FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY 29.03.2023 | Martin Krohs

Yes to arms aid, no to Western integration

To end this senseless war and protect Ukraine's right to exist, something 'unrealistic' needs to happen

The Western community of states is facing a quandary. It is hardly possible to effectively protect Ukraine militarily without accepting an endless war of attrition, the risk of a massive escalation, or the revanchist after-effects of a Russian defeat. On the other hand, immediate peace negotiations with Russia would mean unacceptably sacrificing Ukraine as a state and the self-determination of the Ukrainian people. In both cases, moreover, the post-war situation would be even more conflict-ridden than the situation before the war. The chances of a lasting peace would be slim.

There seems to be no way out of this dilemma – at least not as long as the military upgrading of Ukraine is thought of as being inevitably bound up with the country's acceptance into Western configurations and alliances, the EU and/or NATO. This Western integration meets Ukraine's legitimate security needs and is also intended to protect the rest of Europe from further Russian aggression. However, the coupling of arms aid and Western integration also blocks the way out of the current war and sets the course for a new, cold, but also possibly hot conflict between the blocs that are forming as a result.

Decoupling peace from incorporation into the West

The aim of combining military assistance to Ukraine with the prospect of EU or NATO accession is to force Russia into a negotiating position from which Ukraine's territorial and political integrity can no longer be called into question. But in this scenario, even a weakened Russia will hardly become prone to enter peace talks on the West's terms – all negotiations will have become futile by the already accomplished Western integration of Ukraine. Driving Russia into negotiations that cannot take place will thus actually lower the chances of an early and

lasting end to the war, not increase them.

If we wish to strive for an end to the war that will ensure the existence and future of Ukraine, through which a lasting peace can be achieved and which, at the same time, creates favourable conditions for internal political change in Russia itself, then military assistance and Western integration should be decoupled from one another. For as long as the military repulsion of the Russian attack remains linked to the ongoing Western integration of Ukraine, a militarily weakened Russia has no prospect of any desirable objective of negotiations. A Western-integrated Ukraine is the exact opposite of what the Kremlin thought it could achieve with this war, which was unleashed with the intention to force Ukraine under Russia's control. Accepting it therefore as an inalterable *fait accompli* would be tantamount to political surrender: the survival of Putinism depends on not suffering defeat in this war.

Such a surrender is therefore not to be expected and the West has good reasons for ruling out the sort of direct confrontation with Russia that could possibly force this step. This would leave the Kremlin with the only choice being either escalation – not necessarily, but possibly of a nuclear nature – or perpetuation of the war. Both would be fatal – from a moral point of view and with regard to the global conflict and peace constellation.

Making peace a new alternative

The situation is very different if the project of military peace enforcement is not linked to Ukraine's integration into the West. In this case, Russia's decision-making calculus would change fundamentally. The perspective of indefinitely continuing the war – respectively escalating it – and bearing its enormous costs would not be the only option anymore; there would be an alternative: Russia could negotiate in such a way that the result of Ukraine's non-integration into the Western configurations could be read on the Russian side as a *prevention* of this Western integration *as a result of the war* and thus as a *partially successful* end to the war. Under these conditions, negotiations would make sense for the Kremlin, and an end to the war would be within reach, provided that Russia was pushed back militarily prior to that point.

Abandoning the Western integration scenario does not mean abandoning armament and permanent

However, abandoning the Western integration scenario only seems to expose Ukraine all the more to Russian aggression, and thus undermine the country's territorial and political integrity in just the same way that immediate peace negotiations would. But this objection

military security guarantees.

applies only if this integrity cannot be ensured in any other way. However, it can, albeit in an unconventional manner.

Abandoning the Western integration scenario does not mean abandoning armament and permanent military security guarantees. On the contrary, armament could even be linked to the question of Western integration in the opposite way, i.e. negatively rather than positively, as has been the case up to now. The more armament Ukraine receives, the more it has to distance itself from Western integration, while also making it clearer to Russia that a military concession opens up the prospect of a non-Western-integrated Ukraine. As the militarisation of the armed conflict increases, so does the attractiveness of ending it diplomatically.

In this way, Ukraine would continue to be equipped with Western weapons – possibly even more effectively. In addition, it would have access to resources for upgrading and thus step up the armament process at any time in the event of a renewed threat.

Securing Ukraine's autonomous position

It may sound paradoxical: the West should continue to arm Ukraine, not so that it can subsequently become part of the West, but so that it *doesn't have to* become one. NATO and the EU would therefore need to act not in accordance with their alliance logic but contrary to it. This is because international interests – and presumably also those of Ukraine itself – require achieving the objective of an early end to the war while at the same time securing Ukrainian statehood and paving the way to a sustainable peace.

Strengthening Ukraine's ability to defend its state integrity and political freedom of action in a well-fortified and self-determined manner must not be limited to Western arms deliveries. In the long run, it can be achieved only through concerted international action. To this end, the expansion of international economic relations with Ukraine is just as necessary as the internationalisation of military aid itself. As a first step, it would be the task of NATO and the EU to initiate diplomatic alliances with BRICS countries such as India or Brazil and possibly even China. This, too, is only conceivable on the condition that the participation of these states does not promote Western integration but only serves to secure Ukraine's autonomous position militarily and economically.

Since the UN is paralysed, NATO itself must act like

If one looks at the scenario of 'military upgrading without integration into Western alliances' from a global perspective, it shows

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strong parallels to initiatives that one would expect from the United Nations. However, as is well known, the UN Security Council is unable to act due to Russia's veto power. The consequence of this, however, must not be a re-provincialisation of international politics, as is currently the case. Instead, the globally strongest player in the current conflict, namely NATO, should, of its own accord, ensure that the conflict is internationalised and that a solution is reached outside and above the existing power dynamics and alliance structures. In other words, since the UN is paralysed, NATO itself must act like 'a UN'. Russia's aggression would effectively be stopped but in an international-consensual way and, thus – from the Kremlin's perspective – in a more neutral manner, which would have considerable implications for the whole of the settlement process.

Avoiding past mistakes

Such (seemingly) 'selfless' action by NATO would bring a number of positive side effects. NATO would counteract the expansionist image that is attached to it in many parts of the world and present itself as a genuinely defensive alliance that efficiently works towards building a peaceful global society of states. The protection of international law and the state integrity of Ukraine, which the UN cannot provide in its current configuration, would be taken over by a broad-based international initiative without creating new occasions for conflict through direct military intervention.

Above all, however, this scenario opens up concrete opportunities for domestic political change in Russia, which would be of the utmost importance for the way forward. There is no question that Russia can become a state capable of peace in the medium and long term only if it manages to overcome aggressive, neo-imperial Putinism. However, a 'change through defeat' such as with Germany at the end of the Second World War is hardly to be expected. A disastrous Russian defeat would instead most probably lead to the development of the Russian version of a 'stab-in-the-back myth', while a Russian state collapse is neither likely nor desirable in terms of security policy.

If, on the other hand, the outcome of the war contains an element of ambiguity due to Ukraine's non-integration with the West – under

international guarantees of security and integrity – a new, less catastrophic path of change could arise. Such an outcome of the war could domestically be interpreted as some – quite heavily discounted – 'victory' in Russia, but it suggests at least as much of an interpretation as a partial or main defeat. This asymmetrical double bind could possibly create the preconditions for struggles over interpretation within the Russian state elite and civil society, which could actually lead to a political and ideological rethinking. This desired change can hardly be achieved through external coercion, would then arise from Russia's internal political constellation.

One wonders how realistic the well-known scenarios of 'delivery of arms until victory', 'attrition to exhaustion', or even 'peace negotiations now' are in the first place? Each of these contains its own sometimes considerable portion of utopia.

But is a scenario in which NATO acts in such a 'selfless' and internationalist way even feasible? First of all, a preliminary sketch like this one inevitably seems to be more speculative than other alternatives that have already been widely discussed. But then, one also wonders how realistic the well-known scenarios of 'delivery of arms until victory', 'attrition to exhaustion', or even 'peace negotiations now' are in the first place? Each of these contains its own sometimes considerable portion of utopia, from which stems the persistent feeling that, despite all sincere efforts, we are dealing with a frighteningly hopeless situation.

It seems that in order to end this terrible, senseless war and protect Ukraine's right to exist, something 'unrealistic' needs to be made happen anyway. And if the strategies currently being pursued lead to results that no one would wish for, then the scenario of NATO acting 'paradoxically' is perhaps the most realistic of all.



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