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Security policy is more than defence with weapons

If our societies are to become resilient and sustainable, our priorities must change towards de-escalation including in diplomacy and economy

Putin's war against Ukraine has not only damaged the international cooperative security architecture, it has permanently destroyed it. The Helsinki Act of 1975, the Charter of Paris of 1990 and the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 created a basis for security cooperation in Europe – even 'a new era of democracy, peace and unity', as the Charter of Paris was euphorically titled. At least, that is how the heads of state saw it in the decade after the end of the Cold War.

Today, the war in Ukraine casts a long shadow over European and global security. Cooperation and collaboration have been replaced by military confrontation. Economic cooperation has been shattered, fear of dependency in the energy sector has led to a turning point and the concept of the positive effect of economic interdependence ('change through trade') has proven to be a misperception not only in the case of Russia but also with respect to the relationship of the USA and its Asian and European allies against China. On the contrary, the turn towards confrontational, essentially military-based defence policies can be felt all over the world.

Global military spending is at an all-time high of over two trillion US dollars. Given the budget announcements for the next few years, this sum will continue to rise rapidly in the future. Nuclear weapons have come back into focus. After Russia's surprising attack, which was hardly considered possible, it is understandable that now – as a first reflex – arms are being upgraded, that economic dependencies are being reduced and, of course, there are concerns about critical infrastructure. It is not only about traditional military threats. The boundaries between war and peace have become blurred. Hybrid warfare, the use of mercenaries, cyber warfare, destruction of critical infrastructure, undermining social cohesion with disinformation campaigns and election interference, sanctions and other measures of economic warfare have become the

standard of international conflict.

De-escalation on three levels

Is there a way out of the constant political, economic and above all military escalation? Despite the apparent hopelessness of an end to the power struggle with Putin, despite the escalated situation in East Asia, despite the many now less noticed wars and conflicts – be it Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan or Mali – it is necessary to think about the possible end of these wars. This should happen in parallel on three levels: security, diplomacy and economy.

With all understanding for the hectic procurement of new weapons now being commissioned in the sign of the turn of the times, it should be noted that security policy is more than defence with weapons. Even if there is currently no path in sight for a negotiated solution to the Ukraine war, such a solution should still be considered. Ultimately, this war can only be ended through agreements at the negotiating table. Even though Russia started the war in Ukraine in violation of international law and is obviously committing war crimes, in the long term there can be no peace in Europe without Russia and certainly not against Russia. Respect for Russian security interests, however difficult this may be because of Russian aggression and Putin's fantasy ideas of Russia, is a prerequisite for de-escalation and serious negotiations.

Geopolitics that maximises only one's own advantages leads to a dangerous dead end: the clash is pre-programmed.

Many countries rely on a militarily supported geostrategic foreign policy. China's assertive military, foreign and economic policies are rightly viewed with concern. But the EU also wants to become militarily autonomous. The US is trying to find partners for its policy conducted in competition with China. Other powers such as Australia, Japan or India are also positioning themselves in rivalry to China.

Instead of focusing on geopolitics, it is necessary to focus on values (democracy, human rights) and binding rules (international law), even if Putin is blatantly violating international law and ‘democracy’ is a foreign word in China. It is necessary to change the narrative significantly. ‘The West’, which demands rule of law and democracy with rigour, has all too often emphasised these values and principles in a know-it-all manner – 'the West against the rest'. Often enough, double standards were applied and these values were not observed by ‘the West’ itself, such as in the so-called war on terror and the war in Iraq. If these principles and projects for democracy and against autocracy are to be convincing, then one must

completely abandon the concept of 'the West' and try to cultivate partnership-based – and not Euro-centric (or 'Westro-centric') – relations with democratic countries. In short, geopolitics that maximises only one's own advantages leads to a dangerous dead end: the clash is pre-programmed.

Is the sole answer of 'the West' to keep the upper hand in the geopolitical competition by military means? Economically, it makes sense to reduce dependencies and diversify supply chains. This cannot be done through radical decoupling, but must be done gradually. Obviously, the shock of the pandemic, but above all Russia's possibilities to blackmail by stopping energy deliveries, have changed the priorities a little. But by no means all priorities. At no time since the early 1990s has the military burden on global income been as high as it is today: well over two per cent with a trend towards further increases.

The need for timely disarmament

Should the new era (*Zeitenwende*) consist only of a return to old-fashioned patterns of the military-supported use of force? Arms control is not taking place at the moment. The United Nations and other arms control forums have been pushed to the side. But arms control and de-escalation must already now be considered, even if the Kremlin is still opposed to them and the Chinese leadership is hardly responsive to them at present.

The continuation of the current course leads globally to a situation that is becoming more dangerous than the confrontation in the heyday of the Cold War, since the world is now also seriously endangered by the climate crisis.

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Although the risks of climate change and armament are well known, there is currently no reversal of this trend in sight. The two crises are heading towards a seemingly unavoidable catastrophe. After the old-world order – with a halfway functioning multilateralism, compromises and give-and-take – was replaced by nationalist aspirations, which then led to a breach of international law in the case of Russia, by an emphasis on nuclear weapons and by the pursuit of supposed self-interest, the goals of the climate agreements are being missed and arms control treaties are being ground down.

Geopolitically ambitious powers such as China, India, Turkey, Brazil, South Africa or Saudi Arabia must be integrated into arms control efforts. Almost 'naturally', the G20 summits offer themselves as a forum for this. The G20 initially focused their talks primarily on macroeconomic issues, but have since also negotiated on sustainable development, energy, the environment and climate change – but not seriously on global security policy. However, the G20 member countries are responsible for 82 per cent of global military spending. Almost all arms exports are accounted for by the G20 and 98 per cent of nuclear warheads are stored in their arsenals. Today's military-based arms efforts are concentrated in the G20.

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Moreover, there are links between climate and arms policy that are most clearly reflected in the wars and violent conflicts of the last decades, the movements of refugees, migrant flows and corresponding counter-reactions. If our societies are to become more resilient and more ecologically sustainable, then priorities must be changed, and then such a large share of resources cannot be permanently poured into the military – without any prospect of de-escalation. Our current shift must therefore contain more than the present rearmament.

Since the members of this exclusive G20 club are also the main perpetrators of climate change, they bear the main responsibility for the two current catastrophic trends. So, it is time to remind them of their responsibility and urge them to turn back. Perhaps the fact that India is chairing the G20 this year can be used to put security policy prominently on the forum's agenda. After all, India has refused to adopt Western sanctions against Russia, citing its own interests. In doing so, the government in Delhi – similar to some other countries in the G20 group (Brazil, South Africa and Turkey) – has kept an open door for potential talks. In order to enable a turning point towards a global security order and cooperation in the climate crisis, more is needed than the current clear military positioning of 'the West' in confrontation with Russia.

It is to be hoped that the leading powers of the Global South will strive for a rules-based, multilateral world order within the framework of the G20 talks. That there are possibilities for a security order that looks beyond Europe, as hinted at by Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar, when he confidently stated: 'Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's.'



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