven years. The human rights situation has deteriorated since then, and today the Chinese leadership, endowed with more political clout, economic and military potential, hardly cares about public opinion in the world.

Today, the question arises as to which of the two competing superpowers has changed or needs to change? China no longer accepts the rules of the world order long determined by the US and its allies. China has advanced from "rule-taker" and is now on its way to becoming the "rule-maker". In other words, on the basis of its economic dominance, the Chinese government increasingly determines the rules of global cooperation and trade and is no longer willing to submit to the requirements of the US and international organisations.

What Next?

So how to deal with Russia? Which strategy is recommended? The dangers of reawakened Russian great power are back again. Putin is fixated on restoring Russia to "greatness". Russia's desire to create spheres of influence or buffer zones are reminiscent of the long-outdated strategies of the powers in the 19th century. The concept of "spheres of interest" was expected to be left behind with the end of the Cold War. Why does the geographically largest country in the world, which stretches from northern, central and southern Europe as well as to the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Far East, claim a buffer zone in Central Europe? The Kremlin's current strategies suggest that there can hardly be peace in Europe in future without regime change in Moscow. With a criminal regime, a policy of détente is not possible.

¹² President George Bush, May 27, 1991, Yale University, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/re-marks-the-yale-university-commencement-ceremony-new-haven-connecticut>

The Polish author Szczepan Twardoch advises Western politicians and intellectuals to listen more closely to Central Europeans and he complains: "Eastern Europe remains an object. [...] Eastern Europe is not able to determine its own fate – it remains an object manipulated by the great powers." Euro-Transatlantic intellectuals claim NATO was wrong

because after 1997 it had moved so close to Russia's borders. As if this advance had taken place on a kind of uninhabited terra nullius, a no man's land where the empires measure their strength. As if this country had not been inhabited by self-determined societies.¹³

It looks like the major powers are trying to chop the globe into spheres of influence again. Not only the Russian President tries to pursue such a course. In the US, former US President Donald Trump initiated a sharp confrontation with China, not only rhetorically but also economically. He imposed sanctions on China and increased military efforts. His successor, Joe Biden, may be more conciliatory in style, but he, too, is guided by a confrontational line toward China. He no longer sees China only as an uncomfortable competitor, but as an enemy. The tense relationship with China is also due to the fact that it is considered a zero-sum game by the US. The behaviour of today's Chinese leadership is also shaped by the dream of its own power and ties in with the myth of the dominance of the "Middle Kingdom". The Chinese leadership speaks with nationalist pathos of a reawakening. This claim to power is intended to overcome more than a century of colonial oppression and humiliation. In the meantime, this desire has undoubtedly turned into hubris.

Which strategy is reasonable or could be recommended? There was disagreement in the West about the effectiveness of confrontational or cooperative policies until Russia invaded Ukraine. Now, the proponents of détente or of a cooperative policy are no longer on the defensive. Russia's war made sure they have disappeared. Russia's military action vis-à-vis Ukraine has been a push for solidarity in NATO and the EU. The cacophony in the EU is gone for now and no longer can NATO be called "brain dead".¹⁴ Never have the two organisations been so united as now.

The most important aim is to stop this war as soon as possible and prevent it from spreading. It is now important to support Ukraine by all reasonable and justifiable means. What is "reasonable and justifiable", however, is judged very differently. The Ukrainian government's demands go far beyond what is currently being offered by the US, NATO and the EU. As understandable as Ukraine's desire for a no-fly zone is from a humanitarian point of view, this would clearly mean NATO's immediate accession to the war, with consequences that are not easy to assess. Opinions are also divided on economic measures, and the severity of the sanctions. The order of the day, while at the same time pursuing the West's policy of military strength, should be procedures for de-escalation. The sanctions must hit Russia hard, but it is dangerous to aim for a disintegration of the system. This could lead to (as Glasl, 2011, p. 128 suggested in his conflict model) "a desire to commit suicide if the enemy also perishes."

¹³ In the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9 April 2022.

¹⁴ French President Emmanuel Macron in an interview with the British weekly *The Economist*, 21 October 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english>

There can be no return to intensive economic interdependence. Reducing very close economic interdependence is not only recommended in the case of Russia. The pandemic has shown the vulnerability of the economy through dependence on global supply chains and has brought each country's own security of supply back into focus. The dependence on the supply of Russian gas, oil, coal and other raw material proves the potential for blackmail. And the discussions about the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline also clearly show that such sensitive business relationships are not of a purely commercial nature.¹⁵

In the long term, a Helsinki II process is important. A political project must be pursued in which nuclear deterrence is contained, i.e., a return to predictability, a significant reduction, not necessarily a complete decoupling of economies, the opening of arms control negotiations to relocate weapons systems at the border, a CSCE-like format for a security structure in Europe. Perhaps this will lead to de-escalation, confidence-building, arms control and disarmament. To recall some of the principles that were agreed during Helsinki I is particularly important. One of the principles is: observing international law. This principle has been violated not only by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and previously by the annexation of Crimea. The occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the Kosovo war in 1999 by the US, a coalition of the willing and NATO were also clear breaches of international law. But this rule of law is universal, and we should engage to uphold these principles. It is precisely those who emphasise the rules-based international order that should strictly adhere to these rules themselves. And as Toda Director Kevin Clements rightly pointed out: "War is never the answer to anything."¹⁶

For all the clarity of the words today about the origin of war and about war crimes, demonisation and humiliation do not lead back to the negotiating table. The Lithuanian author Laurynas Katkus intoned correctly what is required at the end of the war:

After the liberation of Ukraine, it will be our duty to help this nation [Russia] regain the sense of reality and free itself from destructive phantasmagoria and phantom pains. If we just watch and put our hands in our laps, another leader will take Putin's place and the cycle of revenge will repeat itself.¹⁷

¹⁵ This should also be a lesson for shaping relations with China.

¹⁶ <https://toda.org/global-outlook/directors-statement-responding-to-the-invasion-of-ukraine.html>

¹⁷ Laurynas Katkus, Lithuanian writer, in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2022, p. 3.

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